School spotlight:

Stevenson Elementary School

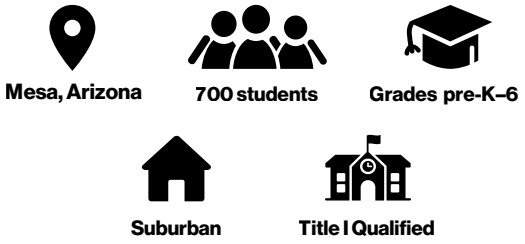
Fall 2025

Introduction

Stevenson Elementary School is a Title I school located in Mesa, Ariz., that takes a dynamic approach to serving about 700 students in pre-K through 6th grade.

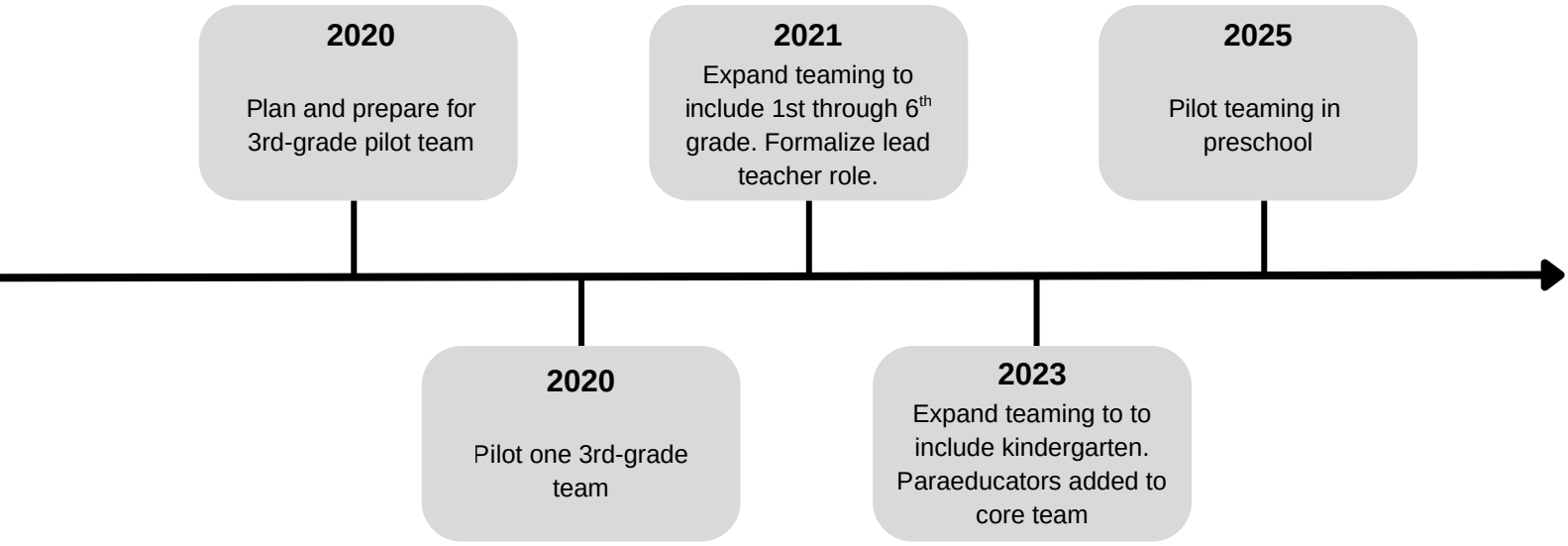
The school's Next Education Workforce™ model wraps teams of educators around students in grades K–6, with the goal of providing deeper and personalized learning. Each core educator team includes certified teachers with expertise in a specific content area (e.g., English Language Arts, math, science, social studies), one of whom serves as the lead teacher for the team. Extended team members join core educator teams: special education teachers, English Language Development itinerant teachers, special areas teachers, specialized paraeducators and community educators.

