



A study reveals how one model of team-based teaching and professional autonomy is reducing teacher turnover.

The Teaching Model That's Keeping Educators in Schools

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Recently, we embarked on a study of a new innovative alternative to the conventional classroom model where, traditionally, one educator teaches many students in their own classroom. Our alternative model, called the Next Education Workforce (NEW) initiative, was designed at Arizona State University and first implemented in 2018 in partnership with the surrounding school districts. It has since

spread to over 150 schools in a half-dozen school districts in Arizona, California, and other states.

Instead of isolating individual teachers with large numbers of students in separate classrooms, the NEW model brings together integrated teams of teaching staff. These teams share a roster of students, share multiple learning spaces, and collaboratively plan instruction, with each team member taking on different roles and responsibilities. In theory, NEW teams can better shape their teaching to meet the needs of students and hence enhance



student engagement and learning. As professors and education researchers, we were interested in investigating the efficacy of this innovative and promising model.

An Outdated Model

The conventional classroom model—one teacher, one classroom, and 25–35 students—has been the norm for schooling for over a century. Historians have documented how this model emerged with the creation of the taxpayer-funded public school system, which aimed to provide universal, uniform education to a mass of “customers” at minimal cost. Mirroring industrial production methods like Henry Ford’s assembly line, this “egg crate” model replaced one-room schoolhouses with rows of identical classrooms under one roof, moving students through in age-graded batches—a structure that remains largely unchanged.

Despite its ubiquity, the conventional classroom model is one of the most controversial and criticized aspects of schooling. Education researchers, practitioners, and reformers have long argued that it is ill-fitted for the needs of teachers and learners.

Education theory holds that student learning is optimized when teachers tailor instruction to individual needs, often called student-centered teaching. But student-centered education is nearly impossible in the conventional classroom, where teachers juggle large numbers of student-clients, compared with most other human-services occupations. In our analyses of national data from the U.S. Department of Education, we have found that in a typical secondary school, the average teacher serves 125–150 individual students per day.

Moreover, students arrive at school with diverse backgrounds, needs, and abilities. Yet schools and teachers are tasked with educating all students,

regardless of their level of preparation, motivation, or engagement. At the same time, educators must balance multiple, often competing, goals for these students: Building literacy skills (reading, math, writing, speaking), encouraging academic excellence, developing occupational or vocational skills, ensuring personal social-emotional growth, enhancing social justice and multicultural awareness, and many more. Addressing these goals is a daunting task for any teacher—and the conventional classroom design means this work is done largely on one’s own, in isolation from colleagues.

Not surprisingly, teachers often find it difficult to meet students’ needs in the conventional classroom model, leading to teacher dissatisfaction, burnout, and high turnover. And, not surprisingly, this model has long been the target of reform.

Upgraded Design Components

The Next Education Workforce (NEW) initiative offers an alternative to the conventional classroom. The NEW Team model is comprised of eight key elements: (1) teachers share a roster of students, (2) teachers share multiple learning

spaces and move across these spaces throughout the day, (3) teachers have and use team planning time, (4) team members have different roles and responsibilities, (5) teachers adjust their schedule according to the needs of both teachers and students, (6) teachers group and regroup their students based on students' needs and interests, (7) teachers use data to tailor learning to each student, and (8) teachers provide each student with rigorous learning opportunities. The objective is to make deeper, personalized, student-centered teaching and learning possible and sustainable. Ultimately, the goal is to improve student motivation and learning, as well as the performance, job satisfaction, and retention of teachers.

The NEW model represents a unique integrated package of several long-standing school design components, notably partnerships between higher education and school systems; team teaching; and differentiated staffing and teacher autonomy and “voice” regarding instructional decisions. In theory, the NEW model is not amenable to a top-down implemented, one-size-fits-all approach. The NEW model holds that for teachers to be able to address their students' needs, teams must have professional-like discretion regarding instruction and the design of their particular teaching environment.¹

Does the NEW Model Deliver?

