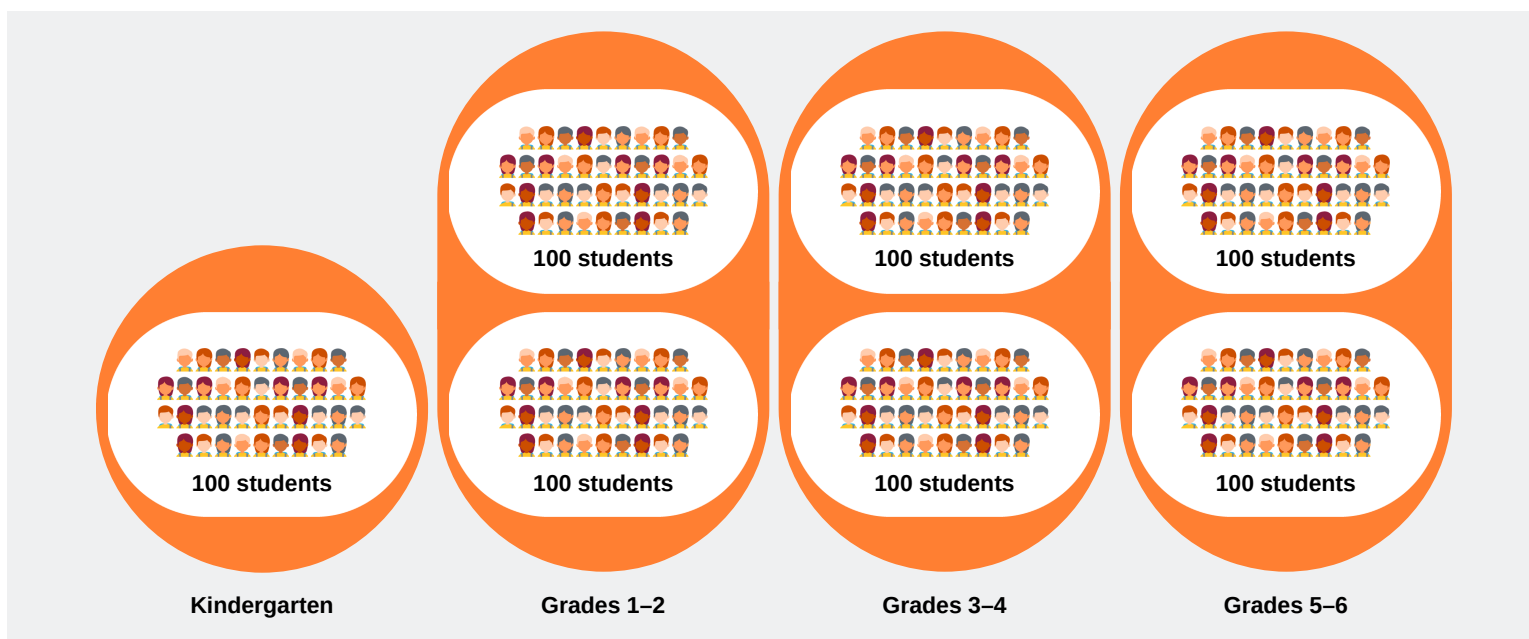# Stevenson Elementary: School profile

Stevenson Elementary School is a Title I school located in Mesa, Arizona 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. Core educator teams are joined by special education teachers, a reading interventionist, special area teachers, specialized paraeducators and community educators. Find out how they're implementing a Next Education Workforce model.

Introduction

As a Mesa Public Schools elementary school, Stevenson is committed to ensuring, "Every student is known by name, served by strength and need, and graduates ready for college, career and community" (Mesa Public Schools, 2022). The educators and leadership at Stevenson Elementary School see team-based models as one way to deliver on that promise. The school piloted a Next Education Workforce model in the 2020–21 academic year with their 3rd-grade team. Students engaged at deeper levels in more meaningful learning, and educators reported feeling more supported and successful. This led them to expand team-based models to Grades K–6 in the 2021–22 academic year, with all educators working on teams.

Teams of educators with distributed expertise

Stevenson Elementary School comprises seven houses, each serving approximately 100 students: one kindergarten house and six multi-grade houses: two each serving Grades 1–2, Grades 3–4 and Grades 5–6.

Kindergarten — 100 students

Grades 1–2 — 100 students, 100 students

Grades 3–4 — 100 students, 100 students

Grades 5–6 — 100 students, 100 students

Role specialization on core educator teams

Most houses are supported by a core team of at least four dedicated educators: a reading teacher, a writing teacher, a math teacher and an innovation teacher, one of whom serves as the lead teacher for that team. Often, houses include a fifth team member—a teacher candidate from a local institute of higher education (including residents from ASU's Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College). During their time with the team, teacher candidates serve as full-fledged core educator team members.

