

## Building Capacity for Sustainable Co-Teaching Practices

### TEACHER IMPACT GOALS STRATEGIC AREA OF FOCUS #1

The first goal and strategic area of focus for this grant project, Building Capacity for Sustainable Co-Teaching Practices, is to motivate and mentor new educators through leadership opportunities and collaboration with fellow educators. Providing educators with opportunities to work with and learn from each other reduces isolation and encourages implementation of new practice.

**SCHOOL/DISTRICT NAME** Washburn High School, Minneapolis Public Schools, Minneapolis, Minnesota

### TEACHER IMPACT GOALS STRATEGIC AREA OF FOCUS #2

The second goal and strategic area of focus is to leverage teacher leadership opportunities and structures for recruiting and retaining talented and highly effective educators. As best practices in education and instruction continue to evolve, programs that seek to recruit and retain effective educators will need to create opportunities for teachers to share their voice and engage in teacher-led professional learning.

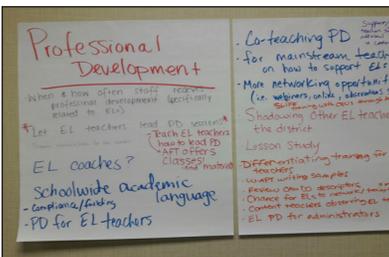
#### Why Co-Teach?

“Co-teaching for English language learners is a means of reducing teacher isolation without eliminating teacher autonomy.”

*Honigsfeld and Dove, 2010, p. 16*



English language teachers and content teachers learning together at the 2016 Minnesota English Learner Education Conference



Brainstorming session on the types of professional development needed to support English learners

### OVERVIEW

Washburn High School serves English learners at all levels of language proficiency through a multitiered model of support. In a program based on district program models, students at intermediate and advanced levels of language proficiency receive academic language support through co-teaching. As student numbers increase, the number of co-teaching partnerships is also increasing. Some of these new co-teaching partnerships, however, are being formed with teachers who have had limited to no formal training or experience with co-teaching as an instructional model.

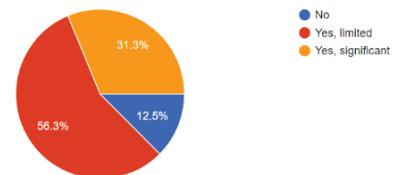
The goal of this project is to build capacity for co-teaching and explore the impact of various professional learning opportunities. This project will provide opportunities for teachers to learn new strategies for collaborative instruction by observing other co-teachers in action, engaging in professional learning through conferences and research-based readings and dedicating time to establish and reflect on co-teaching relationships.

Each of the grant activities is designed to support the strategic goals by creating sustainable opportunities for collaboration and teacher leadership. Peer observations, conferences, and dedicated planning time will provide opportunities to motivate and mentor new educators, including those new to co-teaching. The implementation of grant activities will also support teacher leadership and collaboration, which in turn will help to build a program reputation to recruit and retain talented and highly effective educators.

### Have you had any formal training in co-teaching?

68.8 %

Participating co-teachers with limited to no training in co-teaching



## THE CHALLENGE

### What was the challenge you were facing? What goals were you trying to achieve?

As a teacher, my ultimate goal is to positively impact student learning. When implemented effectively, I believe co-teaching has the potential to affective positive learning outcomes for students. The challenge we faced was how to develop strong partnerships and then equip teachers with the tools and strategies to continue growing as co-teachers in the future.

### Summarize three points of frustration you faced.

One point of frustration I faced was in finding time to grow co-teaching partnerships. For practicing teachers, there never seems to be enough time to accomplish all the necessary tasks in the day, and that includes finding time to intentionally build meaningful co-teaching relationships. Second, it was difficult to know which strategies would be most effective in supporting healthy co-teaching relationships. With limited time and funds, the decisions of which strategies to use becomes paramount. Third, when successful strategies were identified, it was challenging to find the best means and methods to share best practices with other co-teaching teams

### What strategies were you attempting to use before to solve this problem?

To solve these issues, I had previously attempted to take advantage of job-embedded opportunities for collaboration, like joint prep times. Although administration does try to prioritize this style of collaboration, co-teachers do not always share a joint prep time. I also have sought additional funding from the school and district. Unfortunately, district and school funding is often pulled in many directions, and it can be difficult to secure funding for emerging practices. Finally, I have also leveraged informal co-planning time. Informal planning time, however, is typically not substantive enough to affect meaningful change.