The objective of our study was to assess whether the NEW model lives up to its goal of improved teacher retention. In the realm of educational policy and reform, there has been a growing recognition that many school systems suffer from high levels of teacher turnover, and that teacher retention and turnover are key metrics for assessing the effectiveness of policies, practices, and approaches like the NEW model. For instance, in our own research we have long documented that teacher turnover is a leading factor behind teacher shortages, including for math and science teachers and teachers of color (Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll, May, & Collins, 2019).

In our study, we focused on answering three questions:

1. Do members of NEW teams actually practice the key elements of the NEW model?
2. Do members of NEW teams have higher levels of professional autonomy compared to teachers not on NEW teams?
3. Do members of NEW teams have better retention than teachers not on NEW teams?

Teachers often find it difficult to meet students' needs in the conventional classroom model.

To answer these questions, we undertook statistical analyses of a survey conducted in spring 2022–23 by ASU of about 2000 teachers in the Mesa Unified School District. We combined those with school district administrative records, including data on teachers who left their school or the district by the following school year (Ingersoll, Audrain, & Laski, 2025). Below, we summarize the results of our analysis into these three important questions.

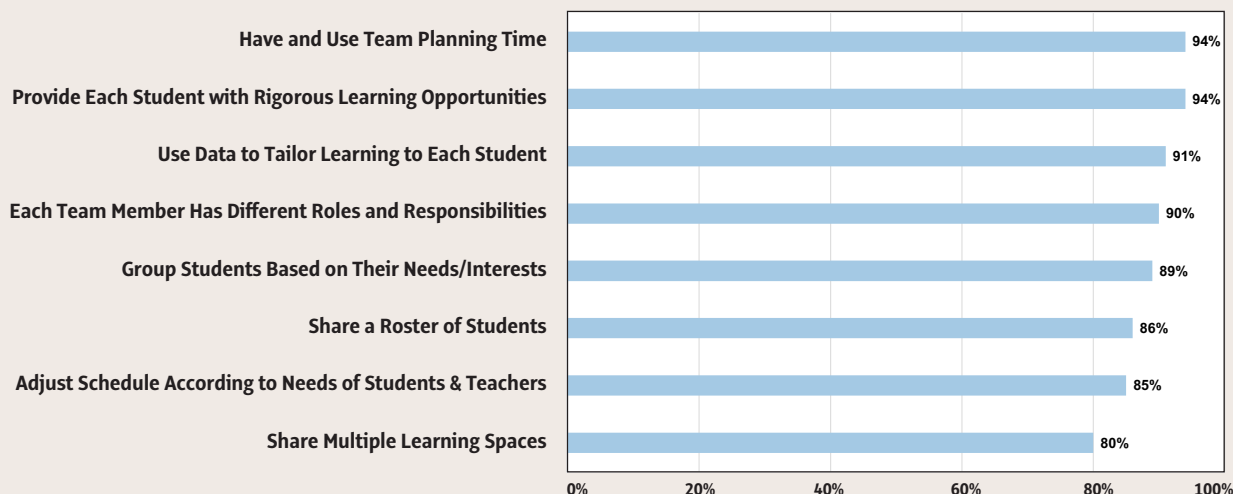
1 Do teachers on NEW teams actually practice the NEW model?

An important factor in evaluating whether any particular educational reform is successful is to first establish the extent to which it is actually implemented. The history of educational reform is littered with well-intended initiatives that are never fully or adequately carried out. Hence, a key first question is whether teachers on NEW teams undertake, in practice, what the NEW model proposes.

To answer this, we examined the items in the teacher survey that asked team teachers if they and their team's members practice the eight key elements of the NEW model of teaching listed above.

Strikingly, with some slight variations, our

FIGURE 1. Percent Teachers on NEW Teams Reporting Their Team Practices 8 Key Elements of the NEW Model



Source: Ingersoll, R., Audrain, L., & Laski, M. (2025). *Team-based staffing, teacher autonomy and teacher turnover*. [Research report]. Center on Reinventing Public Education, Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University.

data showed that the overwhelming majority of teachers on NEW teams report that they and their team do indeed implement key elements of the new model (see fig. 1). Of course, the data do not prove that those on NEW teams actually implement the model—the data tell us what team members believe to be the case. But, interestingly, we found that there were not large differences across types of teachers and types of schools in the degree to which team members report they and their team practice the key elements of the NEW model. For instance, there was little difference between high- and low-poverty schools in team members' reported practices. This suggests that NEW teams are indeed adhering to the NEW model and seeking to engage in personalized, student-centered teaching practices.