Certified teachers

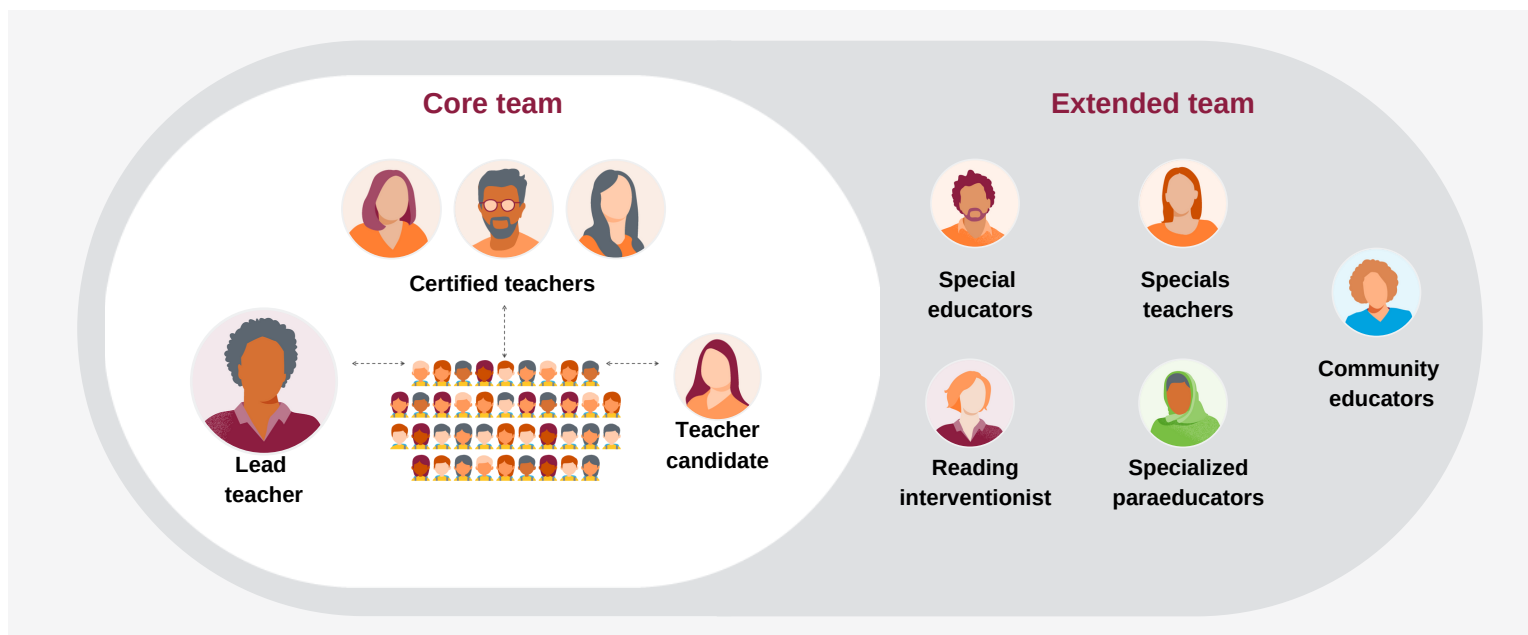**Lead teacher**

100 students

Teacher candidate
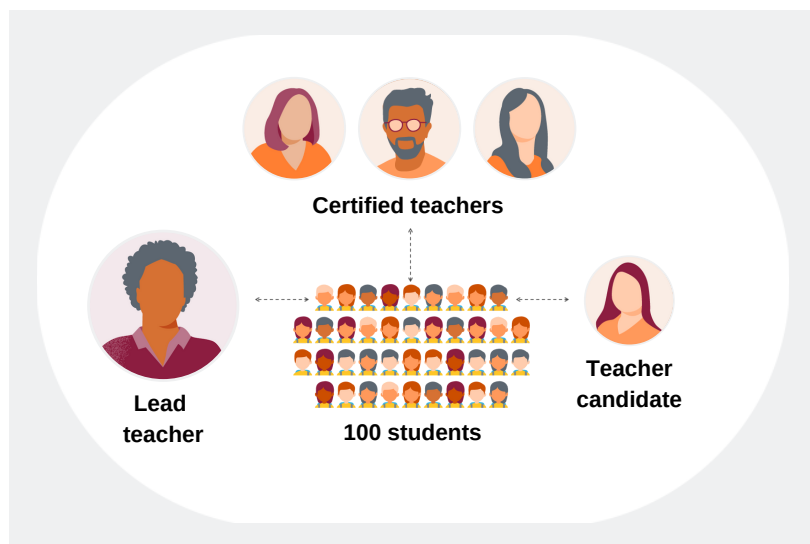
The lead teacher not only teaches students, but also guides the team to plan how they will share responsibility for all elements of instructional planning and delivery (e.g., lesson planning, instruction, data analysis). They lead the team in maintaining high expectations for student learning aligned to Mesa's Portrait of a Graduate and ensure the team functions at a high level to serve all learners by strength and need. The lead teacher makes space for sharing team members' ideas and innovations to improve student learning; co-plans, co-teaches, models, coaches, and gives feedback to their team members; and is fully accountable for the learning and growth of all students taught collectively by the members of the team.

