

# NEWSLETTER

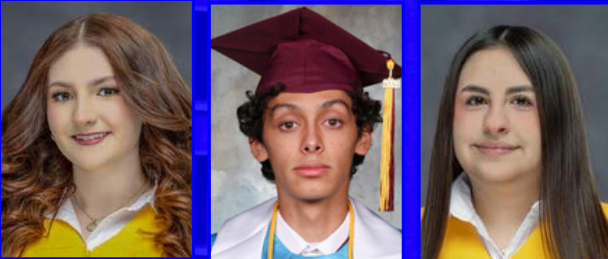
SPECIAL MAY EDITION

## — CONGRATULATIONS —



# 2026

High School  
Senior Scholarship  
Recipients



# DR. MARVENE LOBATO



**Executive Director, AZALAS**

As Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote, “What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.” The accomplishments of this year’s AZALAS High School Senior Scholarship recipients reflect the determination, resilience, and promise that lie within each of them.

The May Newsletter proudly recognizes our recent AZALAS High School Senior Scholarship Recipients. Thanks to the generosity of our sponsors at the Signature, Encore, Emerald, and Diamond levels, AZALAS awards 21 scholarships of \$1,500 each spring to support outstanding graduating seniors in their educational journeys. This year, 178 applications were carefully reviewed by a dedicated team of administrators, retired educators, and community members. We gratefully acknowledge the 28 reviewers featured in this newsletter for their time, expertise, and commitment to student success.

This year’s recipients represent Douglas Unified School District, Mesa Public Schools, Nogales Unified School District, Tolleson Union High School District, Tucson Unified School District, and Yuma Union High School District. In addition to their initial scholarship award, these students are eligible to apply for an additional \$1,500 scholarship annually for the next three years through AZALAS.

Within these pages, readers will discover personal reflections from the recipients and snapshots capturing some of these remarkable students as they accepted their scholarships. The AZALAS Executive Board and our sponsors are proud of their achievements, aspirations, and dedication to creating bright futures.

Reading about these recipients is truly inspiring. Their success reflects not only their hard work, but also the unwavering support of parents, teachers, counselors, and communities who helped prepare them for this next chapter. We are confident they will make meaningful contributions to their communities and beyond.

*Dr. Marvene Lobato*





# AZALAS

2026 HIGH SCHOOL  
SENIOR SCHOLARSHIP

*Recipients*

# 2026 SCHOLARSHIP

# WINNER



*Gabriela  
Barragan Bobadilla*

San Luis High School, Yuma Union High School District

“My Latino heritage has deeply shaped my life’s goals, mission, and desire to impact the world by giving me values of resilience, responsibility, and service. Being Latina isn’t only part of my heritage, it is the lens through which I understand perseverance, family, and community. My mission is to use my education to empower others. Through my studies at ASU, I aim to gain legal knowledge and leadership experience through internships, student organizations, and community engagement. My long-term goal is becoming an attorney who provides accessible legal services to underrepresented entrepreneurs. I want to simplify complex legal systems and ensure that small business owners have the tools and knowledge needed to protect their livelihoods. This mission is deeply rooted in my Latino heritage, which emphasizes collective progress and lifting others as we move forward.”

2026 SCHOLARSHIP

WINNER



*Karla Cordero*

Dobson High School, Mesa Public Schools

“My Latino heritage is the core of who I am. It’s where I learned to value family, resilience, and perseverance. My culture and my parents’ sacrifices are not obstacles; they are the foundation of my strength. A shift in perspective changed my goals. I no longer see myself as someone limited by circumstances, but as someone capable of breaking barriers and inspiring others to do the same. Because of this, education is not ‘just school’ to me; it is my way forward. It is how I honor my parents’ sacrifices and create opportunities they never had. Every late night studying and every challenge I overcome is part of a larger mission: to build a future where my background is not a limitation, but a source of power.”

# 2026 SCHOLARSHIP

# WINNER



*Maria Belen Franco Montano*  
Douglas High School, Douglas Unified School District

“My latino heritage has profoundly shaped not only who I am, but who I aspire to become. It is woven into my identity through a series of sacrifices, resilience, and brave actions; values that have guided me through the most challenging yet defining moments of my life.

My goal is to pursue a career in nursing and be more than just a health provider. I want to be a source of comfort, understanding, and advocacy for families like mine. I want patients to be seen, heard, and cared for, regardless of their background or financial circumstances. I want to bridge the gap that so many immigrants face when they explore the healthcare system, ensuring everyone is treated equally.

My Latino heritage reminds me every day why I started and where I am going. As I continue my journey into college, I strive for resilience and face obstacles with great bravery. Being an immigrant is not a weakness, but a quality that makes people like me unique, determined, and proud.”

