

# School spotlight:

## Kyrene de las Manitas Innovation Academy

Fall 2022



Tempe, Arizona



400 students  
grades K-7



Each student is a member of a  
learning studio



Studios are supported by core teams of up to six educators:  
one teacher executive designer, two team teachers and  
three teacher candidates



Special education teachers, special area teachers,  
specialized paraeducators, academic interventionists and  
community educators join the core educator team

### Introduction

Kyrene de las Manitas Innovation Academy is committed to engaging students in a dynamic learning environment that promotes academic excellence and prepares them to be innovators and leaders of tomorrow. They deploy educators in non-traditional ways by creating new roles and staffing structures in an effort to attract and retain high-quality staff and to reinvigorate the teaching profession.

The school first piloted a team-based approach in the fall of 2019, with a single educator team serving a multi-age band of about 75 third- and fourth-grade students. In response to strong interest from families, they grew the program each subsequent year, expanding to serve fifth-grade students in the fall of 2020 and establishing two learning studios, serving about 200 students in Grades 3-6 in the fall of 2021. In the fall of 2022, they adopted a whole-school Next Education Workforce model. The school will expand to K-8 in 2023-24.

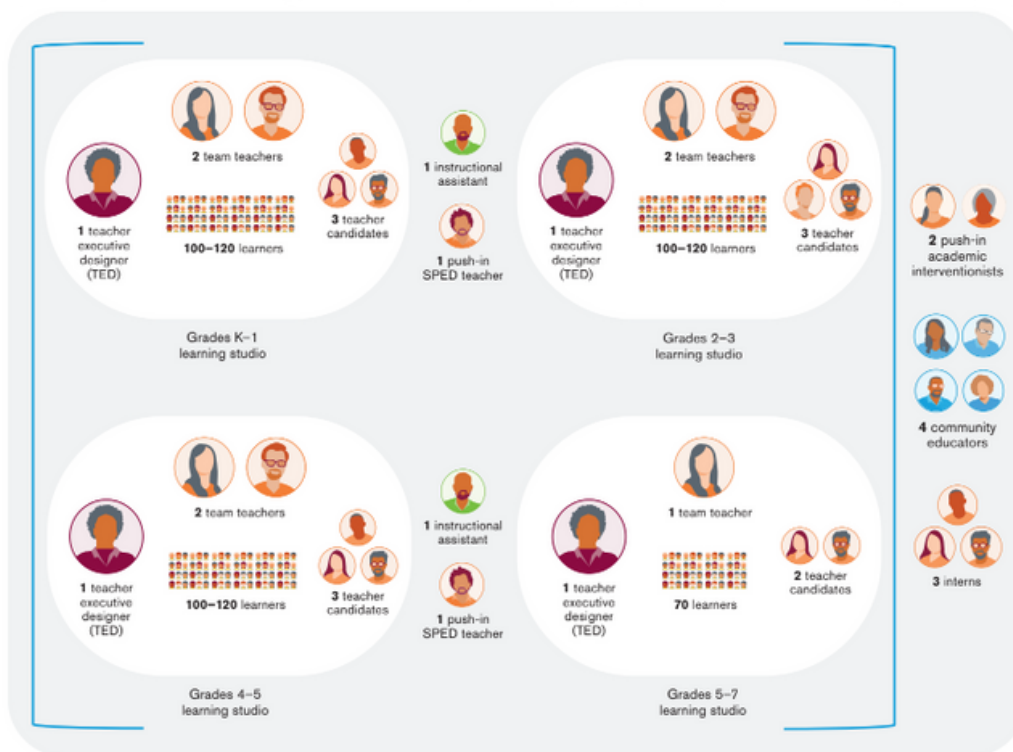
Read on to find out how they're implementing a Next Education Workforce model.

### Teams of educators with distributed expertise

Kyrene de las Manitas Innovation Academy comprises four multi-grade learning studios, each serving 70-120 students.

#### Role specialization on core educator teams

The three largest learning studios are supported by a core team of at least six dedicated educators: a teacher executive designer, two team teachers and three MLFTC residents – senior-year students engaged in the practice-embedded experience, teacher collaboration and family engagement. The smaller learning studio is supported by a teacher executive designer, one team teacher and two MLFTC residents.



Kyrene School District created the role of teacher executive designer (TED), which includes an additional stipend with the goal of retaining highly effective educators and building advancement pathways that keep educators working directly with students. TEDs are dedicated, full-time members of a single learning studio and work with all students and educators within that studio. They are highly experienced teachers who set high expectations of achievement for all students taught by the team; set direction for the team; and lead educator team members in high-quality unit and lesson design. TEDs lead their teams to establish a culture of respect, enthusiasm and rapport with students and families while holding students accountable for high expectations of behavior and engagement. They model instructional practices and coach educator team members.



