

FALL 2020

Learning in the Unknown with "Plan-Do-Study-Act"

Turning unexpected obstacles into improvement opportunities. How STRIVE Prep is using the PDSA structure to improve co-teaching observations in the virtual classroom this Fall.



DENVER, COLO.

When instructional plans switched from in-person to fully online as **STRIVE Preparatory Schools** prepared to go back-to-school, **Krystle Menduke**, a Special Education Manager and STRIVE Prep's Improvement Lead, faced some tough questions about how to proceed with **co-teaching** in the Fall.

How do you improve co-teaching practices using an observation rubric? What might co-teaching look like in the virtual setting? How might the network adapt its co-teaching observation rubric for the virtual setting?

To answer these questions, Krystle and the Improvement Team refocused their learning efforts on co-observations in the virtual setting. In early August, Krystle and the General Education Director led network-wide training for

Special Educators. They honed in on models of co-teaching to improve the remote learning experience for students with disabilities. Following the professional development (PD) session, Krystle conducted classroom visits to observe co-taught virtual classrooms in action. In these virtual classrooms, Krystle conducted a learning cycle, using the **Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) structure** of improvement science to guide the learning and inform next steps for observations.

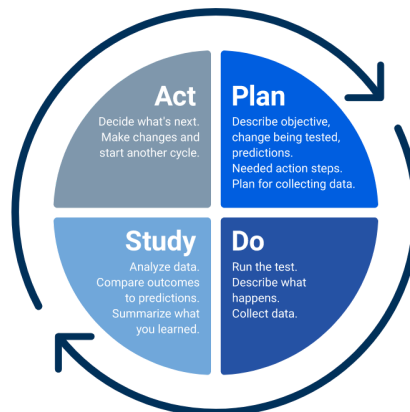


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Step 1: PLAN. *Define the objective. Create questions and predictions. Plan who, what, where, and when.*

Krystle tested out the rubric in the online observations. She planned which classrooms to observe, when it would happen and how long to stay.

- Do I stay for an entire block?
- Can I access all student materials in a virtual class? If not, do I need to plan in advance and request them?
- If stations or breakouts are used, can I observe more than one group?

Then it was time to jump in.



STEP 2: DO. *Carry out the plan. Document problems and expected observations.*

With the PDSA team aligned on goals, predictions, and process, Krystle joined virtual classrooms in the second week of school. During this phase, she ran into a series of unexpected but valuable learnings, which she documented for further analysis.



STEP 3: STUDY. *Complete analysis and summarize learnings.*

Among her co-teaching observations in the first go, Krystle noted:

- ▶ **Feedback given to individual students** over private chat on Zoom were not viewable to the co-teaching observer. Access to instructional materials was not instantaneous over Zoom.
- ▶ **Compared to the physical setting**, in which walking into a classroom allows the observer to peer over a student's shoulder or observe the whiteboard, advanced coordination was required for virtual observations.

► **When teachers send students into breakout rooms**, the observer did not have the ability to go in and out of breakout rooms -- unless they were given co-host access in advance.

Put simply, co-teaching observations were vastly different in the virtual classroom.

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STEP 4: ACT. *What changes must be made to improve the next cycle?*

Realizing that their rubric would not be able to capture everything happening in the class via Zoom and that further testing would be needed, the team decided to adapt the test and begin again. Krystle pushed forward with the second cycle with a plan to coordinate with teachers to conduct pre- and post-observation check-ins. In these check-ins, she prepared questions for teachers, asked for co-host permission to observe student groupings, and requested advance access of instructional materials.

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...and repeat!

After implementing the first test of change, Krystle began seeing improvement in classroom observations. She shares:

“What I thought I would see is not what I actually saw. There’s a need to work with teachers before and after class, which is not as simple as in-person. But after being in a lot of classrooms, I’m seeing progress every week: from week 1 to week 2 to week 3.”

Now in the third PDSA cycle, Krystle plans to incorporate teacher voices into the learning process, gradually expanding outward.



Down the line, the STRIVE Prep Improvement Team aims to **build improvement capacity** at all levels of STRIVE Prep. From administrators at the network level to Special Education and content coaches at the site level, inclusion lives at the heart of STRIVE’s improvement work.

Already, the Improvement Team’s focus on **co-observations with network and site leaders** is having a visible impact on STRIVE Prep’s co-teaching practice. Owing to this virtual structure, educators are “mirroring” what students might experience in a co-teaching model—by going through the same virtual experience as both learners and coaches. As a result, empathy is created for everyone.

Krystle states:

“I received an appreciation from Kam [General Education Director of STEM] for the focus on co-teaching and co-observations and how it is making a difference in classrooms. In years past there wasn’t a regular cadence of scheduled co-observations between departments and he looks forward to doing this scheduled co-observation every month. Following our observation for September, we added an additional round of co-observations because we felt four weeks was too long in between seeing the feedback we provided in action.”

— Or might we say, an ‘observable’ impact! ■

Networked Improvement Community
FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Paula Espinoza led the reporting of this story. Daria Zhao writes from Marshall Street Initiatives, a K-12 solutions lab that tackles persistent challenges in American public education.