Find out how they're implementing a Next Education Workforce model.



Teaming vision:

Foster a dynamic community of empowered individuals where collaboration, innovation and passion ignite success for all students to graduate ready to make a positive impact on the world.



Core Team

Stevenson organizes student rosters into grade-level “houses”. Houses are supported by a core team of three or four certified educators. Within each team, educators distribute expertise by content area, specializing in English Language Arts, math, and innovation, an inquiry-based class rooted in science and social studies standards. One of the certified educators serves as the lead teacher for the team.

Additionally, each house includes at least one paraeducator who works alongside the core team throughout the day to support student learning. Paraeducators engage fully in planning and data sessions, collaborating with the core team to coordinate instructional strategies, address student needs and ensure a cohesive learning experience.

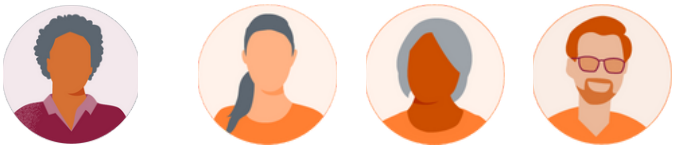
ASU teacher candidates

Senior-year students engaged in practice-embedded experience, teacher collaboration and family engagement

Sometimes, houses include an additional team member — a teacher candidate from a local institute of higher education, including from Arizona State University’s Mary Lou Fulton College for Teaching and Learning Innovation. During their time with the team, teacher candidates serve as full-fledged members of the core educator team.

The lead teacher not only teaches students, but also guides the team in sharing responsibility for all aspects of instructional planning and delivery — such as lesson design, instruction and data analysis. They maintain high expectations for student learning aligned to Mesa’s Portrait of a Graduate and ensure the team functions at a high level to serve all learners by both strength and need. The lead teacher creates space for team members’ ideas and innovations to improve student learning; co-plans, co-teaches, models, coaches and provides feedback; and is fully accountable for the learning and growth of all students taught collectively by the team.

