School Journey Profile: Building Effective Practices with Grant Funding

2026

Triton: Salisbury Elementary School Implements Co-Teaching to Strengthen Instruction and Build Teacher Capacity

What has made this (co-teaching) partnership successful is open communication, clearly defined roles, and a shared belief that every student benefits when both teachers take equal ownership of the learning.

- ***Salisbury Elementary School Teacher***

FAST FACTS

Salisbury Elementary (2025-2026):

Teachers:
42.9

Students:
385

Low-Income:
42.3%

SWD:
20%

High Needs:
56.1%

English Learners:
5.7%

Overview of the Evidence-Based Practice Grant:
The purpose of the multi-year Student Opportunity Act Evidence-Based Practice Grant (hereafter "SOA EBP" grant) is to address persistent disparities in achievement among specific student groups, improve educational opportunities for all students, share best practices for improving classroom learning, and support efficiencies within and across school districts (Student Opportunity Act, 21st Century Education Program, Section 16A).

This profile showcases work of recipients of the 2025-2026 school year program. Grantees were initially awarded a three-year grant (FY23-FY25) through a competitive grant process. Competitive continuation funding for a fourth year was available to grantees based on demonstrated improvements in student outcomes. School year 2026 funding was intended to allow districts to continue refining effective practices with an eye toward dissemination.

Students Served:
Salisbury Elementary School is one of three elementary schools in the Triton Regional School District, which serves three towns in Essex County, Massachusetts: Salisbury, Newbury, and Rowley. Each town has one elementary school. The three elementary schools feed into a single regional middle school and, subsequently, into a single regional high school. Salisbury Elementary is the smallest of the three elementary schools. It serves 385[1] students, 20 percent of whom are identified as students with disabilities and 42.3 percent of whom are identified as low-income. Over fifty percent (56.1%) of its population is identified as high needs,[2] the highest percentage of the three elementary schools in the Triton Regional School District.

[1] All current figures can be found at Enrollment Data (2025-26) - Triton (07730000) on the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) Profiles web page.
[2] The high needs student group is comprised of students who belong to one or more of the following student groups: students with disabilities, English learners, and former English learners and students from low-income families.

The Challenge:
The Triton Regional School District applied for the three-year SOA EBP grant on behalf of Salisbury Elementary School in school year 2023-2024. Between 2021 and 2023, the percentage of students with disabilities in Salisbury Elementary School increased by over 5 percentage points, from 12.9 to 18.1 percent. Only three percent of these students met or exceeded expectations on MCAS in 2021. Similarly, students in the low-income student group experienced low growth scores in both ELA and math on 2023 MCAS and continuously declined in ELA MCAS achievement each year from 2019 to 2023. Declines in student achievement persisted at Salisbury Elementary despite having an active Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) in place and improved attendance across every student group—all of which exceeded targets. With the higher populations of students in the high-needs student group enrolled at Salisbury Elementary than at the district's other elementary schools, it was there where the district decided to channel grant funding to implement a co-teaching model.

School leadership resolved to identify what might reverse declines and leverage opportunities for instructional improvement. In collaboration with the district, the school determined there was a need to strengthen tier one (1) and tier two (2) instructional approaches. The grant afforded them an avenue to take a thoughtful, multi-year approach to developing a co-teaching and inclusion model as a potentially impactful pathway to improvement.

The Turning Point:
During the 2021-2022 academic year (prior to receiving the SOA EBP grant), the district allocated funds from the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to work with Seaside Educational Consultants (Seaside) to train teachers to build and support a formal system of co-teaching. At the time, the school did not have a true collaborative teaching model in place, relying primarily on push-in support. Participation in the initial two-day co-teaching training was limited due to minimal readiness among teachers. The teachers who did participate, however, found that the model showed promise in meeting student needs, strengthening practice, and improving student outcomes. Despite the limited interest, the district was determined to continue growing the practice. Then, in the 2022-2023 school year, the SOA EBP grant provided the resources needed to expand and strengthen its co-teaching model.

The school and interested teachers committed to four years of training with the consultant. The grant paid for the same annual two-day training sessions with Seaside, a 1-day working session for all co-teachers, and it covered the cost of stipends to teachers to engage in the training work. Teacher buy-in was essential, so leadership was intentional in recruiting teachers willing to volunteer to participate. Although these early adopters pioneered the work and shared their positive experiences with their colleagues, some educators remained concerned about the increased responsibilities and planning demands. Additionally, leadership recognized the critical importance of building trust between co-teachers and the need to establish an approach that would foster it from the beginning. In response, leadership initially allowed teachers to select their co-teaching partners, hoping this would provide a comfortable path into the work and an effective way to garner buy-in. As the work developed, partnerships became more strategic, whereby general education teachers paired with special educators or reading specialists. Co-teachers started seeing student gains on interim assessments, and as a result, more teachers became interested and wanted to be trained. Additionally, more intentional pairings and co-teaching practices also resulted in a greater sense of shared responsibility for all students in every student group by educators at the school.