### What was the big “aha” moment when you decided you needed to try something new?

As we looked at school demographics last year, we knew that increasing student numbers would lead to increases in staffing and subsequently an increased number of co-teaching partnerships. With these increases, it became clear that building a strong foundation for co-teaching and collaboration would be necessary to ensure that staff new to co-teaching would be fully supported and therefore have positive experiences with collaboration and co-teaching.

### What was the top reason you selected this grant?

I applied for the ASCD TIG because I believe in the importance of professional learning and teacher leadership. I know that these are values that are shared by ASCD as an organization, and I was excited to learn about the partnerships that ASCD had with the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards, the U.S. Department of Education, and various family foundations.



**WASHBURN  
HIGH SCHOOL**

#### WASHBURN HIGH SCHOOL

This grant project is having the greatest impact at the school level. Washburn High School is an urban high school that serves student in grades 9–12 located in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

#### BY THE NUMBERS

**1617**

Total Student Population

**450**

Student with a  
Home Language  
Other than English

**222**

English Learners

**16**

Teachers Participating  
in the Grant Project



Books on co-teaching and collaboration purchased for participating teachers

## THE RESPONSE

### How has the Teacher Impact Grant work helped you achieve your goals or solve a problem?

The Teacher Impact Grant work has provided much-needed resources to help our school achieve its goals. In addition to the overall project goal of building capacity for co-teaching through multiple learning opportunities, our grant project also sought to provide opportunities for the mentorship and support for new teachers as well as opportunities to grow and develop leadership strategies for teachers at any point in their careers. The funding provided by the Teacher Impact Grant has allowed teachers the opportunity to engage in professional learning in several ways. Teaching partnerships were able to attend a local professional conference addressing the needs of our English learners and receive research-based readings that were relevant to their classroom needs. Teachers were also given reserve coverage they could use during the day to conduct peer observations and extended time outside of the school day to reflect and evaluate their teaching practices.

### How has it impacted your school/district/teachers/principals/students?

The Teacher Impact Grant has impacted our school in a number of significant ways. For teachers, the grant project has provided time and resources to learn and practice new skills and strategies in the classroom. Because of these new strategies and added time for planning, learning opportunities for students have been enhanced. Through an inclusive environment, all students have access to rigorous and relevant instruction that is differentiated to meet their needs.

For administrators, the project has highlighted the leadership and expertise of teachers within our building and it has emphasized the importance of redefining professional development in more innovative and creative ways. For the school as a whole, the work done as a part of this grant has helped to create a culture of collaboration where teachers are excited to learn more about what is happening in other classrooms and eager to share strategies they have mastered. Teacher-led learning has opened the door to great learning opportunities for all building staff and has set an example for other schools in the district.

### How has it helped you to overcome the challenges you had before?

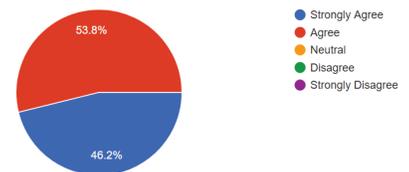
Our project, Building Capacity for Sustainable Co-Teaching Practices, was designed to address challenges related to limited training and limited time available for collaboration. So far, the greatest successes of the project have been in demonstrating how much need there is for effective professional learning opportunities that have immediate relevance for co-teaching teams and in identifying the realities of time demands placed on practicing teachers. The urgency of teaching responsibilities made it difficult for some teachers to find time to step away from the classroom for their own professional growth. This project is identifying meaningful strategies and professional learning supports that can effect the greatest impact with limited teacher time.



