

April 29, 2020

This letter is written in support of the Restart S.M.A.R.T. post-pandemic strategy that Higher Ground and its collaborators have proposed. As the former Mayor of Tucson, I strongly support this initiative. I am familiar with the impact of the pandemic on our community, especially those already struggling in lower socioeconomic status and those with mental health issues.

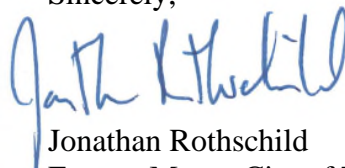
In 2013, I created the Mayor's Commission on Poverty to understand how to better serve low-income families. We found that while Tucson has a wealth of non-profits that can assist people in poverty, there was a disconnect in accessing these services. In 2015, we formed the Community School Initiative to implement the Community Schools model in several schools. This model, which transformed school campuses into resource hubs, positively impacted student attendance and access to college. My vision was to utilize this model to mitigate the opportunity gaps that poverty created across socio-economic status.

With this pandemic, the Community Schools model is more important than ever. We need to mitigate the exacerbation of the issues that those living in poverty are experiencing. Without Community Schools, my concerns about the long-term impact of the already existing gap, compounded with the trauma of the pandemic, will remain unaddressed.

I believe Higher Ground's Restart S.M.A.R.T. strategy addresses these important issues. Upon re-opening our schools, we will need to rebuild the spirit of our students. We must create safe spaces in our schools and support the mental health of our students, teachers, and families. In order to have high academic expectations, we must address the new needs of our students and their families.

The groundwork for addressing these issues must begin as early as possible. I urge educators, funders, and policy makers to take the proposed measures addressed in the Restart S.M.A.R.T. strategy seriously to ensure that resources, funding, and necessary policies be in place for implementation at re-opening.

Sincerely,



Jonathan Rothschild  
Former Mayor City of Tucson