PREPARED TO TEACH

Benefits of Co-Teaching as Clinical Practice

Co-teaching as clinical practice embeds pre-service teachers in classrooms alongside an experienced mentor teacher, sharing the planning, lesson delivery, assessment, and reflection of instruction. As a clinical practice, particularly when embedded in year-long placements such as residencies and apprenticeships, co-teaching provides high-quality preparation while simultaneously strengthening classroom instruction, benefitting pre-service teachers, mentor teachers, and students.

More so, because co-teaching draws on a range of strategies, it can be intentionally tailored to meet the unique needs of each classroom and its learners. Co-teaching is highly beneficial at the classroom level, and when deeply embedded, it can positively influence school culture by modeling teamwork and trust, relational elements that have been proven to promote overall school improvement.[i] When intentional space is created for shared reflection and the exchange of strategies, co-teaching can extend across classrooms, enabling pre-service and mentor teachers to learn and apply different co-teaching approaches to meet varied student needs.

BENEFITS TO PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS

Enhanced, real-time feedback and learning

Through a co-teaching model, pre-service teachers have the opportunity to learn and receive feedback on their practice while collaborating side-by-side with an experienced mentor teacher. This fosters individual professional growth for pre-service teachers which in turn better prepares them to lead their own lessons and classrooms.[ii]

This enhanced feedback and learning is particularly powerful for pre-service teachers in year-long clinical placements, such as residencies or apprenticeships. A full year of co-teaching creates an inclusive classroom environment where pre-service teachers can see the impact co-teaching has on students. In a student teaching model, aspiring teachers may spend a large percentage of time observing the mentor teacher deliver lessons, rather than actively participating in lesson delivery and student interaction from day one. But consistent, active engagement with students in a co-teaching setting gives aspiring teachers a more accurate sense of what a full day of teaching is like. Co-teaching also provides pre-service teachers with experience and skills to effectively collaborate with a colleague, such as a paraprofessional or education assistant, in a classroom setting to deliver instruction and support to students.

Pre-service co-teaching also involves deep collaborative co-planning and co-reflection between aspiring teachers and mentors. When pre-service teachers are immersed in lesson planning, student assessment, and reflection of their own practice as well as the mentor's, they gain critical learning experience.

"To me, it has been a very nice experience because I have learned so much from [my mentor], and I also learned when the kids need help, one can help right away, or if I need help, she jumps in... Co-teaching has been really good for both of us."

- Karla Cruz, *'24-'25 Teacher Candidate*

Responsive Teaching

Every student in every classroom has unique needs. With a co-teaching model, pre-service teachers learn how to use a variety of techniques with their mentor to teach diverse groups of students who have differing learning styles, cultural backgrounds, and other individualized factors. Pre-service teachers learn to identify student needs, and in collaboration with their mentor teacher, they adapt lesson plans, differentiate instruction, plan assignments, and reflect on their practice. This is a key experience for future educators, providing opportunities to make classrooms inclusive learning environments and build confidence to work students with a variety of needs.[iii]

"[Students] have more time with us, and we have more time for them, and we can differentiate and give them that supplemental teaching, or reteach if needed, just to help their needs."

- Lana Naki, *'24-'25 Teacher Candidate*

Exposure to innovative teaching techniques and classroom tools

Co-teaching brings pre-service teachers to the forefront of emerging classroom pedagogy, materials, tools, and technology applications. As schools adapt to new technological developments that can support student learning, teachers need opportunities to practice using new strategies. Co-teaching allows aspiring teachers to learn and experience how technology is used in the classroom and provides a scaffolded opportunity to integrate it into instruction. Oftentimes, both the pre-service teacher and mentor teacher may be learning a new tool together. Through co-teaching, mentors can create a safe learning environment for the pre-service teacher while working together to learn new approaches for the classroom. This working relationship allows seamless transitions for classroom technology and creates a supportive learning environment for students.[iv]

BENEFITS TO MENTOR TEACHERS

Distribution of Workload

Co-teaching allows for workload distribution amongst two teachers in the classroom. Workload distribution is not just limited to classroom management and support— in a co-taught classroom it includes co-planning, co-assessment, and co-reflection. The time gained from sharing responsibilities is immediately reinvested in the classroom, allowing the teacher to spend more with students and providing mentorship to the pre-service teacher.