Core educator team

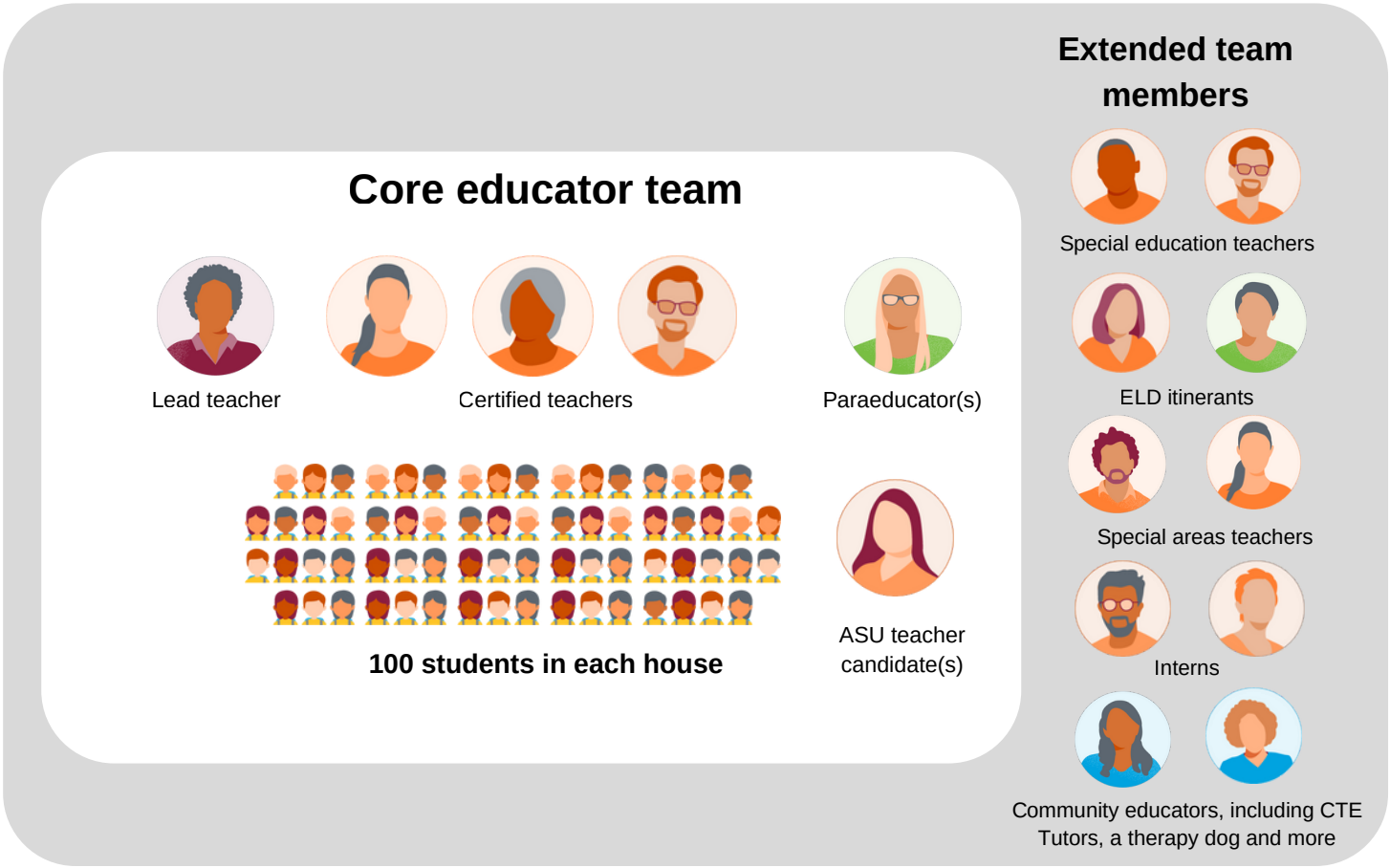


Lead teacher | Certified teachers

Paraeducator(s)

100 students in each house

ASU teacher candidate(s)



Extended team members

Driven by the belief that every adult on campus is an asset to the team, Principal Kelsey Christofferson took a bold approach, completely rethinking the master schedule and moving beyond traditional role definitions to create more opportunities for extended team members to contribute. By intentionally placing staff where their strengths could have the greatest impact, she unlocked new ways to deliver targeted, consistent support for student learning.

Extended team members include, but are not limited to:

Special education teachers: Three special education teachers (one of whom serves as the lead special educator) co-plan with core educator teams and provide both push-in and pull-out services as part of an inclusion model. Although special education teachers typically span support across multiple houses, they still regularly engage in house co-planning and data analysis meetings and regularly facilitate early intervention meetings.

Additional specialized paraeducators: Two full-time special education paraeducators move fluidly across all houses and grade levels to conduct small-group reading interventions and progress monitoring.

English Language Development itinerant teachers: Two full-time educators support English language learners across all houses, providing both push-in and pull-out instruction to ensure students receive their targeted ELD support.

Special areas teachers: Special areas teachers work across houses (and in some cases across multiple schools) to provide instruction in art, music, band/orchestra, media center and physical education. At times, special areas teachers support students in the learning space, acting as part of the extended team during intervention and family meetings.

Community educators: Educator teams incorporate community educators into the learning space to support students in a variety of ways. For example, juniors and seniors from the local feeder high school who are enrolled in "Future Educators," a CTE elective course, receive instruction at the high school on specific instructional strategies and then apply that knowledge by working with small groups during intervention at Stevenson twice a week. Additionally, community educators such as industry experts are brought in to enrich interdisciplinary units. For instance, the editor of Arizona Highways magazine engaged with students as part of a unit on Arizona history.