**Educators are able to pick right back up with students at the start of the year. They already have deep knowledge of their individual students and relationships with students' families."**

**— Sarah Collins, school leader**

While all educators on the core team teach all core subjects, most teams designate lead planners for math, English language arts and innovation (STEM) based on individual educators' expertise. Toward the beginning of the school year, the TED and team teachers typically assume these leadership roles, while MLFTC residents play a more supportive role in planning. As the year progresses, residents typically assume more responsibility for planning leadership.

### 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 may not be limited to):

- **Special education teachers:** Two special education teachers co-plan with educators and provide push-in services as part of an inclusion model. Typically, one special educator partners with Grades K-1 and Grades 2-3 learning studios while the other partners with Grades 4-5 and Grades 5-7 learning studios; however, the teams retain flexibility to ensure they can best meet the needs of individual students.
- **Special area teachers:** Three special area educators and one special area paraeducator work across all learning studios to provide instruction in art, music, library and physical education.
- **Academic interventionists:** Two academic interventionists co-plan with educators and provide intervention services that are responsive to student learning data.
- **Specialized paraeducators:** 12 instructional assistants support educators and students across the four learning studios, each specializing in academic interventions or behavioral supports.
- **Community educators:** Teams often incorporate industry experts into their units. For example, during a unit on sustainability, Tempe's Chief Sustainability Officer met with students to discuss his current projects.

### **Self-improving teams**

Core educator teams have shared planning and meeting time each day: For 50 minutes during special area classes Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday and for up to two hours after early dismissal on most Wednesdays. During these times, teams analyze student learning data as part of their studio-based professional learning community, adjust student groupings and co-plan units and lessons. School leader Sarah Collins says that this has led not only to collective efficacy but also to increased connectedness among educators.

## **Deeper and personalized learning**

Kyrene de las Manitas educators deepen and personalize student learning in a number of ways, including:

### **Flexible space and scheduling in support of project-based learning**

While learning studios follow a bell schedule, educators regularly adjust the schedule to allow for extended project-based learning time, and both students and educators move fluidly through the open spaces of studios in order to ensure the learning needs of students – not the bell schedule – drive how time and resources are used. For example:

- K–1 learning studio educators may collapse their afternoon Math and Innovation/STEM time to ensure students have more time to dedicate to a multidisciplinary math-science project.
- The Grades 2–3 learning studio may gather together for a culminating activity or to present end-of-unit projects.
- All students from the Grades 5–7 learning studio may gather together in the same space during English Language Arts to engage in a Zoom interview with an author.

### **Supporting student outcomes through flexible grouping**

Math and ELA class rosters change based on formative student learning data, and teams make smaller shifts in student groupings on a weekly basis as determined by ongoing progress monitoring and students' social-emotional needs. Wednesdays are devoted entirely to re-teaching and enrichment in math and ELA, with students engaging in instruction targeted to their specific learning needs and interests in small groups, large groups and through engagement with i-Ready's adaptive personalized learning software.

### **Choice labs**

Each quarter, students select two choice labs with which they will engage each Wednesday. Choice lab offerings are collaborations between core and extended team members that offer students an opportunity to further explore their interests. Example choice lab offerings include book clubs, coding, passion projects, drawing studies and drum circle.

### **Sustaining relationships**

Multi-age bands promote long-term relationships among students and members of the educator team, as students learn with the same peers and educators for at least two consecutive years. "Educators are able to pick right back up with students at the start of the year," said school leader Sarah Collins. "They already have deep knowledge of their individual students and relationships with students' families."

Furthermore, educator teams prioritize making meaningful, sustained connections with students' families through family-teacher teams meetings and student-led conferences. Family-teacher teams meetings are adults-only events where families come together with educator teams to explore and interpret student learning data from previous months; work with educator teams to build their own understanding of content and skills students have been struggling with; develop familiarity with upcoming curriculum and learn from the school's counselor about topics like self-awareness and emotional regulation. Student-led conferences occur in spring and are events for families, students and educator teams where students showcase their learning and growth to family members. With the move to student-led conferences, Innovation Academy educators experienced an increased sense of partnership with both students and families.

## **Specializations and advancement pathways**

### **Continuum of educator roles**

Each learning studio intentionally includes educators who work together and are better able to meet the needs of all students. Roles vary based on student needs, but the team includes a combination of educational leaders (i.e., TEDs), professional educators (i.e., team teachers), teachers who are on the pathway to becoming professional educators (i.e., MLFTC residents), paraeducators and community educators. Looking ahead, teams intend to incorporate community educators more deeply into choice labs, thereby offering an opportunity for students to access meaningful relationships that might help them to further their goals.

### **Personalized professional learning**

TEDs meet weekly with the school leader to share updates, elevate feedback and questions from team members and discuss professional learning needs. In the coming months, the group plans to dedicate a portion of meeting time to the development of professional learning tailored to the specific needs of both individual educators and learning studio teams.