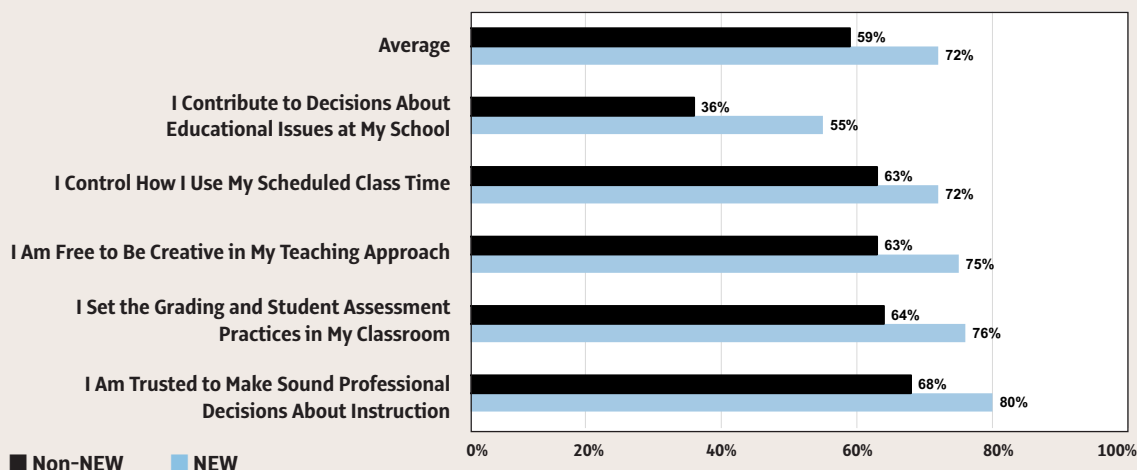
2 Do members of NEW teams have higher levels of professional autonomy compared to teachers not on teams?

To answer our second question, we examined a set of items in the teacher survey that asked teachers about their level of agreement with statements about having professional autonomy

in regard to five different areas of educational decision-making. Figure 2 displays the percentages for each statement of team members and non-team members who responded with “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” (on a six-point scale from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree”).

The data in Figure 2 seem to show that very high percentages of NEW teachers (55 to 80 percent) have substantial autonomy in the five areas of educational decision-making. However, it is important to note that when we solely focus on those who “strongly agree,” the percentages drop dramatically. While NEW teachers are more likely than non-NEW teachers to agree that they have substantial autonomy across the five specific areas measured, far fewer teachers—less than half overall—strongly agree that they have substantial autonomy in these areas. So, the data show there are large variations in teachers' levels of professional autonomy—and these variations seem to make a difference for NEW team members' practices: We found that team members who reported higher levels of autonomy are also more likely to report that they practice each of the eight key elements of the NEW model. Thus, the data indicate there

FIGURE 2. Percent Teachers on NEW Teams and Not on NEW Teams Who “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” with Statements About Teacher Autonomy



Source: Ingersoll, R., Audrain, L., & Laski, M. (2025). *Team-based staffing, teacher autonomy and teacher turnover*. [Research report]. Center on Reinventing Public Education, Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University.

is a strong affinity between the NEW model and enhanced teacher autonomy.

3 Do members of NEW teams have better retention than teachers not on NEW teams?

Our last question involves the relative turnover or retention of team and non-team members. Are NEW team members more or less likely to depart from their school or to leave the school district entirely? Moreover, given the large differences in professional autonomy among teachers, we were interested to see if any relationship between team membership and teacher turnover is influenced by, or dependent upon, the degree of professional autonomy held by those teachers. To address these questions, we conducted advanced statistical analyses of the data to examine whether being on a NEW team and professional autonomy are associated with a teacher’s likelihood of departing, after controlling for background teacher characteristics (experience, gender, race-ethnicity, and performance evaluation score) and school characteristics (school size, poverty-level, and school grade level).