Teachers and school leadership also established protected weekly collaboration time for co-teachers, a structure, teachers state, which "has been so powerful." From the onset, teachers and leadership regarded this planning time as "sacred" agreeing that it is crucial to strengthening the co-teaching instructional model. During co-teacher collaboration time, teachers receive support and do the critical work of reviewing data, and planning together. The work during this time has also served to foster a cultural shift in which team teaching is grounded in mutual respect.

Demonstrating its own commitment to the model, school leadership, which includes the principal, vice principal, Title I coordinator, and the math and literacy specialists, openly voiced its support and enthusiasm for co-teaching. The expectations and explicit communication around co-teaching, including what it looked like and how it would be implemented, helped put everyone on the same page. In collaboration with Seaside and

drawing from the book, *Co-Teach: Building and Sustaining Effective Classroom Partnerships in Inclusive Schools*[3], the school eventually developed an application for those interested in co-teaching to be explicit and to better match teachers. The application outlines many different iterations (and possibilities) of co-teaching, demonstrating how it is fundamentally different from a push-in model but "can be made up of various partnerships, on various schedules. . . for various and targeted reasons" (see Figure 1).

Figure 1:

Co-Teaching Partnership	Application
Classroom Teacher & Special Educator	This is the most common co-teaching arrangement. It has been a part of special education services since the mid-1980s for student with mild needs, those with behavior or emotional needs, and those with significant disabilities.
Classroom Teacher & EL Teacher	This co-teaching arrangement has evolved over the past several years, especially with the expectation in federal legislation that ELs will meet, after a relatively brief time, the same rigorous academic standards as other students.
Classroom Teacher & Literacy or Math Specialist	When literacy or math coaches co-teach, they often use this option as away to model evidence-based instructional strategies and may do so to demonstrate a particular skill or for a time-limited period.
Classroom Teachers & Speech-Language Therapist	This co-teaching arrangement is most common in elementary schools, especially in primary grades. Typically, it occurs just 1-2x a week which can make it a challenging but still effective and rewarding option.
Classroom Teacher & Media Specialist	This co-teaching option is usually implemented for a specific instructional unit, and can be appropriate for any school level. The emphasis is on integrating appropriate literature or technology into the academic content.
Classroom Teacher & Gifted-Talented Educator	This co-teaching approach can be a means of integrating enrichment into general education classrooms. It also helps to ensure that students who may not otherwise access these services can be incidental beneficiaries of them.

Leadership set expectations and provided ongoing support to co-teachers, providing not only collaboration time and coaching, but also time to be observed in co-teaching teams, receive feedback, and observe their peers' best practices. Students with disabilities and English learners were intentionally placed in classrooms with the teams that would best serve their unique needs. Interventionists and instructional support staff were equally intentional in supporting co-teachers. The school also engaged in "train the trainer" sessions to develop in-house coaches and create sustained momentum. Leadership's investment in co-teaching became a critical piece in the multi-year adoption process. Because school leadership was fully invested, it further inspired the buy-in of staff.

The Impact on Instruction and Outcomes:
As the work progressed, teachers started seeing instructional changes at much higher levels than expected. In delivering an already solid MTSS, teachers found that, with co-teaching, they "could provide all the tiers more effectively." Teachers further explain that they have "been able to implement meaningful, purposeful lessons. Talking daily has allowed (us) to think about the tasks we'll assign and how to differentiate." Students receive immediate feedback and scaffolded support from more than one teacher, making them more comfortable in trying and persevering through different strategies than they had before co-teaching. Smaller groups help to bolster engagement and, according to teachers, students have developed the confidence to take more academic risks to gain a deeper understanding of the content.

The decision to adopt co-teaching has been further buoyed by student data. The school has tracked data to analyze the progress of students in co-teaching classrooms compared with those in the traditional classrooms. The school's iReady benchmark data in ELA, for example, (see Figure 2) shows a nine-point difference in achievement at or above grade level at the midyear assessment in 2024-2025 between students in co-taught classrooms (73 percent) compared with those who were not (64 percent).

[3] Friend, Marilyn Ph.D. *Co-Teach: Building and Sustaining Effective Classroom Partnerships in Inclusive Schools*. Marilyn Friend, Inc., 2018.

