Building Implementation Teams:
The Key to Effective Co-Teaching Programs

As many people who've tried a do-it-yourself project know, utilizing a contractor can make all the difference. Whether building a house or a school program, any project is going to require advance planning and ongoing oversight. An effective co-teaching program, like any successful initiative, requires in-depth implementation planning. But who should be involved? Whether planning to implement co-teaching for the first time or improving the fidelity for an existing program, change is challenging. We know three things about how schools change. First, people tend to support what they help create. This may sound obvious, but it's worth mentioning – having a stake in the development process makes you more likely to want to support a project in the future. Second, local people tend to be the best at solving local problems; the better-acquainted you are with specific needs, the better you can design a co-teaching program that meets those needs. And finally, change takes place more quickly in groups; efficiency requires a network of support.[1]

Based on this and other research on school change, Arkansas has adopted the practice of utilizing building and district leadership teams to identify a school's goals, adopt instructional programs and strategies, and provide oversight to initiatives designed to improve outcomes for students. The model of "leadership planning teams" can also be applied to co-teaching. What better way to ensure successful implementation of co-teaching than to involve the individuals responsible in the planning process?

For this reason, the Arkansas Co-Teaching Project strongly recommends that administrators create a Co-Teaching Building Implementation Team (BIT) as a vehicle for launching a new co-teaching program or improving the fidelity of an existing program. The team should consist of the building principal or designated assistant principal, a representative general education co-teacher, a representative special education co-teacher, and any others whose support might be needed to address implementation obstacles. These might include a special education supervisor, content area instructional facilitators, and

counselors. Including representative general and special education co-teachers not only gives the "people on the ground" a voice in decision-making, but also provides an incentive to participate in a school's co-teaching program. In addition to this core team, a Co-Teaching BIT should also solicit input from parents and students served in co-taught classrooms. As stakeholders, they will be directly impacted by the recommendations made by the Co-Teaching BIT; making sure that their needs are considered throughout the process will prevent misunderstandings that may have a negative impact on the program at a later date.

First and foremost, the BLT's job is to **create and communicate a common vision of co-teaching** to colleagues in their building and district, and to the community at large. Although individual co-taught classrooms may be in various stages of development, communicating a common vision sets expectations about what a co-taught classroom should look like and specifies the roles of co-teachers. The Co-Teaching BIT is also responsible for **making scheduling recommendations for students and staff**. If scheduling decisions have already been made by the time the Co-Teaching BIT is convened, the team should plan on reviewing current scheduling patterns and making recommendations for the next year's master schedule.

The Co-Teaching BIT is also responsible for **evaluating the implementation of the co-teaching model**. This is not about evaluating co-teachers' performance, but more about how the model itself is being implemented, as well as analyzing the results of implementation. Implementation evaluation data sources might include pre- and post-academic assessments, discipline and attendance data; results from perception surveys completed by teachers, students, and parents; completion of IEP goals, graduation/dropout rate data, teacher retention data; number of notations of 6 co-teaching formats in lesson plans, especially those other than One Teach, One Assist; amount of co-planning time provided, co-teachers' perceptions of time usage, etc.

Co-Teaching BITs also need to make recommendations about professional development for co-teachers. New co-teachers will need foundational co-teaching professional development. Experienced co-teachers will need to deepen their knowledge in specific areas, such as differentiating instruction, curriculum, serving students with disabilities, etc. The Co-Teaching BITs may also need to make recommendations to meet the unique professional development needs of specific co-teachers. What resources and options might be needed for a special education co-teacher who is unfamiliar with the curriculum? What about the general education co-teacher who hasn't felt successful serving students with disabilities in the past? Decision-making that includes the involvement of a team composed of administrators and co-teachers increases the likelihood that there will be a good match between professional development needs and activities.

In order to improve implementation practices, **it's necessary for Co-Teaching BITs to create action plans**. Action plans created on an annual basis capture decisions made during the planning process and include two things: documentation of the persons responsible for implementation, and timelines. Plans should be reviewed regularly. Actions completed with successful outcomes should be celebrated. Revisions to the plan should be made as needed.

Co-Teaching BITs also serve as problem-solving teams. One of the greatest advantages of leadership planning teams is harnessing the power of many different perspectives and types of expertise. Implementing an effective co-teaching program is a complex endeavor. Bringing stakeholders together to address problems when they occur increases the likelihood that successful solutions will be found.