

At-A-Glance: Important Guidelines for Scheduling

Scheduling Guideline	Description
Put students with disabilities in the master schedule first.	All the administrators who have been successful in scheduling co-teaching & inclusion report that this is mandatory. Trying to retrofit students with disabilities into an already created schedule simply will not work. By putting them in the master schedule first, the rest of the schedule can fall into place. It is important to do this correctly right from the beginning and that starts with the Master Schedule.
Resist the urge to increase the student-teacher ratio.	Part of the benefit of co-teaching is that it reduces the student-teacher ratio. Having two credentialed teachers in the room is not license to double the number of students. However, if the typical class size is 30, the co-taught class might be capped at 32, just slightly higher than the typical class. Remember though that this class has a number of students with identified disabilities in it. That alone warrants keeping the numbers low.
Recognize that general education teachers should only have one co-teaching “dance partner”.	Content area teachers are less likely to truly co-teach (co-plan, co-instruct, co-assess) if they have multiple partners across the day. To encourage real planning together, general educators should have just one partner with whom they collaborate for co-teaching, even if they have multiple preps or if that partner comes in at different times throughout the day.
Recognize that special education teachers can only have 2-3 “dance partners” for co-teaching.	While best-case scenario would have a general and special education teacher able to co-teach all day long, this is not typically an option. Special service providers work with multiple teachers. Be aware, however, that they will not be able to truly co-teach (co-plan, co-instruct, co-assess) with more than two new co-teachers at a time (a third can be added over time). They may assist in classes through in-class support in addition to their co-teaching, but it won't be at the same level of involvement as true co-teaching.

At-A-Glance: Important Guidelines for Scheduling (Cont'd)

Scheduling Guideline	Description
Limit the class proportion of students with special needs to no more than 30% of the class.	When those who create the master schedule see two credentialed teachers in one room, especially when one of them is credentialed in special education, the tendency is often to place all students with special needs in those classes. Even those schedulers who are aware of the need to avoid going over the 30% rule will sometimes rationalize that only 30% of the class has IEPs and identified disabilities, the others are students who are on 504 plans, are English Language learners, are struggling students with no label, or have other needs. This results in a class that resembles a de facto special education class, not the inclusive heterogeneous class it was designed to be. Co-teachers in this type of scenario often report feeling like they are being “dumped on” and are not able to be effective with the range of needs.
Ensure that those who schedule also know the guidelines and will continue to follow them throughout the year.	Make sure that anyone who has access to scheduling students is aware of the need for heterogeneity in the class. Often, we find that while those administrators who have been trained in co-teaching assure us that no classes have more than 30% of students with special needs, the co-teachers show us rosters with 60-80% of the class with IEPs or other special needs. In researching the issue, we find that other individuals, such as counselors who weren't in on the co-teaching training, have inadvertently been scheduling new students into these classes.

At-A-Glance: Important Guidelines for Scheduling (Cont'd)

Scheduling Guideline	Description
Incorporate the proactive feedback of teachers, especially special education teachers.	Special education teachers typically know the students on their caseload and can help to determine what types of classes (self-contained, co-taught, monitor only) they need to have. They can also provide insight into what types of teachers may work best with particular children. But in addition, ask for teachers' feedback on what classes or grades they may prefer. Many special educators are given their schedules without being consulted, and learn belatedly that they are to co-teach in a math class when their strength is in language arts, while a colleague who majored in math is being assigned to the language arts classes! Input from teachers can help assure that they are best able to support students and keep up with the general education content.
Avoid over-scheduling special educators to the point that they cannot be effective. Select one of four strategies for focus: by subject matter, by grade, by professional learning community (PLC), or by caseload.	Ask any general education content teacher if he is interested in having 5 different preps and he'll respond that, while he may be qualified to teach those different classes, if he had to do so, he would be spread too thin to be effective. Yet, that is exactly what is regularly done to special educators. Instead, provide some structure by allowing special educators to specialize by subject matter (e.g., I support the Math teachers while you support in English), by grade (e.g., I support K-2, while you support 3-5), by professional learning community (e.g., I support the Tigers cluster, while you support the Eagles), or by caseload (e.g., I "loop" with one group of students for 5th, 6th and 7th grades over the next three years, while you "loop" with your own caseload).

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<p>Keep in mind the additional job responsibilities of special educators and build them into the schedule (assessing, IEP meetings, monitoring, adapting materials).</p>	<p>While all teachers need planning time, special educators need planning time and a separate time for activities that cannot be done at home. We strongly advocate for special educators to have both a planning time (for individual planning, as well as planning with co-teaching partners), as well as an additional time when they are not scheduled with students. Don't call it planning as other teachers will be upset to think that special educators get two planning periods. Instead, use another term, e.g., Monitoring/ Facilitative Support/ Consultation /IEP /Assessment, etc. This additional time will ensure that special educators are able to assess students, have IEP meetings, make curricular adaptations, and so forth, which will ensure that students get their needs met. Though it may seem antithetical to take teachers away from students in order to meet their needs, we feel in this case the students will benefit more by teachers having the time to prepare their supports than if they were merely running between classes.</p>
<p>Consider the physical placement of co-teachers and their respective classrooms.</p>	<p>The closer co-teachers' actual classrooms are, the more easily and often they can communicate. This proximity will also increase their ability to do small group instruction during their co-taught lessons. Consider giving them a webcam to chat virtually if they are not in close proximity. (See the "Plugged In" box on page 40 for another tech option called "Creative InPerson".)</p>
<p>Create time for co-planning into the schedule.</p>	<p>This is nonnegotiable if you want co-teaching to work (yes, it's our "sacred cow"). In Chapter 5, we offer a variety of options for building in planning time, but without a doubt our # 1 option is that teachers have a common planning time or period built into the schedule from the beginning. As you build your schedules, have this need at the forefront. As you determine when each co-teaching team will be teaching kids together, also figure out when they will be planning together. Please do not try to squeeze in planning time as an afterthought; it will never happen and when it gets lost in the shuffle, the result will be ineffective co-teaching. You've worked this hard to make it successful; don't stop now!</p>