Figure 2:

Grade Level ELA Data: iReady Benchmark 2024-2025	% of Students At/Above Grade Level at MidYear Assessment	+/- v. Classrooms With Co-Teaching
Classroom With Co-teaching in Year 2	73%	
Classroom Without Co-teaching	64%	-9%

Data in grades 3-6 during the Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) instructional block demonstrates similar results on iReady. The one fourth grade co-taught classroom during this block showed stronger annual typical growth (the expected score increase for a student at that grade level over one academic year, representing solid, steady progress) on iReady. The co-taught classroom had annual typical growth of 17 points compared with non-co-taught classrooms scoring at 13. Students in the same co-taught classroom outpaced students in the non-co-taught classrooms in annual stretch growth (a more ambitious annual target, reflecting above-average effort and acceleration) of 22 points compared with 6 points in the non-co-taught classrooms. This trend extended to the math instructional block in which 73 percent of students in the co-teaching classroom in 2024-2025 scored on or above grade level, compared with 63 percent in the non-co-taught classroom.

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Schoolwide, Salisbury Elementary has moved consistently upward from its accountability percentile[4i] of 32 in 2023, to 38 in 2024, and most recently up to 48 in 2025 – all years with the EBP grant. Progress toward its improvement targets have seen similar climbs from 2023 when it made "Moderate" progress toward targets of 49 percent to 2024 when the school made "Substantial" progress at 55 percent, and in 2025 when it again made "Substantial" progress toward targets at 60 percent.

In terms of accelerating the achievement of their students with disabilities and students in the low-income student group, students are growing at a faster pace than prior to the implementation of co-teaching. Students with disabilities have more than tripled both progress in the annual criterion-referenced target percentage from 2024 (12 percent) to 2025 (38 percent), as have the number of students with disabilities scoring at or above grade level on the midyear benchmark assessment in 2024-2025 compared with 2023-2024. Students in the low-income student group showed a 16 percent increase in progress in 2024-2025 toward the annual typical growth over the midyear assessment in 2023-2024, with 44 percent of students meeting their annual typical growth by the midyear point as compared to 37 percent in 2023-2024. In math, students in the high needs student group are showing high growth, with a 2025 Mean Student Growth Percentile (SGP) of 58.1 and have exceeded their 2025 achievement target.

Results are not only emerging in student assessments, but in school culture as well. According to Principal Michael Astuccio, "We believe the collaborative nature of co-teaching and the way it enables us to provide support to our students is having a positive impact on our Spring 2025 Views on Climate and Learning (VOCAL) data as well. In the third year of the implementation of co-teaching, with the number of staff trained and opportunities to co-teach having grown, the number of students reporting a *Favorable* or *Most Favorable* view on their school experience increased by 17 points." Teachers assert an additional benefit to the collaborative professional culture is that students notice positive working relationships being modeled between teachers, feeding a healthy and positive whole-school culture. Students see both teachers in each classroom as their teachers as opposed to one being a special educator pushing in simply to provide support. This has

[4] Accountability percentiles indicate how a school is performing overall compared with other schools. A school's percentile is calculated by combining information related to achievement, growth, English learner progress, chronic absenteeism, high school completion, and advanced coursework completion. Schools with higher percentiles are generally higher performing, and schools with lower percentiles are generally lower performing. Districts do not receive an accountability percentile.

also allowed students to build strong relationships with another adult at the school, creating more opportunities for connection and allowing teachers to know students better and plan around their needs in a more deeply informed way. One teacher explains that “co-teaching has been a success for my colleagues and me because we share a commitment to high-quality instruction for all students, are open to both giving and receiving feedback, and we have a mutual respect for one another. It has allowed us to differentiate more intentionally, respond to students’ needs more quickly, and meaningfully engage all learners in the classroom.” Teachers state that this responsive differentiation allows them to target support “without lowering expectations.”

As one teacher notes, “Co-teaching has deepened my belief that learning is strongest when it’s built on connection, teamwork, and a shared commitment to every child’s growth.”

While co-teaching has had a positive impact on both students and educators at Salisbury Elementary, the work continues. Now the staff have a deeper understanding of the data, evidence the model works, and years of practice to make it impactful. Teachers at the school note that in adopting a co-teaching model, certain conditions need to be in place to be successful: there needs to be buy-in and support from school leadership, explicit expectations about what co-teaching is and will look like, allowance for teachers to participate at a comfortable pace, and a formal structure for protected co-planning time, which teachers assert, “has been the backbone of our success”. For Principal Michael Astuccio, the school’s success can be credited directly to “the awesome work of our teachers, instructional staff, and students!”

Since beginning my co-teaching partnerships three years ago, I have seen that the most meaningful impact comes from the relationships we are able to build with students. Having two teachers in the classroom creates more opportunities to truly know our students: to listen, observe closely, and meet them exactly where they are academically and emotionally. With two perspectives and shared responsibility, we’re able to notice small successes, respond quickly to challenges, and provide more individualized support.

- *Salisbury Elementary School Teacher*