

# MULTI-CLASSROOM LEADERSHIP IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

## SCHOOL MODELS

BY PUBLIC IMPACT

**M**ulti-Classroom Leadership is the cornerstone of an Opportunity Culture. Teachers with a record of high-growth student learning and leadership competencies, known as multi-classroom leaders or MCLs, teach part of the time and lead small, collaborative teams of two to eight teachers in the same grade or subject to meet each MCL’s standards of excellence. MCLs guide lesson planning, help teachers practice and prepare for instruction, coach and develop the team and individuals, and lead improvements based on data. Team members use the MCL’s instructional methods and tools to provide high-standards, differentiated instruction for high-growth learning, and they meet often to plan and improve. The MCL is accountable for the team’s student learning outcomes. Teams may include paraprofessionals and teacher residents. MCLs earn pay supplements, averaging about 20 percent of base pay, funded by some position vacancies and reallocating other costs within each school.

Schools combine Multi-Classroom Leadership with Team Reach when they want to reach more students with available teachers and/or increase teacher planning time, pay, and career advancement opportunities. Team reach teachers directly teach more students than usual, but typically without raising instructional group sizes and with increased small-group instruction.

The **MCL model**, alone or in combination with Team Reach, can be used by special education (SPED) teachers. This brief describes **four examples of how to reach all students who have disabilities with excellent teaching**—three in inclusive models and one in self-contained SPED classrooms.

Schools designs must stay within the **Opportunity Culture Principles** and keep team sizes between two and eight teachers. Schools must follow federal and state laws covering students receiving special education services. That includes creating and following Individual Education Programs (IEPs) and 504 plans to provide particular services to each student for the time specified (where applicable), and accommodations that allow students to participate effectively in school. Schools also must comply with any laws that direct how staff, including paraprofessionals, are trained and supervised to deliver special education services.

MCLs help schools reach all students, including those with disabilities, with excellent teaching. To ensure that the team achieves high-growth student learning and social-emotional development, the MCL must:

- \* Co-plan instruction for high-growth learning;
- \* Co-teach and model excellent instruction;
- \* Teach part of the time, in own class or others’ classes;
- \* Lead team to monitor and analyze student learning data and to improve instruction continuously;
- \* Coach and develop the team and individual teachers;
- \* Collaborate with the team, using the team’s ideas that the MCL agrees may improve learning;
- \* Take accountability for the learning and development of all students taught by the team members;

- \* Help choose and evaluate team members, dismissing low performers if needed (with the principal); and
- \* Participate on a schoolwide instructional team of leaders with other MCLs, the principal, and others.

### OPPORTUNITY CULTURE PRINCIPLES

*Teams of teachers and school leaders must tailor roles, budgets, and school operations to:*

- 1. Reach more students with excellent teachers and their teams**
- 2. Pay teachers more for extending their reach**
- 3. Fund pay within regular budgets**
- 4. Provide protected in-school time and clarity about how to use it for planning, collaboration, and development.**
- 5. Match authority and accountability to each person’s responsibilities**

SPED MCLs focus on ensuring instructional excellence for high growth in core subjects as well as other skills and subjects articulated in each student's IEP or 504. Administrative and compliance duties related to special education may be handled primarily by specified district staff or school-based IEP case managers, in collaboration with SPED MCLs, regular MCLs, and teachers. Schools should innovate to funnel more of their excellent educators' time into teaching, rather than paperwork.

Large schools, particularly those with previously funded SPED instructional and/or compliance specialists, may need and have funds for more than one SPED MCL. Small schools, and those without previously funded SPED specialists, may have one SPED MCL serving multiple schools.

### WHY USE MULTI-CLASSROOM LEADERSHIP IN SPECIAL EDUCATION?

Research has shown that teachers starting at average student learning growth, who then join small teams led by MCLs with prior high growth, leap to produce student growth in the top quartile in math and nearly that in reading.<sup>1</sup>

Students with disabilities need the high-growth learning and thinking skill development that comes from having excellent teachers as MCLs. Yet teachers trained to serve students with disabilities—both special education and general education teachers—are often in short supply.