> "Just having that support of two adults at one time has made a huge difference for students. And for me as a teacher, it's made a huge impact on my workload and the things that I have to do. And it's just been a great experience."
>
> - Marchelle Hennrich, *Mentor Teacher*

Fresh Perspective on Instruction

Mentoring a new teacher often serves as a direct line to professional development that would be inaccessible otherwise. Engaging in co-teaching with a pre-service teacher naturally fosters reflective practice, as mentor teachers articulate their decision-making, examine their instruction, and refine their approach in real time. In turn, pre-service teachers bring their own wealth of knowledge to share with mentors from new technologies to individual and unique skills that complement classroom instruction. Mentor teachers can benefit from aspiring teachers who are learning innovative practices in teacher preparation programs, which can be utilized to garner deeper relationships with students and teach difficult concepts in new ways.

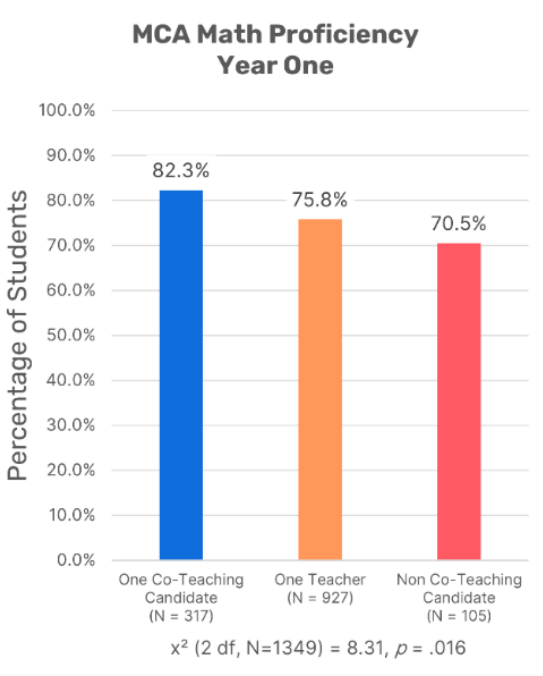
> "For me, because I've taught 17 years, it's having someone else there looking and seeing things that maybe I wouldn't see, and bringing some new ideas to the table, and having the students have someone else to go to instead of always coming to me. Sometimes they'll go to her, and sometimes they actually feel more comfortable going to her than coming to me, so it's kind of nice to have an extra person in the classroom."
>
> - Mindy Sanchez, *Mentor Teacher*

