

Innovative Staffing Models

This is one of a series of evidence-based strategies to help states and school districts invest Covid relief aid effectively. Read all 18 strategies in FutureEd's [Covid Relief Playbook](#).

With schools closed during the pandemic, many educators developed innovative strategies for delivering instruction. Some created multi-teacher teams with one teacher leading the lessons and others working closely with struggling students. Others reorganized schedules to provide more time for teachers to collaborate on planning lessons and analyzing student work. Covid relief funding could help states and districts bring these innovative models to more schools and train teachers how to work within the new frameworks.

THE RESEARCH

Research suggests that closer collaboration among teachers can improve instructional practices and, in some cases, student achievement. In [Opportunity Culture](#) schools, lead teachers teach part-time and also lead small, collaborative teams of two to eight teachers, paraprofessionals, and teacher residents in the same grade or subject. Their duties include clarifying the roles and responsibilities of each team member based on their strengths; leading the team in analyzing student data to target and adjust instruction; leading teacher development through lesson planning, co-teaching, modeling, and individual feedback; and providing input on principal evaluations of team members. A rigorous third-party [evaluation](#) by the National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research, or CALDER, found that the implementation of such teams was associated with sizable math gains for students. However, researchers could not be certain whether the math gains were the direct effect of the teacher teams or attributable to other school improvement efforts.

More definitive evidence of student achievement gains emerged from a Tennessee study led by Brown University researcher John P. Papay. Papay paired teachers who had done well on specific domains within an evaluation rubric with peers who had struggled. Schools were randomly assigned to the teacher-to-teacher model or continued as usual. The paired teachers were encouraged to work together on improving teaching skills identified by the evaluation data. By year's end, the average student in a school with paired teachers scored higher on math and reading tests than the average student in a control school. This finding held whether or not the student's teacher had participated in a partnership, according to a 2016 working [paper](#). These improvements persisted, and even grew, in the school year following treatment.

Improved achievement also comes with teachers observing and evaluating each other's instructional style, according to a 2020 [study](#) by researchers from Harvard University and England's Oxford Partnership for Education Research and Analysis and University of Bristol. The researchers randomly assigned teachers in British schools to observe or be observed by their colleagues while teaching. Students in the observation schools scored higher on math and English exams compared to students in the comparison schools.

While these results are promising, a [meta-analysis](#) of 60 teacher-coaching studies led by Brown University's Matthew A. Kraft found improvement in instructional practices, but not consistent improvements in student achievement.

Innovative Staffing Models

Continued

WHAT TO CONSIDER

To ensure teachers are committed to the idea of learning through peer feedback, schools and districts should seek buy-in from educators before pursuing multi-teacher teams or teacher coaching arrangements. In some places, these new arrangements may require adjusting union contracts. Typically, team leaders receive higher pay for the increased responsibilities they assume. Covid relief money could support extra pay for leadership, as well as training for the educators using these models.

RESEARCH

- [Reaching Further and Learning More? Evaluating Public Impact's Opportunity Culture Initiative: **PROMISING**](#)
- [Learning Job Skills from Colleagues at Work: Evidence from a Field Experiment Using Teacher Performance Data: **STRONG**](#)
- [Teacher Peer Observations and Student Test Scores: **STRONG**](#)

RESOURCES

- [Teaching Innovation: New School Staffing Strategies Inspired by the Pandemic](#)
- [Multi-Classroom Leadership](#)
- [The Effect of Teacher Coaching on Instruction and Achievement: A Meta-Analysis of the Causal Evidence](#)