“Teaching and leadership should not be an either-or. Teachers need the opportunity to effect change outside of their classroom without having to leave the classroom.”  
—Ashley Karlsson

Final Survey Results  
Evaluation of Program Objectives

**It helps improve professional practice.**





## THE RESULTS

### What specific metrics can you share about the impact it had?

Throughout the course of this project, a variety of metrics were gathered to demonstrate the impact of the project. Data were collected on teacher experiences with co-teaching, attitudes towards teacher leadership and collaboration and the extent to which collaborative, teacher-led initiatives were taking place in the school. Data and results gathered from the grant surveys can be seen in the sidebar.

### What is the single biggest reason you would recommend applying for a Teacher Impact Grant in the future?

It is hard to narrow down a single reason to recommend applying for a Teacher Impact Grant in the future because there are so many ways in which this grant project has supported education. If I had to choose just one, I would say because it has made me a better educator. Being part of the Teacher Impact Grant has given me leadership skills and opportunities to put those skills into action. It has given me time and resources to improve instruction in the classroom and support my colleagues in doing the same, directly impacting the education of thousands of students.

### How has this project grown over a year's time with regard to collaboration between teachers and administrators and the two chosen strategic goals?

This project has grown in significant ways over the past year. The first strategic goal for this project was to motivate and mentor new educators through leadership opportunities and collaboration with fellow educators. This project has allowed us to provide resources and support to guide teachers new to co-teaching. Both teachers and administrators have been able to see the benefits of fully supported collaboration as well as identifying the challenges and learning how to best address those challenges. The second strategic goal was to leverage teacher leadership opportunities and structures for recruiting and retaining talented and highly effective educators. By positioning collaboration as a priority, we have been able to establish a team of educators that is committed to the success of co-teaching and collaboration.

## CALL TO ACTION

My biggest takeaway from administering the ASCD Teacher Impact Grant is that teacher-led initiatives can make a direct impact on student learning. From my own project to those of fellow TIG grantees around the nation, it is clear that teacher leaders are reimagining what education can and should look like. Teachers have the potential to shift the tide towards more inclusive, student-empowered schools if only they are given the resources and support they need. Teachers need to be given leadership opportunities that do not require them to leave the classroom. Staying connected to the classroom is what allows teachers to make decisions that make the most good.

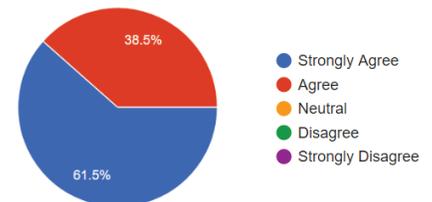
Teachers need time to collaborate. Collaboration disrupts the pattern of teacher isolation and creates bridges to shared progress. Teachers also need more voice in designing learning opportunities that are relevant to their needs. The definition of professional learning for educators needs to be expanded to include more nontraditional forms of learning. The "sit-and-get" philosophy of traditional professional development sessions ignores everything we know about good teaching. Through this grant project, teachers were able to participate in a variety of professional learning opportunities, including peer observations that provided them with strategies they

"I feel that sharing responsibility for instruction has made me more willing to take risks and try new strategies."

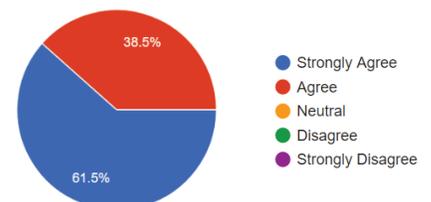
—Social Studies Teacher

### FINAL SURVEY RESULTS

Teacher leaders can help drive school transformation.



The profession can be strengthened by having teacher leaders build solutions.



"I have been provided with ingenious ideas through peer observations that I have implemented in the classroom successfully."

—Social Studies Teacher

could immediately implement in their own classroom settings. By recognizing the value in peer observations as a mechanism not only for collaboration, but also for learning, teachers were able to expand their repertoire of classroom strategies. Overall, the grant project has given me greater confidence in my work as a teacher and greater hope that together we will be able to accomplish greater things than we ever could on our own.

*The Teacher Impact Grant Program is made possible by the support of ASCD, the Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust, and Carnegie Corporation of New York.*