



Southern Arizona Leadership Council

March 10, 2021

To Whom It May Concern:

The Southern Arizona Leadership Council (SALC) is heartened by the positive developments in the COVID-19 pandemic including decreasing cases and mortality, increasing numbers of vaccinated citizens, and schools transitioning back to an in-person learning format. It is now more important than ever to support and engage students and to provide the resources they need to succeed. Higher Ground's work through its effective Community Schools initiative – Restart SMART – does just that by empowering both students and the surrounding community, and by using the school as a hub of youth and family stabilization.

Higher Ground's model represents a shift from the overburdening of school personnel to a system of partnerships, mapping for students, families, and the school community to effectively assist where needed and allows teachers to concentrate on education. Higher Ground's evidence-based outcomes show this system can improve attendance and educational attainment. Data also reveals improved public safety metrics and decreased youth-related crimes. The community school model has been tested and proven in dozens of cities and states. When it is implemented effectively, the model improves outcomes for students, families, and the surrounding community by providing a system of support, and empowerment

SALC recognizes that the underfunding of our education system over the past two decades has diminished our region and state's economic progress, negatively affected quality of life for many, and has disproportionately impacted lower socioeconomic students and families and students of color. As such, SALC enthusiastically supports the unique work of Higher Ground and the Community Schools Initiative which helps these students and their families, especially as they rebound from the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sincerely,

Shelley Watson
Vice President
Southern Arizona Leadership Council