SPED MCLs and general education MCLs leading grade or content-specific team teachers who have SPED training can optimize student learning growth by: crafting team teaching roles to fit each teacher's strengths, planning instruction, monitoring data, and adjusting instruction to produce high-growth student learning and critical skill development for all students, including those with disabilities.

The model options below offer several examples. Most essentially, all students have access to teachers with a prior record of high-growth student learning; all students in need have access to high-standards, differentiated instruction; and all models stay within the five Opportunity Culture Principles. Experience and research will reveal which role variations are the most effective for students and teachers.

**Higher Pay Within Budget:** SPED and other MCLs earn substantial pay supplements. In early Opportunity Culture models, general-education MCLs earn an average pay supplement that is about 20 percent of average base pay. New roles and pay supplements are budget-neutral in all Opportunity Culture schools, and they are funded only through reallocations of regular school budgets, not temporary grants. Schools may fund the temporary costs of transition to an Opportunity Culture with part of the savings from reallocations, raising pay even more after the transition is complete.

There are three main ways to use regular budgets to fund new roles and higher pay.

- 1. Schools can reallocate instructional specialist or coaching roles,** such as reading and math specialists, to fund supplements for SPED MCLs and grade or subject MCLs. SPED coaches/specialist positions may be traded only for other SPED positions—such as a SPED MCL who leads a team in one or more schools—not to fund non-SPED Opportunity Culture positions. Preexisting English language learner specialist/coach positions should remain intact in all Opportunity Culture models, and SPED specialist/coach positions should remain intact in all schools without a SPED MCL.
- 2. Schools can trade one vacant teaching position on a team for a less-costly paraprofessional position.** When schools combine Multi-Classroom Leadership with Team Reach, some vacant teaching positions are traded for paraprofessionals known as reach associates. A reach associate performs instructional and noninstructional duties to support the team, as directed by the grade or subject MCL, including following student IEPs and 504s. These position trades can help fund pay supplements for MCLs (including SPED MCLs), team reach teachers, and, in some cases, reach associates, too.
- 3. Some schools allocate Title I, Title II, or other funds for MCL supplements.** Some schools also reallocate other budget items to fund pay supplements.

**Schedule Changes:** Each MCL, whether leading a SPED or general-education classroom team, must have time for planning, student data review, and coaching with the SPED team and individual teachers. Principals and assistant principals playing instructional leadership roles must have similar time regularly scheduled with their teams. All planning and coaching is scheduled during regular school hours by staggering team meeting times across the school day, when paraprofessionals and “specials” teachers are with students. Each team meets at least once a week.

**Facilities:** No facilities changes are needed, except that all schools should use as many comfortable spaces conducive to learning as possible, to give the SPED team flexibility for teaching students where each can learn best. Teachers on an MCL team ideally have classrooms near one another. Decisions about whether to teach students with disabilities in the general-education classroom or elsewhere will vary each year with the students' needs and space availability, affected by overall enrollment. Students with disabilities may be taught in the general-education classroom (with others or in separate small groups), in pull-outs into small spaces in the school, or in a larger resource room. The SPED MCL plans instruction and works with the SPED teaching team and principal to make location decisions each year based on instructional needs and facilities availability.

**Technology:** Digital assessments, where appropriate for the students served, and organizing tools to analyze student needs and progress within each MCL team and among SPED students school-wide can help.

**Estimated Reach Extension Effect:** 100%–700% more students reached by excellent teachers. For more on the MCL models, including MCL + Team Reach, see <https://opportunityculture.org/multi-classroom-leadership-models/>.

## SPECIAL EDUCATION MODELS

### Inclusion or Self-Contained Model

Whenever possible, students with disabilities should be served in inclusion models, in which students with disabilities are in a general-education classroom for all or most of the day. The self-contained model is only for students with severe to profound disabilities that are best addressed in a self-contained classroom; in some districts, enough students have such needs to fill multiple classrooms. (For statistics on the time that students with disabilities spend in general classrooms, see National Center for Education Statistics tables, such as this one from 2014: <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=59>)

### Inclusion Models

Schools choosing among the three inclusion model examples below should consider the known number of students with identified disabilities who receive special education services, the estimated number of students with unidentified disabilities, and the district’s access to certified SPED teachers, including those who have a record of high-growth student learning who might serve as SPED MCLs.