All teachers distribute expertise by content area, with educators specializing in English Language Arts, math and innovation (an inquiry-based class rooted in science and social studies standards). Over the course of the 2022–23 academic year, teams plan to move toward distributing expertise in other ways (e.g., restorative justice coordinator, family coordinator).

Role specialization on extended educator teams

Students are supported not only by members of their core educator team, but also by members of an extended team, which includes (but not limited to):

- **Special education teachers:** Four special education teachers (one of whom serves as the lead) co-plan with core educator teams and provide both push-in and pull-out services as part of an inclusion model. Special education teachers typically partner with all houses in a given grade-band (i.e., kindergarten, Grades 1–2, Grades 3–4, Grades 5–6); however, this is the guideline, not the rule: the team retains some flexibility to ensure they can best support differentials

Core team

Extended team

Certified teachers

Lead teacher

Teacher candidate

Special educators

Specials teachers

Community educators

Reading interventionist

Specialized paraeducators

between grade-band caseloads and match educator expertise with student need. Although special education teachers typically span support across multiple houses, they prioritize engaging in house co-planning and data analysis meetings and regularly facilitate early intervention meetings for the teams with which they partner.

- **Specialized paraeducators:** Seven full-time specialized paraeducators move fluidly across all houses and grade levels to conduct small-group reading interventions and progress monitoring.
- **Reading interventionist:** The school's reading interventionist both supports students across Grades K–6 and manages the team of specialized paraeducators. She plans the paraeducators' professional learning, observes their instructional practice, and gives feedback. She analyzes progress monitoring data and works closely with lead teachers across all seven houses to deploy paraeducators where they are most needed.
- **Special area teachers:** Special area teachers work across houses (and in some cases across multiple schools) to provide instruction in art, music, band/orchestra, media center and physical education.
- **Community educators:** Teams often incorporate industry experts into interdisciplinary units. For example, the editor of Arizona Highways magazine recently engaged with students as part of an interdisciplinary unit on Arizona history.
- **Other educational leaders and specialists:** Some students also work closely with other educational leaders and specialists (e.g., guidance counselors, a part-time dean, contracted service providers) as dictated by their learning and social-emotional needs. Communication between these educators and the core educator team occurs regularly and is tracked by the lead teacher.

Self-improving teams

Each Wednesday afternoon, following early dismissal, Stevenson's teams have two hours to co-plan, analyze data, adjust student groupings, and trouble-shoot procedures and operations. Agendas for this time are typically set by each team's lead teacher in collaboration with core educator team members and, when appropriate, extended educator team members. "Protecting time for teams to meet and trusting them to operate autonomously is a critical piece of the puzzle for whole-school team-based models," school leader Krista Adams says.

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.

Sustaining relationships

In growing to a whole-school team-based model, educators and leaders at Stevenson were eager to find ways to promote long-term relationships among students and the adults who support them. Multi-age bands seemed like the natural solution. Beginning in fall 2022, following kindergarten, all students enter a multi-age house where they remain for two years (Grades 1–2) before being promoted to the next house (Grades 3–4) for two years, and so on.

Interdisciplinary units through a workshop model

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 introduced during literacy blocks through a workshop model. 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 creation of an authentic assessment. Assessments are deeply connected to unit themes, driven by student interest, and presented to authentic audiences. "This model fosters a love of learning and a love of literacy," Adams says. "Students are deeply invested and connected to the issues they are exploring and have a strong sense of ownership over the work they produce."

Flexible schedules

"At Stevenson, scheduling is flexible and fluid," Adams explains. "It's based on students' learning goals and educator expertise." Importantly, although Stevenson has a daily schedule, that schedule merely serves as the starting point for educator teams as they plan learning experiences. Within a given house, educators often extend class periods or pull several large groups of students together for "all hands on deck" work time, presentations and special events.

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 more 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 will be piloting a more formalized 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 stipend on top of their salary.

Stevenson typically supports up to seven 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.