# 2026 SCHOLARSHIP

# WINNER



*Dafne Bojorques*

Yuma High School, Yuma School District

“When I first arrived, I had no understanding of English whatsoever, which combined with my accentuated accent, made me a target of mockery. Feeling embarrassed, I told myself I would never get humiliated again. Coming from a Latino heritage reminded me that I had to push through challenges with determination and resilience. I spent endless hours studying the language, with a promise to never feel humiliated again. After years of hard work, I finally became fluent and my experience gave me a purpose; to help others who struggled like myself.

As I grew, I became in love with microbiology. As I researched more about the field, I realized that one of the biggest problems within the Hispanic community is the lack of presence in science related areas, especially in the areas of biology and microbiology. This realization made me more determined to earn my bachelor’s degree in microbiology. By earning my degree, I will have the scientific knowledge that I need to investigate microorganisms, infections, and diseases that Hispanic people have in their daily lives. I want to be one of the people who represent the Hispanic community and give representation to those who also work in scientific areas.”

2026 SCHOLARSHIP

# WINNER



*Jorge Cuadras Martinez*

Dobson High School, Mesa Public Schools

"I grew up in a small, tight-knit border town with a strong Hispanic culture and a deep emphasis on family values. These experiences have made me family-oriented, with my primary goal being to secure a comfortable, financially stable future for my family.

I plan to attend Arizona Western College to earn an associate's degree in engineering within two years. Following this, I intend to transfer to Arizona State University to major in electrical power and energy systems. I aim to pursue a career in power engineering, specifically focusing on power generation and electrical systems. My professional ambition is to design systems that sustain cities and provide reliable electricity to families."

# 2026 SCHOLARSHIP

# WINNER



*Fabian Ferrer Ruiz*

Copper Canyon High School, Tolleson Union HS District

“Since I was young, I have been interested in healthcare and helping others. I remember being curious about how the body heals and how people recover from injuries. Over time, that curiosity turned into a goal. Today, I want to become a physical therapist so that I can help people regain their strength, mobility, and confidence after injuries. I hope to work with people in my community and make healthcare feel more welcoming and supportive for everyone.

Paying for college can be difficult, especially for my mom, a single parent who has always done everything possible to support her children. This scholarship would help me continue my education and focus on achieving my dream of becoming a physical therapist. More than anything, it would allow me to continue the journey my mother started when she came to this country working hard, creating opportunities, and building a better future for the next generation.”

# 2026 SCHOLARSHIP

# WINNER



*Emily Laurette Gomez Lopez*

Douglas High School, Douglas Unified School District

“Growing up as a Mexican girl in a border town, I learned at a very young age that life is not always equal, even when people live a few miles apart, being separated by metal walls. For me, the border separating two different countries wasn’t just a line on the map, it was something that I experienced every single day. It showed me two nations side by side, but they did not always offer the same opportunities. Although I did not fully understand the idea as a child, I saw it in how hard families from Hispanic backgrounds worked to build better lives despite the scarcity of resources.

Most of my childhood memories are clouded by the image of my parents carrying responsibilities with quiet strength and resilience. They would rarely complain about hardship but worked tirelessly for the past 18 years. They’ve supported me so that I could pursue my dream of becoming a medical specialist. I am inspired to pursue a career in medicine to improve access to healthcare for underserved Latino communities. My goal is to provide justice for the inequalities that I once experienced at a young age.”

# 2026 SCHOLARSHIP

# WINNER



*Ashbbie Goebel*

University High School, Tucson Unified School District

“My experience being in a classroom filled with diversity made me realize that Latino culture isn’t defined by a single recipe. My father, who works in wastewater treatment, showed me how his job directly impacts public health. My mother, a teacher who earned a master’s in Spanish, preserves culture. Through both of their lives' work, I was taught to use my education and opportunities to serve others.

I desire to become a chemical engineer who creates better water filtration systems, safer food options, and sustainable skin care. Not only do I want to break barriers, but I also want to empower other Latinos by pursuing STEM. In my dual-credit engineering class, I am one of the very few women and Latino students. That visibility matters, and I proudly take on the role of mentoring my sister, younger relatives, and students by pursuing STEM, no matter the odds. My heritage has taught me to stay resilient, to reach for my goals, and to give back. My mission is to uplift my community, expand access to STEM, and bring my vibrant culture wherever I go.”