**Matrix Management:** In all of the inclusion models, schools use a “matrix management” structure. This is a structure used in many public and private organizations where both technical knowledge and strong delivery of services or projects are critical to success. In schools, each SPED teacher receives guidance and coaching from both a SPED MCL and one or more grade or subject MCLs.

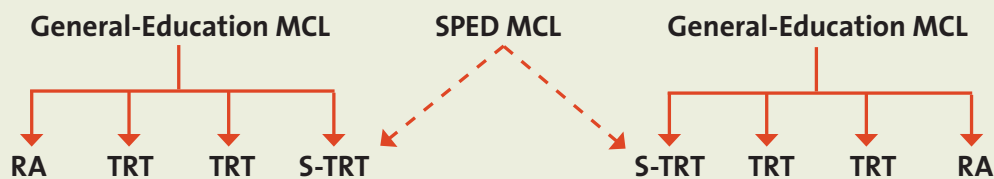
The **right reporting relationships are crucial to success** in matrix management: When each general education team has its own SPED teacher (options 1 and 2 below), the SPED teacher should report formally to the general-education grade or subject classroom MCL but also receive frequent technical guidance and coaching from the SPED MCL. When a SPED teacher serves multiple teams of general-education classroom MCLs (option 3 below), the SPED teacher should formally report to the SPED MCL, but also co-plan with the general-education grade or subject classroom MCL teams.

**Clarifying roles and communicating consistently** helps everyone succeed in a matrix structure. Using Team Reach in the MCL general-education classrooms is ideal to free more time for teachers to plan and communicate with both SPED and general-education MCLs. For more about matrix management, read: <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/revisiting-the-matrix-organization>

## SPECIAL EDUCATION MULTI-CLASSROOM LEADER MODELS

Following are three examples of special education **inclusion models** and one **self-contained model** that use a combination of teaching roles under the leadership of a multi-classroom leader.

### Inclusion Option 1: General-Education Multi-Classroom Leaders’ Teams Each Include a SPED Teacher



Each SPED-certified team reach teacher (**S-TRT**) reports to a **general-education classroom multi-classroom leader (MCL)** who leads a small grade or subject team while teaching part of the time. The S-TRT works **full time** on the general-education MCL team. Teams typically use Team Reach to free more time for planning SPED and general instruction, and to free funds to pay supplements for both MCLs and teachers. Teams also have regular (non-SPED) team reach teachers (**TRTs**) and a paraprofessional reach associate (**RA**), who supervises skills practice and projects and, in some cases, tutors and teaches small groups. (Alternatively, other funds may be reallocated to fund advanced role pay.) Each general-education MCL team meets at least weekly to plan, review data, and improve instruction.

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### Inclusion Option 1 (continued):

The SPED team is led by a **SPED MCL**, who serves one or multiple schools as funding permits. SPED team reach teachers also meet weekly with the schoolwide SPED team to plan SPED instruction, review SPED student data, and improve SPED schoolwide. S-TRTs help general-education MCLs and their teams follow IEPs and 504 plans effectively and incorporate instructional practices that help students with disabilities—both diagnosed and undiagnosed—excel. The location of SPED teaching—co-teaching in a classroom or pulling students out into another space—will vary by class and year, depending on student needs and available space, which may change with enrollment.

The SPED MCL:

- \* is accountable for the learning growth and other outcomes of students with identified disabilities;
- \* continues to teach part of the time, serving one or more MCL teams; and
- \* provides collaborating general-education MCLs and the principal with input about each S-TRT's strengths and development opportunities, for formal evaluation and/or development, according to district evaluation policies.

The SPED and general-education MCLs clarify roles and communicate routinely. All MCL teams average six teachers or fewer, with a maximum of eight per team; teams of six to eight may have an assistant leader (a “master team reach teacher”) who has prior high learning growth and is paid a supplement. All MCLs have produced high-growth student learning as teachers and earn a pay supplement; team teachers using team reach typically earn a supplement, as well. SPED team reach teachers must also have the subject knowledge and any required certifications to teach relevant content, especially important at the secondary level.