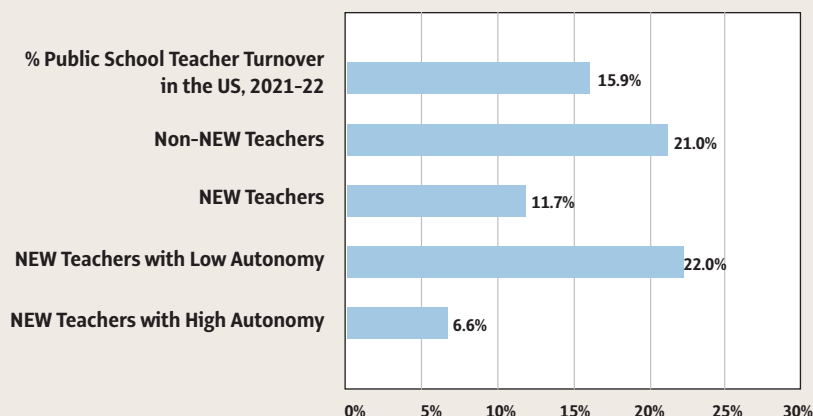
We found that, after controlling for other

Teachers on NEW Teams with higher levels of autonomy have remarkably lower turnover.

factors, NEW team members are indeed less likely to depart from their schools or districts. Similarly, we found that teachers with more professional autonomy are far less likely to depart. Finally, our analyses found a strong positive synergy—a win-win relationship—between NEW team membership and teacher professional autonomy. Teachers with both NEW team membership and higher levels of autonomy have dramatically lower turnover than teachers with only one or the other.

Figure 3 illustrates these differences in turnover associated with team membership and teachers’ professional autonomy, after controlling for background factors. The turnover of NEW team members was 11.7 percent, while for non-team members it was 21 percent. And again, the teachers’ level of autonomy makes a large difference. Among NEW team members who reported a higher level of autonomy (at the 75th percentile), turnover rates were only

FIGURE 3. Turnover of Teachers, for NEW and Non-NEW Teachers, and Level of Teacher Autonomy



Source: Ingersoll, R., Audrain, L., & Laski, M. (2025). *Team-based staffing, teacher autonomy and teacher turnover*. [Research report]. Center on Reinventing Public Education, Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University.

6.6 percent versus 22 percent for members with lower autonomy (at the 25th percentile). In addition, in order to benchmark teachers in Mesa Public Schools against the nation, we also display the most recent (2020–21) national annual rate of teacher turnover in public schools (from the U.S. Department of Education). The data show that non-NEW teachers in Mesa departed at rates higher than the nation’s average, while NEW teachers departed at lower rates than the average, and at far lower rates for those with higher levels of professional autonomy.

The Future of Team Teaching

This Next Education Workforce initiative is an interesting and innovative alternative to the conventional classroom model. Our findings suggest that teachers on NEW teams do seek to implement the NEW model, that an essential component of the model is the degree to which teachers are able to wield a professional-like autonomy in their classrooms and school, that the NEW model improves the retention of teachers, and finally, that the latter is especially true for those NEW team members who have enhanced autonomy.

Our finding of an affinity between the NEW model and teacher professional autonomy is

noteworthy. Autonomy and decision-making power are hallmarks of traditional professions, and education reformers aiming to elevate the status of K–12 teaching often prioritize increasing teacher autonomy. There has been a long history of reform models devoted to granting teachers an important role in leadership and decision-making within schools, including school-based management, teacher empowerment, site-based decision-making, distributed leadership, and teacher leadership. Perhaps the most pronounced example of teacher professionalization and enhanced influence is the small, but growing, number of “teacher-led” schools—schools that are collectively designed and led by teachers.² From this perspective, to improve the quality of teachers and teaching, it is essential to improve the quality of the profession. **E**

¹For more on the NEW model, see recent publications (Basile, Maddin, & Audrain, 2023; Maddin et al., 2025), a Virtual Site Visit of teams in action (<https://virtualsitevisit.education.asu.edu/>), and an Explore Experience Video of educators implementing NEW team-based staffing models (<https://workforce.education.asu.edu/events/category/explore/explore-experience/>).

²For information on teacher-led schools see <https://www.teacherpowered.org/>.

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