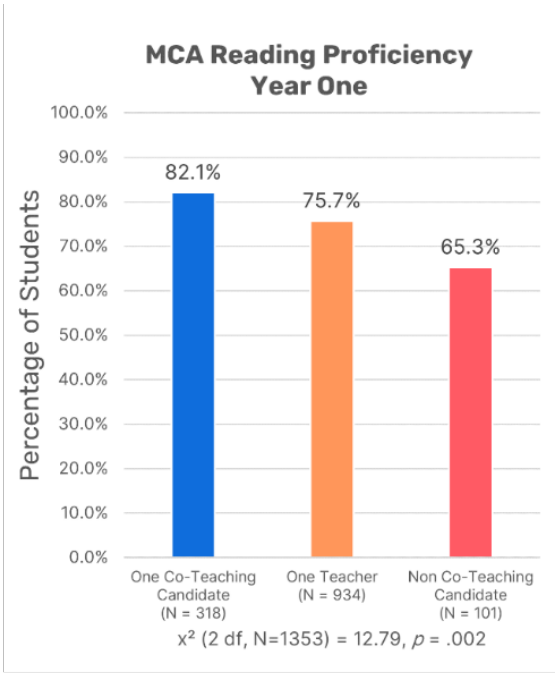
BENEFITS TO STUDENTS

Increased Instructional Support and Positive Academic Outcomes

MINNESOTA

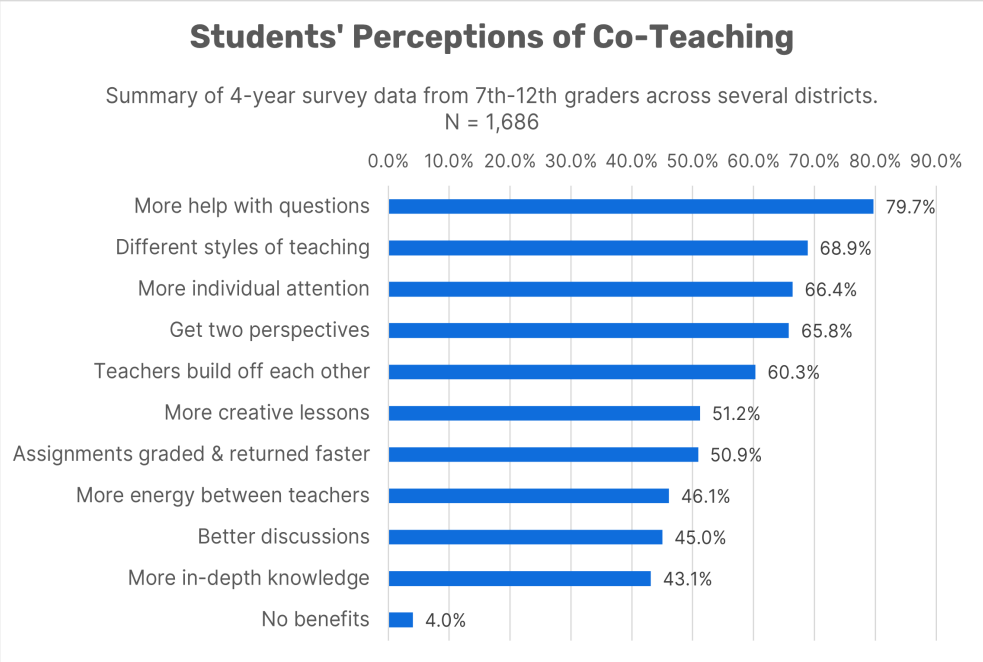
To put the efficacy of pre-service co-teaching to the test, St. Cloud State University in Minnesota conducted four years of rigorous research on the model in a traditional teacher preparation program. By analyzing student test scores, surveys, and interviews with students, teacher candidates, and mentors, researchers identified a positive impact associated with pre-service co-teaching across nearly every grade and subject .[v] Co-teaching was found to be the most effective teaching method as compared to traditional student teaching and teaching with a single teacher. The following data offers a summative glimpse into the study.





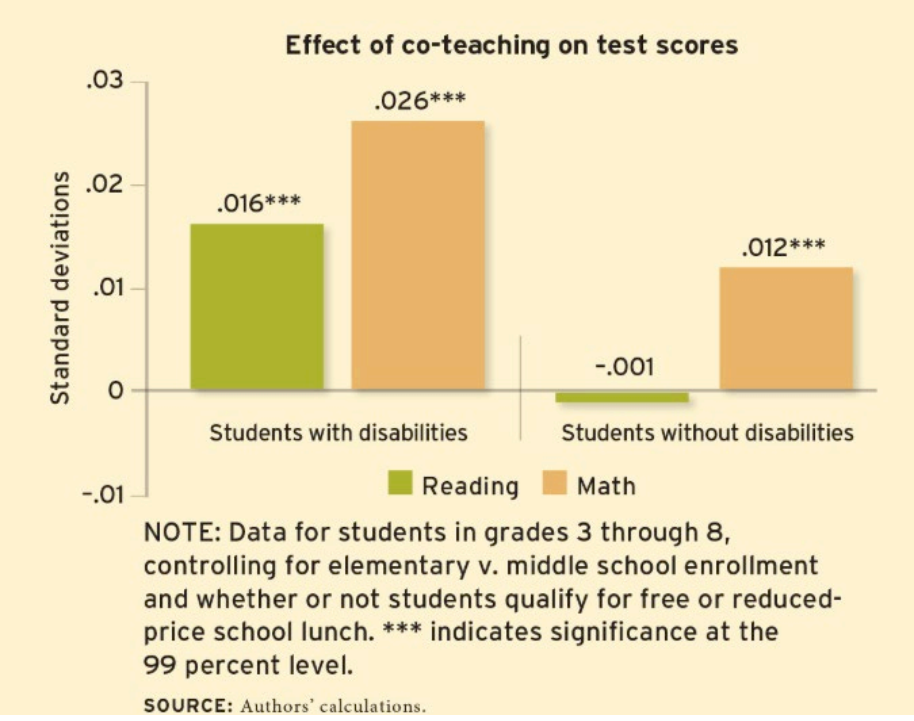
On the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA), pre-service co-teaching classrooms outperformed classrooms with only one teacher and far surpassed traditional student teaching classrooms.