### Inclusion Option 2: General-Education MCLs' Teams Each Include Teacher Trained on the Job in SPED



Each SPED-trained team reach teacher (**ST-TRT**), who is not SPED-certified but who is trained on the job in SPED methods by a **SPED MCL**, reports to a **general-education classroom MCL**. The ST-TRT works **full time** on the general education MCL team. The general-education MCLs lead small grade or subject teams while teaching part of the time. Teams typically use Team Reach to free more time for planning SPED and general instruction, and to free funds to pay supplements for both MCLs and teachers. Teams also have non-SPED team reach teachers (**TRTs**) and a paraprofessional reach associate (**RA**), who supervises skills practice and projects and, in some cases, tutors and teaches small groups. (Alternatively, other funds may be reallocated to fund advanced role pay.) Each general-education MCL team meets at least weekly to plan, review data, and improve instruction.

The SPED-trained team reach teachers are led by a **SPED MCL**, who serves one or multiple schools as funding permits. ST-TRTs meet weekly with the schoolwide SPED team to plan SPED instruction, review SPED student data, and improve SPED schoolwide. ST-TRTs help general-education MCLs and their teams follow IEPs and 504 plans effectively and incorporate instructional practices that help students with disabilities—both diagnosed and undiagnosed—excel. The location of SPED teaching—co-teaching in a classroom or pulling students out into another space—will vary by class and year, depending on student needs and available space, which may change with enrollment.

The SPED MCL:

- \* is accountable for the learning growth and other outcomes of students with identified disabilities;
- \* continues to teach part of the time, helping one or more teams; and
- \* provides collaborating general-education MCLs and the principal with input about each ST-TRT's strengths and development opportunities, for formal evaluation and/or development, according to district evaluation policies.

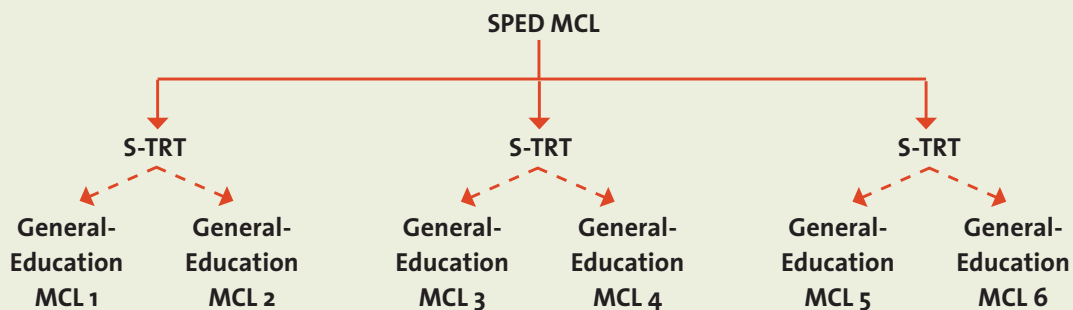
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### **Inclusion Option 2 (continued):**

The SPED and general-education MCLs clarify roles and communicate routinely. All MCL teams average six teachers or fewer, with a maximum of eight per team; teams of six to eight may have an assistant leader (a “master team reach teacher”) who has prior high learning growth and is paid a supplement. All MCLs have produced high-growth student learning as teachers and earn a pay supplement; team teachers using team reach typically earn a supplement, as well.

ST-TRTs must have the subject knowledge and any required certifications to teach relevant content, especially important at the secondary level. They ideally also have already demonstrated effective or high growth consistently, rather than entering this role as new or struggling teachers; high growth with students with disabilities, if measured, is even more desirable. Ideally, districts supplement on-the-job training with summer training funded by regular professional development funds, to help SPED-trained (but not certified) teachers develop expertise in supporting students with learning disabilities who are served in general education classrooms; collaborating with institutions of higher education can allow SPED certification of these teachers over time.

### **Inclusion Option 3: SPED Teachers Serve Multiple General-Education Multi-Classroom Leader Teams**



Each SPED-certified team reach teacher (**S-TRT**) reports to a **SPED MCL** serving all or part of the school (depending on school size, SPED student population, and funding). The SPED MCL is accountable for the learning growth and other measured outcomes of all students identified as having disabilities. The schoolwide SPED team meets weekly to plan, review data, and improve.