# 2026 SCHOLARSHIP

# WINNER



*Katya Hernandez Pedroza*

Douglas High School, Douglas Unified School District

“Growing up with my Latino heritage has shaped my life goals, sense of purpose, and views of the community. For my entire life, I have lived in Douglas, Arizona, a border town populated primarily by Latinos. My parents met across the border, and their love blossomed. However, their journey was not easy. My mother often shares experiences to remind me of the hardships they faced and how she hopes I can learn from them. Through their story, I have come to understand the value of perseverance and dedication.

I strongly believe that values are shaped by the environment you grow up in, and my parents instilled in me principles that continue to guide my future. I want to use those values, time management, resilience, and empathy, to give back to under-resourced Latino communities. I plan to major in computer science with a concentration in software engineering. Through my education, I hope to create opportunities for others by offering free virtual programming classes to students who are interested in STEM but lack access to early career preparation.”

# 2026 SCHOLARSHIP

# WINNER



*Michelle Herrera Lamadrid*

Douglas High School, Douglas Unified School District

“Being part of a Mexican family has inspired me to aim higher, not only for myself but also for those who surround me. I strive to become the first in my family to pursue a career in medicine, breaking tradition of straight workforce, and creating a path for future generations. This goal not only represents myself, it represents the hopes and dreams of my family as well, who have always supported and encouraged me to succeed. My heritage and culture have also shaped my desire to give back to my community. I have witnessed how language barriers, limited healthcare access, and lack of resources have affected families with similar ancestry. These experiences have inspired me to become a doctor who not only saves lives but also pays back the community. I want to provide compassionate care, ensure patients feel understood, and help the gap between healthcare systems and those who often feel overlooked.

In the long run, my Latino heritage has given me a strong sense of identity, purpose, and responsibility. It has taught me to persevere and to use my success for a better future. As a future doctor, I hope to honor my Hispanic background by making a lasting impact of serving communities in need and proving that where you come from does not limit where you can go.”

# 2026 SCHOLARSHIP

# WINNER



*Brianna Jimenez*

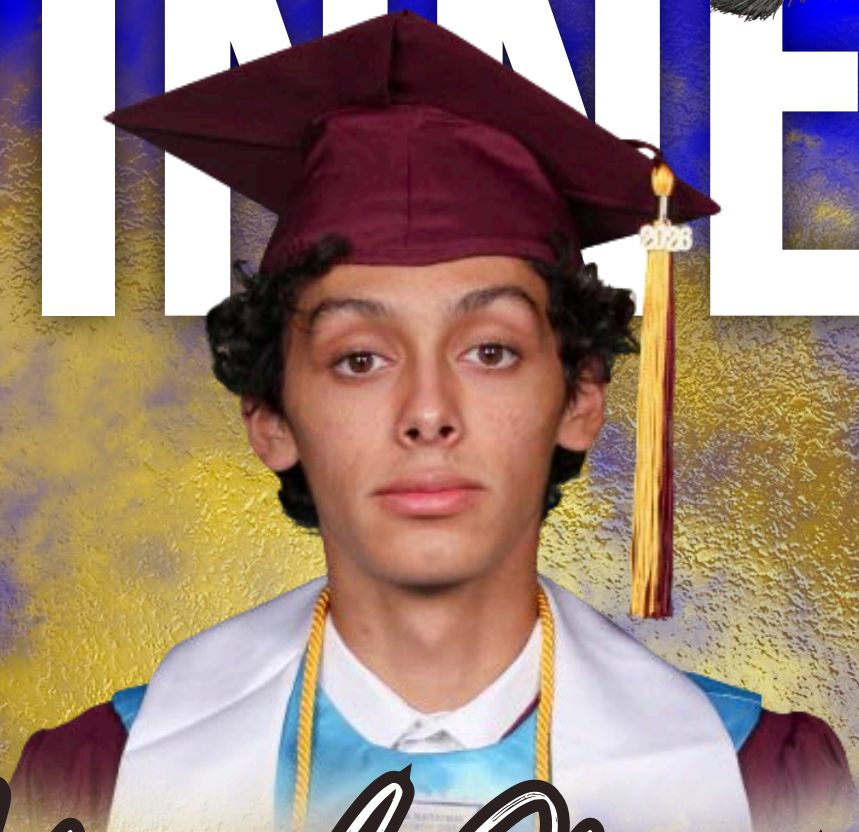
Dobson High School, Mesa Public Schools

“The Hispanic/Latino community has become a target for discrimination and unjust treatment. With Hispanic parents who grew up in predominantly Hispanic neighborhoods, witnessing the current state of my community is truly heartbreaking to watch. I see these hardworking families being torn apart, people facing discrimination for something they can’t control, and many people are too afraid to leave their homes due to these stressful circumstances.

