

26 November, 2012

By email to members of the board of Tucson Unified School District



*Leaders in conservation
and education since 1949*

Dear TUSD Board Member,

Tucson Audubon Society is extremely concerned to learn of the possible closure of Manzo Elementary School, and seeks to work to prevent this possible closure.

Tucson Audubon understands that the Tucson Unified School District needs to resolve a \$17 million budget shortfall projected for the 2013–2014 school year, and also that TUSD seeks to preserve unique programs and activities.

Tucson Audubon is an independent 501(c) 3 non-profit organization. We have worked in southern Arizona since 1949 to connect people to their natural environment. We are the third largest independent Audubon chapter in the nation, and we focus on birds and other wildlife to inspire and motivate people to conserve natural resources in southern Arizona for use and enjoyment by all. We serve around 5000 members in our region.

Main Office
300 E. University Blvd., #120
Tucson AZ 85705
TEL 520.629.0510
FAX 520.623.3476

R Cynthia Pruett
President

Dr Paul Green
Executive Director
520.209.1801
pgreen@tucsonaudubon.org

Working with Manzo

During the 2012–13 academic year Manzo Elementary is partnering with Tucson Audubon. This project is funded by a \$10K grant from the Arizona Game and Fish Department Heritage Fund to work with students to create a schoolyard natural habitat. The outdoor classroom allows the students to learn about native plants, birds, insects and reptiles. It is also providing a laboratory for students to study how the different parts of natural communities interact, and students learn how to measure and record these relationships.

As a result of our work with Manzo Elementary, Tucson Audubon has become deeply impressed by the innovative and engaging ecological programs at the school and the awareness of even quite young students about how our natural world works. We consider it important to impress on you how unique and important these outcomes are.

Curriculum Integration

To Tucson Audubon, the key innovation at Manzo Elementary is that reading, math, critical thinking, and other core subjects are informed and inspired by the students' engagement in a broad range of ecologically-based activities that include composting, aquaponics, and creating gardens that produce fruits and vegetables.

Manzo Elementary's ecology program is a major step in closing the achievement gap for the underserved students in Barrio Hollywood. The level of integration of ecology with core curriculum is, in our opinion, unique and can provide inspiration to other schools.

Skills for the future

The world these young students will face as they grow will be increasingly disrupted by ecological problems that earlier generations of people have caused. Having a clear understanding of ecological principles, as shown by the Manzo students, will be critical for creating successful leaders and informed citizens of tomorrow.

This innovative flagship school serves an unmet need for elementary school ecology education in Tucson. As such it is a key asset in Tucson's future ability to reverse habitat loss, support declining wildlife species, mitigate for and adapt to climate change, and make the most of our scarce water resources. Manzo's rainwater harvesting, urban food production and wildlife programs provide a model for all schools across the arid southwest and beyond.

As a way of keeping education relevant to human needs, learning, understanding, and applying principles founded in ecology will be the most critical technology of the future. Indeed, ecology acts as an antidote to the over-reliance on man-made technologies. Educators talk a great deal about the disconnection of students from their natural world. For example, in his book *Last Child in the Woods*, Richard Louv reports that "studies of students . . . nationwide show that schools that use outdoor classrooms and other forms of experiential education produce significant student gains in social studies, science, language, arts, and math." The future of any generation that does not respect and understand the natural processes that support us will be imperiled.

Manzo and its environment

The development of Manzo's leadership, staff dynamics, neighborhood support, and fixed ecological infrastructure are critical to Manzo's continued success and momentum. The green infrastructure developed on site by the school is central to the learning process and in most cases cannot be moved. Manzo Elementary grew its program organically and funded its development independently in the midst of significant budget cuts from the district.

Manzo's programs are tailored to and anchored in the community and culture of Barrio Hollywood. This approach is an integral part of the program. We believe that moving the students to another school where there is no history of developing such an organic and enterprising program with an ecological focus would be a major loss.

Promoting the model

The Board of Directors of Tucson Audubon reiterates just how important and unique this school model is. The 500 other Audubon chapters across the nation know about and applaud this resource in Tucson.

The University of Arizona and the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, among others, also see Manzo as a ground-breaking school and are working with the school.

It is our strongly held view that Tucson should take pride in promoting, growing, and protecting this unique educational resource and model. This brilliant experiment of Manzo Elementary can inform the future direction educators will take in Tucson over the next 20 years so that our schools develop skills that are relevant to our rapidly evolving society and environment. It will be the answer to attracting and retaining students, and to helping Tucson remain as a leader in adapting to our rapidly changing natural world.

Our appeal

We strongly urge Tucson Unified School District to look in depth at what Manzo Elementary School is achieving through its novel approach to learning. We urge you to use it as a model for K-12 education in Tucson, to promote it nationally for the model that it is, and not to squander this jewel in the crown of the TUSD and the wider Tucson community.

Sincerely,



R. Cynthia Pruett
President of the Board.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, Tucson Audubon.