Interns and Path2Teach: Several aspiring educators, taking an alternative path to certification, serve as extended team members while simultaneously pursuing their teaching degree.

Other educational leaders and specialists: Some students also work closely with other educational leaders and specialists (i.e., guidance counselors and contracted service providers) as dictated by their learning needs. Communication between these educators and the core educator team occurs regularly and is tracked by the lead teacher.

Elements of the Next Education Workforce

While there is no one-size-fits-all Next Education Workforce model, all team-based models share several common elements. Read on below to learn how Stevenson Elementary School applies one of the Elements of the Next Education Workforce: team schedules.

Team schedules

School leaders ensure school schedules are designed so that core teams share the same students at the same time. School leaders provide daily protected planning time in the school schedule for each core team and weekly protected planning time for the extended team.

Planning time

When sharing a roster of students, common instructional time and regular opportunities for core and extended team members to have common planning time are essential. To make this possible, Principal Kelsey Christofferson developed innovative ways to leverage all adults in delivering instructional minutes, creating space for teams to engage in collaborative planning. Each team uses a mix of formal and informal structures, sometimes including extended team members, depending on the purpose.

Each morning, as part of a school-wide initiative, teams huddle for 15 minutes to ensure they are aligned before students arrive. During these huddles, teams surface any adjustments to daily procedures or operations, discuss support for specific students and confirm that each educator has the materials needed for the day.

> "When we protect team planning time, trust in our instructional leaders and value the strengths of every team member, we create conditions for our school's vision to come alive — together."
>
> **— Kelsey Christofferson, Principal, Stevenson Elementary School**

Teams also have daily common planning time while their students attend a 30-minute special, sometimes strategically back-to-back to allow extended time. On most days, lead teachers — working in collaboration with their team — determine how best to use this time. At least once a week, this period is reserved for a formal PLC meeting, supported by a member of the leadership team.

On Wednesday afternoons, following early dismissal, Stevenson's teams have two hours to co-plan, analyze data and adjust student groupings. Agendas for this time are typically set by the lead teacher in collaboration with core team members and, when appropriate, extended team members.

Deeper and personalized learning

Stevenson Elementary School educators deepen and personalize student learning in a number of ways, a selection of which is described below.

> When learning is personalized and rooted in authentic tasks, it becomes meaningful, engaging and essential for every student's growth, helping them develop the skills and confidence to thrive beyond the classroom.
>
> **— Kelsey Christofferson, Principal, Stevenson Elementary School**

Interdisciplinary approaches
Stevenson takes an interdisciplinary approach to unit planning that fosters deeper learning for students and ensures their learning experiences are connected over the course of the day. While science and social studies standards typically drive interdisciplinary connections, much of the science and social studies content is reinforced during literacy blocks through a workshop model, using district-adopted materials. Educators' mini-lessons align not only with reading or writing standards but also with science and social studies standards. Unit themes are further developed during math instruction, with attention given to making real-world connections between unit themes, math content and skills and students' daily lives. Then, during innovation time, students synthesize their learning from across the content areas as they work toward the creation of an authentic task

Additionally, students' learning needs drive regular changes in their individualized schedules. Content area class (reading, writing, math and innovation) rosters typically change on a quarterly basis, and intervention groups change frequently, based on regular progress monitoring.

Specializations and advancement pathways
Each of Stevenson's educator teams is led by a lead teacher who is an experienced educational leader. Mesa Public Schools formalized a lead teacher role during the 2022–23 school year. This role is intended to help keep the most effective educators directly supporting learners while also offering a pathway for advancement. Lead teachers receive a supplemental stipend.

Stevenson typically supports teacher candidates each year. During their time at Stevenson, teacher candidates are considered full-fledged members of core educator teams, and their responsibilities increase and differentiate as they grow and develop. Importantly, teacher candidates benefit from co-planning with, co-teaching with and receiving feedback from all members of their educator teams, not just their university-affiliated mentor teacher and lead teacher.