Students overwhelmingly found the co-teaching model beneficial to their learning experiences in the classroom. They reported having more help with questions, enjoying the varied perspectives and styles of teaching from having two teachers, and liking the creative lessons the pair created.



MASSACHUSETTS

In Massachusetts, a Boston University longitudinal study found that students with and without disabilities in co-taught classrooms saw test score improvements, especially in Math. This study emphasized the need for additional co-teaching quantitative research to support all the qualitative evidence indicating co-teaching as a student achievement factor.[vi]



Inclusive and Safe Learning Environments

Pre-service co-teaching provides increased instructional support for students, creating inclusive and safe learning environments. The pre-service teacher and their mentor model a working relationship that builds trust within a classroom, impacting how engaged students are during instruction. When the two co-teachers have dedicated time to co-plan, co-reflect, co-assess, and co-teach, students in a co-taught classroom perceive both teachers as experts in content and receive a coherent approach to learning.

> "If I'm giving a lesson, and I pause and look around at how many of my students are actively working on and talking about what we're supposed to be doing, having two teachers in the room, the engagement is just so much higher than I've ever seen it in my classrooms before."
>
> - Daniel (Aysh) Heneghan, *Mentor Teacher*

CONCLUSION

Pre-service co-teaching as clinical practice is beneficial to classroom environments at every level: for the students, the mentor, and the pre-service teacher. The benefits to each individual in the classroom are mutually reinforcing— one benefits, so do the others. For example, a mentor teacher who co-plans with a pre-service teacher can effectively distribute their shared workload over the course of the co-taught lesson, meaning the pre-service teacher's confidence grows and students receive more individualized instruction. Overall, pre-service co-teaching as clinical practice is an opportunity for pre-service teachers to learn and grow through experience, while simultaneously having a positive impact on students, classrooms, and schools.

To explore more resources on Pre-Service Co-Teaching, visit Prepared To Teach's Guided Toolkit, Co-Teaching: Enriching the Clinical Practice Experience.

[i] Anthony Bryk and Barbara Schneider, Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for Improvement (New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 2002); Matthew Ronfeldt et al., "Teacher Collaboration in Instructional Teams and Student Achievement.," American Educational Research Journal 52, no. 3 (June 2015): 475–514; Andrew Hargreaves and Michael Fullan, "The Power of Professional Capital: With an Investment in Collaboration, Teachers Become Nation Builders," JSD/The Learning Professional 34, no. 3 (June 2013): 36–39; Alan J. Daly et al., "Accessing Capital Resources: Investigating the Effects of Teacher Human and Social Capital on Student Achievement," Teachers College Record 116, no. 7 (2014): 1–42.

[ii] Damiani, M., & Drelick, A. (2024). Co-teaching in Teacher Preparation: Programmatic Priorities, Promising Practices, and Potential Pitfalls. *Journal of Special Education Preparation*, *4*(3), 36–45. https://doi.org/10.33043/9fn8gca2

[iii] 1. Y. J. A. Khasawneh, "An Investigation of Pre-Service Teacher Preparation Programs in Teacher Education and Co-Teaching Models," *Information Sciences Letters* 12, no. 7 (July 1, 2023): 2849–57, https://doi.org/10.18576/isl/120714.

[iv] Damiani, M., & Drelick, A. (2024). Co-teaching in Teacher Preparation: Programmatic Priorities, Promising Practices, and Potential Pitfalls. *Journal of Special Education Preparation*, *4*(3), 36–45. https://doi.org/10.33043/9fn8gca2

[v] Bacharach, Heck, and Dahlberg, "Changing the Face of Student Teaching through Coteaching."; Teresa Washut Heck and Nancy Bacharach, "Chapter 4: Data and Research Findings," in *Mentoring Teacher Candidates through Co-Teaching: Collaboration That Makes a Difference* (St. Cloud, Minn.: Academy for Co-Teaching & Collaboration, College of Education, St. Cloud State University, 2014).

[vi] *Jones, N., and Winters, M.A. (2023). Are Two Teachers Better Than One? The effect of co-teaching on students with and without disabilities.* Education Next*, 23(1), 54-59.*