PREPARED TO TEACH

# Conversations on Co-Teaching

## Ongoing Support for Teacher Candidates and Mentors

Pre-Service co-teaching professional development and training in the beginning of the school year is essential for teacher candidates and mentors. In addition to an initial orientation, effective co-teaching develops through practice, reflection, and refinement over time. Therefore, recurring opportunities for continued professional learning and conversation are key to successful pre-service co-teaching.

This resource offers a sample structure of what ongoing support for mentors and teacher candidates can look like throughout a school year. In this format, candidates and mentors meet in separate groups virtually once per month. These conversations can offer reviews of co-teaching strategies, the importance of co-planning, reflection, and other key topics that support strong implementation throughout the year. In addition to instructional content, the most helpful aspect of these meetings is often the opportunity for participants to speak with their colleagues and learn from each other's experiences in similar roles.

### Session Considerations

- **Facilitators:** Facilitators of these monthly sessions can be university supervisors, faculty, veteran mentor teachers, principals, or other professionals well-versed in the pre-service co-teaching model with the bandwidth and interest in building community within candidate and mentor groups.
- **Grouping:** Teacher candidates meet in one group and mentors meet in another. Separating roles allows participants to be more forthcoming about their experiences and gain support and perspective from others on similar journeys. Supervisors can also benefit from similar conversations.
- **Topics:** Teacher candidates and mentors cover the same topic as each other each month, but the content and questions differ slightly to be geared toward their role. Covering the same topic allows facilitators to prompt participants to discuss the topic with their partner when they get back into the classroom, often sparking productive conversations that may not have occurred.
- **Timing:** Meetings can be held virtually to accommodate candidates and mentors across locations. Timing of the sessions depends on when candidates have program classes, when school dismissal takes place, and individual time restrictions. If needed, it can be helpful to conduct a poll to determine times that work for everyone.
- **Requirements:** Preparation program and district partnerships can consider together whether these sessions are required or optional. If they are required, will the session be recorded for make-up? Will there be an asynchronous discussion board outside of the meeting? In the past, virtual sessions were recorded with whole group reflections edited out to protect the privacy of participants.

**Session Flow**

Each session lasts approximately one hour and typically follows a general structure that can change based on the content or the discussion.

1. **Short small group ice breaker** conversation (ex: "What has been your favorite moment so far in the clinical practice experience?"). Small groups can be between 4 and 6 people; too small and the time might not be filled, too big and not everyone will have a chance to share.
2. **Brief content delivery** from the facilitator related to session topic. Content sections do not have to be long; the main focus is the participant discussions.
3. **Breakout group conversations** related to content using the same breakout groups as the ice breaker. This is an opportunity for participants to share what they are doing in their classroom and learn from others' experiences.
4. **Whole group share-out** and reflection for groups to hear from more participants, ask questions, and provide guidance.
5. **Check-in question** to the group. This can be any question that gauges where they are in a particular area related to the topic (ex: "Have you used any of the seven co-teaching strategies that we discussed today? Show of hands or in the chat.")
6. A "**Monthly Challenge**" prompt for participants to try or work on something over the next month before the next session (ex: "Take one thing you heard today from someone else and try it out in your classroom." Or "Discuss with your mentor or candidate partner a goal you set today.")

**Monthly Topics**

These topics relate to the time of year they are being discussed, topics can also change and adapt based on group ideas or needs.

<u>September: Setting Up for a Successful Year</u>

- An overview of classroom environment, classroom management, routines, and school community through the lens of introducing the teacher candidate as a co-teacher.

<u>October: Fostering Shared Classroom Leadership</u>

- A discussion around positioning the teacher candidate as a fellow leader in the classroom, both from the prospectives of students and co-teaching pairs.

<u>November: Informed Co-Teaching Strategy Selection</u>

- A discussion around what to consider when choosing a co-teaching strategy for a lesson. Considerations can include student needs, lesson content, collected data, and teacher candidate learning goals.

December: Midpoint Check-In - Celebrating Successes and Setting Goals

- Celebrate that we are halfway through the year! This is a time to reflect on growth so far and prompt participants to set goals for themselves for the rest of the year. Have participants write their goals down to revisit later.

January: Deeper Dive on Communication, Reflection & Co-Planning

- Participants have likely worked on communication, reflection, and co-planning throughout the year. Discussions will cover how these routines are going so far, and ways mentors and candidates can communicate with each other and the supervisor to build upon or improve existing routines or dynamics.

February: Teacher Candidate Leadership in a Classroom

- By this time, candidates have had many months in the classroom and are hopefully ready to drive classroom instruction. These discussions will address the considerations and challenges of mentors releasing more responsibilities while the teacher candidate takes on more of a leadership role.

March: Goal Check-In

- Consider skipping a synchronous March session due to scheduling challenges such as spring break and testing. Instead, participants can revisit the goals they created in December in a conversation with their mentor and supervisor. How is their progress going so far? Are there any goals they want to create or adjust before the end of the school year?

April: Finishing Strong

- After spending nearly a full school year in the classroom, teacher candidates are learning how to close out the school year. Now is a great time to discuss wrapping up curriculum, reflecting on student growth, and saying farewell to their classroom. What are teacher candidates learning about the end of the school year and how can mentors support them during their last few months?

May: Reflecting on the Journey, Looking Ahead

- We did it! Time to celebrate and reflect on all the great work throughout the year and discuss what lessons teacher candidates and mentors are taking with them into next year.

Monthly conversations around co-teaching not only keep the strategies and pedagogy top of mind for mentor and candidate pairs, they also offer a touchpoint for participants to connect with one another, offer support, and build community.

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