Marshall Street

Conclusion

OPENING DOORS TO COLLABORATION

A collection of research-to-impact practices developed with the Networked Improvement Community for Students with Disabilities

Conclusion

Too often, special education is siloed within schools. Special educators, tasked with meeting the varied needs of students with disabilities, are made to do so largely on their own, which leads to a great disparity between the content expertise that students with and without disabilities receive on a daily basis. Additionally, because being a siloed special educator is particularly challenging, teacher turnover rates in this field continue to rise, meaning that the students who are often furthest from opportunity are being taught by more and more inexperienced teachers. While special education teachers have specific training, students with disabilities benefit most from a collaborative approach that engages multiple educators to meet their unique needs. In order to improve outcomes for Black and Latinx students with disabilities experiencing poverty, schools must adopt inclusive mindsets and practices and improve collaboration between general and special educators at all levels of America's education system.

Over the course of three years, the Marshall Street Networked Improvement Community for Students with Disabilities (NIC) saw teachers and leaders from 10 participating charter networks implement, study, and adjust various best practices for improving outcomes for the target population of students. This collection — itself an outcome of the work these schools have done — describes some of the strongest of these practices, giving particular attention to collaboration between general and special educators, based on the understanding that improving this collaboration leads to improved educational experiences and outcomes for all students. It highlights three best practices: co-planning, student work analysis, and a gradual release model to optimize co-teachers. There is one case study showing what this work can look like when done well. The collection also includes guidance documents about effectively forming collaborative teams and supporting those teams with strong coaching.



The work highlighted in these pages has improved student outcomes over the course of the NIC because of the implementation of strong collaborative practices and support structures. Intentional co-planning, in particular, led to strong measurable improvements in

student achievement. At **Collegiate Academies**, the percentage of students meeting their IEP plan goals more than doubled in the two years following the implementation of co-planning. At **STEM Prep**, the combination of co-planning and collaboration coaching led to the percentage of students with disabilities achieving a B or higher doubling in a single semester. **Summit Public Schools** implemented a form of co-planning and saw an increase in skill mastery for students with IEPs of almost 20%.

Some practices took root at a classroom level and showed similarly strong results. When looking at student work is approached with a collaborative lens, the elevated rigor of the conversation leads to improved outcomes for students. One classroom at **Ednovate** shifted to interdisciplinary student work analysis, which led to an almost 20% increase in their course pass rate as they were able to better focus on the specific needs of their students. At **Green Dot Public Schools**, an increased focus on collaborative student work analysis led to 84% of students passing their co-taught classes in just a single semester.

Key Takeaways

COLLABORATION STARTS NOW.

It is very rare for a school system to consider a new approach and have the structures in place to flawlessly implement that new approach right away. Collaboration is no exception; in fact, creating the conditions that enable highly effective collaborative practices requires a great deal of time, energy, and staff. However, by delaying implementation until all of those systems are in place, leaders rob students of the opportunity to be supported by teachers working together. Instead, start now! Collaboration is a spectrum, and while not all schools are in a place where all classrooms can be co-taught, all schools can ensure that general and special educators have some protected co-planning time, which is a start. Collaboration, in any form, is the first step on the road to more equitable support for all students, particularly students with disabilities.

ADDITIONAL EDUCATORS MEANS ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS.

Effective teacher collaboration is a gift for students. When done well, it allows teachers to adjust small groups and use differentiated instruction in many more ways than they would be able to solo. Co-teaching increases the amount of expertise in the classroom, particularly when general and special educators are effectively collaborating with one another on a regular basis. All of this means that more students, particularly those with disabilities, are given increased access to learning opportunities.

CO-PLANNING MUST BE A DELIBERATE ACTION.

In order for collaboration between educators to be effective, there must be specific time set aside for deliberate co-planning. Not only that, but the time must be used intentionally to increase access to learning for all students. The collaborating teachers and co-teachers in the NIC found that simply meeting together was not enough. Rather, meeting with a plan and with support led to the growth in practice and student impact that they were looking for.

IMPROVING COLLABORATION MUST BE A WHOLE-SCHOOL (OR NETWORK) EFFORT.

Putting two or more educators in a room together, while a step in the right direction, will not lead to improved student access or outcomes. Improving collaboration requires a systematic approach, starting at the leadership level. Just as general and special educators need to work together intentionally, instructional leaders must work together with special education directors to ensure that inclusive mindsets and enabling conditions are in place. Only when all individuals within a school are working together will true classroom-level collaboration be at its most effective.

The three chapters and two guidance documents in this collection lay out the key components of effective collaboration.

Put together, these components set the stage for collaborative work that supports all teachers to better support all students, while simultaneously growing the capacity of leaders within the system. The participating members of the NIC found that as they honed their collaborative skills, student learning outcomes increased at a greater rate. It is a misconception, however, that these components cannot be implemented until each one is carefully manicured and perfected. Rather, we urge school and system leaders to start now. Each school system has different needs, but prioritizing collaboration is an invaluable use of time and resources that will lead to improved equity and student outcomes.