S-TRTs rotate through classrooms of two or more **general-education grade or subject MCL** teams, each for **part of their time**, to teach and co-teach. S-TRTs meet weekly with the general-education MCL teams they serve to plan instruction, review data, and improve education, including for the students with disabilities whom each team serves. These teams typically use Team Reach to free time for planning SPED and general instruction, and to free funds to pay supplements for both MCLs and teachers. Teams using Teach Reach swap a vacant position for a paraprofessional reach associate (RA), who supervises skills practice and projects and, in some cases, tutors and teaches small groups. (Alternatively, other funds may be reallocated to fund advanced role pay.) General-education MCL teams meet at least weekly to plan, review data, and improve instruction.

Each S-TRT and grade or subject MCL guides the other team reach teachers and RA to follow IEPs and 504 plans and to incorporate instructional practices that help students with disabilities—both diagnosed and undiagnosed—excel. The location of SPED teaching—co-teaching in a classroom or pulling students out into another space—will vary by class and year, depending on student needs and available space, which may change with enrollment.

The SPED MCL:

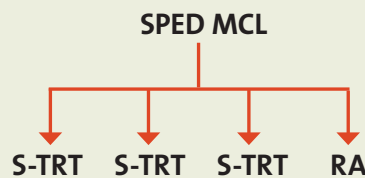
- \* is accountable for the learning growth and other outcomes of students with identified disabilities;
- \* continues to teach part of the time, serving one or more grade or subject teams; and
- \* seeks input, with the principal, from collaborating general-education MCLs about each S-TRT’s strengths and development opportunities, for formal evaluation and/or development, according to district evaluation policies.

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**Option 3 (continued):**

Non-SPED team reach teachers and RAs report to each grade or subject MCL, all of whom continue to teach part of the time. The SPED and general-education MCLs clarify roles and communicate routinely. All MCL teams average six teachers or fewer, with a maximum of eight per team; teams of six to eight may have an assistant leader (a “master team reach teacher”) who has prior high learning growth and is paid a supplement. All MCLs have produced high-growth student learning as teachers and earn a pay supplement; team teachers using team reach typically earn a supplement, as well. SPED team reach teachers must also have the subject knowledge and any required certifications to teach relevant content, especially important at the secondary level.

**Self-Contained Model For Special Education**



The **SPED MCL** leads a team of teachers serving self-contained classrooms of students whose needs cannot be met in a general-education classroom. The SPED MCL is accountable for the learning growth and other measured outcomes of all students served by the MCL’s SPED team. Teams may use Team Reach to free more time for planning and to free pay supplement funds for the MCL and teachers. When using Team Reach, teams swap a vacant position for a reach associate (RA), who is trained in advance and/or on the job to supervise students with disabilities. Alternatively, other funds may be reallocated to fund advanced role pay.

The SPED MCL guides the SPED team reach teachers (**S-TRT**), who are **full-time** members of the team, and the RA to follow IEPs and incorporate instructional excellence practices. Each SPED MCL team meets weekly to plan, review data, and improve. The SPED MCL teaches part of the time. All MCL teams average six teachers or fewer, with a maximum of eight per team; teams of six to eight may have an assistant leader (a “master team reach teacher”) who has prior high learning growth and is paid a supplement. All MCLs have produced high-growth student learning as teachers, measured by student growth and relevant portfolio assessments, as available, and earn a pay supplement; team teachers using team reach typically earn a supplement, as well.

**Notes**

1. Teachers who were on average at the 50th percentile in student learning gains, who then joined teams led by teacher-leaders known as multi-classroom leaders, or MCLs (who had prior high growth as teachers), produced learning gains equivalent to those of teachers from the 75th to 85th percentile in math, and, in six of the seven statistical models, from 66th to 72nd percentile in reading. Teams had a median of five teachers in addition to the MCL. Opportunity Culture meets ESSA requirements for an evidence-based intervention for schools in need of improvement. For more information, see: Hansen, M., & Backes, B. (2018, January 25). New teaching model yields learning improvement for students in math [Blog post]. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2018/01/25/new-teaching-model-yields-learning-improvement-for-students-in-math/>

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