

To Whom It May Concern:

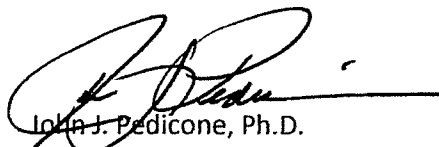
This letter is written in support of "Restart S.M.A.R.T." (Restart - Stronger, Mindful, Agile and Aware, Resilient, Trauma-Responsive), a program being developed by a number of local and national community experts to address the impact of trauma due to the COVID 19 pandemic on students and families as they transition back into the school setting.

Restart S.M.A.R.T. is a community impact initiative designed to provide the support of community resource professionals in partnership with local school superintendents to address the needs of children and families in the most underserved neighborhoods in Tucson. The program has been developed by a panel of experts in cooperation with school leaders who continue to meet regularly to refine an innovative engagement strategy designed to create safe and supportive environments for children. As the project description details, "families at or below the poverty line will, in most communities, experience an enhanced level of trauma as a result of the virus." Without question, a huge opportunity gap already exists between affluent and poverty neighborhoods that often translates into achievement gaps. As a result, academic slide will be more severe among at-risk students. Restart S.M.A.R.T. is designed to prepare public schools to understand and address the complex issues involving academic and non-academic challenges that will confront school leaders as a result of the pandemic. When implemented, it will also provide the necessary support to school counselors, social workers, student support personnel and administrators to better address the needs of children at all levels. The overall goal will be to minimize negative impact through the rapid deployment of the "Community Schools" strategy, which brings all aspects of the human support paradigm into play.

I have been involved with Higher Ground, the convening organization, for several years as a result of my former role as superintendent of Tucson Unified School District. I have watched this organization grow from a fledgling afterschool program to a formidable community intervention partner across the two largest urban school districts in the Tucson valley. The superintendents of both districts strongly support Higher Ground and have committed to participating in this project. Through these partnerships the likelihood of program success is extremely strong. I have every confidence in the leadership of HigherGround to faithfully execute the objectives of the plan and the established relationships between key constituents and Higher Ground provide an additional level of assurance that the goals of the project will be met.

It is with strong conviction that I support the proposal. I am asking that educators, funders, and policy makers to take the proposed measures under serious consideration in order to fully support Arizona's students for better outcomes now and in the future. If there is any additional information required, please feel free to contact me at (520) 307-6122.

Sincerely,



John J. Pedicone, Ph.D.

Former Superintendent of Tucson Unified
and Flowing Wells Schools Districts.