

29 November 2012

Esteemed Colleagues of the TUSD Governing Board:

The Pima County Food Alliance is a grassroots organization that works to improve our community’s health and economy by supporting farms, healthy food, and positive changes in local food policy. As an alliance, we have dozens of organizations, farms, and other institutions involved in our work. Just a few examples are Pima Community College, the Community Food Bank, ReZoNation Farm, Bean Tree Farm, BAJA Sustainable Arizona, and various colleges and departments at the University of Arizona.

One of our goals centers around Farm-to-School—teaching kids where food comes from, how to grow it, how to eat healthily, how to turn food waste into compost, etc. In the next year or two, a small handful of schools will begin incorporating their garden food into the meals at the school cafeteria level, an achievement that puts TUSD and southern Arizona on the map nationally when it comes to Farm-to-School. Because of the significant accomplishments of the reconciliation ecology program, **Manzo Elementary** is one of these schools. In fact, in the desert Southwest, they are leading the charge nationally on TUSD’s behalf when it comes to looking at our children’s health holistically.

To give an example: I was recently at the school to learn about their composting system, run entirely by students who give up their recess and after-lunch breaks to make the program work, when I noticed a student engaging with the school counselor. “Mr. Thompson,” he said, “Can I go dig now?” “How long did you go in the classroom?” Mr. Thompson responded. “20 minutes,” said the boy. “Ok, well let’s go for 30 next time. Now go dig!”

Seeing my look of confusion, the counselor explained to me, “This student has a severe case of AD/HD. His meds haven’t been effective, and so we’ve made an arrangement with his parents and the teacher—for every 20-30 minutes of dedicated class-time, he gets 5 minutes in the garden. This helps manage his symptoms.”

This is one small example of the innovation and hard work happening at this school. Along with the sheer number of student-, teacher- and parent-hours sunk into developing this space—the greenhouse, the chicken coop, the desert tortoise habitat, the vegetable garden, etc.—all of this combined makes moving the school unviable, and closing it, a tragedy.

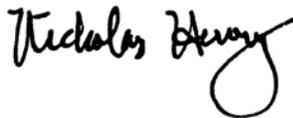
While we sincerely sympathize with the difficult decisions facing TUSD’s governing board, and we don’t want ANY schools to have to close, we felt particularly called to speak in this case. We hope the board will take this into consideration in making its decision, as it significantly affects both Manzo and the Farm-to-School plans we have laid out for the next few years. Thank you,

Members of the Leadership Council of the Pima County Food Alliance:

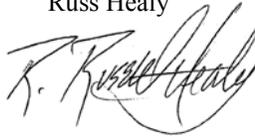
Barbara Rose

  
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Russ Healy



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