Horizontal and Vertical Teams

Effective schools rely on collaborative teacher teams to drive student-centered implementation at the classroom level. These teams are meet to analyze student data, implement and adjust instructional strategies, and support students through shared responsibility and collective expertise. Depending on a district’s size and structure, collaborative teams can take on various configurations, most commonly **horizontal** or **vertical**.

# ****Purpose of Collaborative Teacher Teams****

Regardless of structure, collaborative teams support the following practices:

* Analyzing student data to identify academic and behavioral needs
* Implementing evidence-based practices, interventions, and strategies
* Monitoring student progress and adjusting supports
* Providing targeted resources and supports
* Engaging in ongoing professional learning
* Sharing strategies and resources to promote schoolwide improvement

# ****Horizontal Teams****

**Definition:**  
Horizontal teams consist of educators who serve the same grade level, content area, or share a common focus.

**Purpose:**  
These teams support aligned instruction, shared assessments, and coordinated strategies for students at a particular level.

**Examples of Horizontal Teams:**

* Grade-level teams (e.g., all 2nd-grade teachers)
* Special education team
* Specials (art, music, PE)
* Ancillary staff (e.g., speech pathologists, school psychologists)
* Paraeducators working within classrooms

**Additional Forms of Horizontal Collaboration:**

* Collaborative teaching teams (e.g., interdisciplinary units)
* Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)
* Curriculum development or assessment teams
* Student support teams (behavior or academic focus)
* Technology integration committees
* Mentorship programs
* Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs)

# ****Vertical Teams****

**Definition:**  
Vertical teams include educators from multiple grade levels or instructional roles who work together to ensure coherence and continuity across years and subjects.

**Purpose:**  
These teams promote alignment of curriculum, instructional strategies, and expectations to support long-term student growth and readiness.

**Examples of Vertical Teams:**

* Primary (K–3) and upper elementary (3–5) collaboration teams
* School leadership and improvement teams (math, literacy, SEL, etc.)
* Co-teaching partnerships across grade spans
* Vertical PLCs or assessment alignment groups
* Special education and general education integration teams
* Mentorship programs across grade levels
* Technology and curriculum alignment teams
* Social-emotional learning improvement groups

# ****Considerations for Singleton Teachers****

Teachers who are the only one in their role or content area at a building or “singleton” teachers—may still participate meaningfully in collaborative teams by:

**Within-School Options:**

* Joining teams that serve the same students
* Connecting with teams that share planning time
* Collaborating with teams focused on innovation and learning

**Across-School Options:**

* Participating in cross-building or districtwide teams
* Engaging in virtual collaboration using shared documents, video conferencing, or asynchronous tools

# ****Conclusion****

Both horizontal and vertical teams play essential roles in a school’s success. **Horizontal teams** build consistency and shared ownership within grades or content areas, while **vertical teams** ensure that learning experiences are connected and purposeful across years. Together, they form a strong foundation for systemic improvement, equitable access, and collective responsibility for all students.