I aspire to become an immigration lawyer one day, I believe that being proactive in supporting the communities that I will work with often is essential. I genuinely care for my community and I want to keep them safe and I want to give back for all that it has provided me. I want to give hope, safety, and comfort back to my community and advocate for those who can’t advocate for themselves.”

# 2026 SCHOLARSHIP

# WINNER



*Miguel Jimenez*

Nogales High School, Nogales Unified School District

“As a Latino, I, like many others, have experienced discrimination in one form or another. And yet, alongside those challenges, I recognize that privilege shapes how I navigate them. I am privileged in that I can speak English while accessing my mother tongue, giving me an edge in uncomfortable social interactions. In situations where I have encountered discrimination, for the most part outside of Nogales, It was evident that staying silent would do no more than reinforcing these barriers. Instead, I opted to push myself to speak up even if it may have been awkward or uncomfortable making it a point to advocate for myself and others if need be.

I am interested in studying political science because I am driven to ensure that this marginalized community is properly represented and the people’s voices like the Latinos of Nogales do not go unheard. I am inspired to contribute to policy that for once will positively impact the hard working Latino community.”

# 2026 SCHOLARSHIP

# WINNER



*Leah Macias Quintana*

Douglas High School, Douglas Unified School District

“Growing up in a Latino family in a border community has deeply shaped my values, my resilience, and my desire to impact the world. My heritage has taught me the importance of family and supporting others, even during the most difficult times. These values have influenced my desire to pursue a career in healthcare and dedicate my life to helping communities that often struggle to access the care they need.

My heritage is much more than where I come from or the language I speak; it is the reason I keep moving forward. It has taught me perseverance, compassion, and the importance of lifting each other up. I want my career to be more than a profession; I want it to be a mission. My goal is to help break down barriers to healthcare and provide the much needed care to underserved communities.”

# 2026 SCHOLARSHIP

# WINNER



## Jocelyn McMullen

Tucson High Magnet School, Tucson Unified School District

“People who experience stereotypes are often treated unfairly, even making individuals feel judged or excluded. We need change so we can encourage others to see individuals for who they truly are rather than making assumptions. I want to share my voice for those who feel invalidated because they do not fit society’s expectations. By embracing my identity, I hope to encourage others, especially young Latinas, to feel proud of who they are. I want to change stereotypes and remind people that there is no single way to look or be Latino.

These experiences have also influenced my life’s goals. I want to become a pediatric registered nurse so I can help children and families feel safe, respected, and cared for. Many Latino families face challenges such as language barriers or feeling misunderstood in healthcare settings. As someone who understands both cultures and languages, I hope to provide comfort and support to children and their families during difficult moments. To my younger self, I would say: no matter what you look like, people will always have something to say, but never let it define you. Be proud of who you are and where you come from. To anyone who has ever felt judged for their identity, look in the mirror without shame. Walk in beauty.”

# 2026 SCHOLARSHIP

# WINNER



*Mia Ochoa-Rembis*

Douglas High School, Douglas Unified School District

“My Latino heritage has always been one of the most powerful influences in my life. Being Latina has shaped my values such as hard work, resilience, and community. Growing up in a Latino household, I understand that success is reached through dedication and persistence. My background has given me a sense of purpose, while enhancing my desire to create a positive impact, and further influencing my ambitions. Growing up, I have been surrounded by strong role models who emphasized key family values by being clear demonstrations of perseverance. While facing challenges like working long hours, insufficient income, or other small obstacles, I have witnessed what hard work and determination truly looks like.

My goal is to help others, and I believe I can achieve this through a career in engineering. This career opens opportunities to create solutions and solve real world problems that will improve everyday life. I aspire to work on projects that benefit communities by creating safer environments, access to resources and infrastructure improvement. Overall, my heritage has taught me the importance of using my skills to make a difference, rather than personal success.”

# 2026 SCHOLARSHIP

# WINNER



*Juan Pablo Urtegasustegui*

Douglas High School, Douglas Unified School District

“In the future, I would like to become a lawyer. I have been passionate about law for many years now, and looking back, that passion stems from the hardships and cruelty I constantly see on both sides of the border. The most common issue that happens, not just in my town but all around the area, is racial profiling against Latino people. As a Latino myself, I don’t just see these issues, but feel them. I see myself, my family, or my neighbors constantly at odds over something out of their control. My mission is to use my bilingualism and bicultural knowledge to better my community, but, most importantly, help my fellow Latinos in their constant uphill battle. I want to ensure that not just the people of Douglas and Agua Prieta feel safe, but also those beyond it. Latinos are the largest and fastest-growing immigrant group in the country. By pursuing a career in law, I aim to transform these hardships into opportunities and growth. I aim to ensure that the next generation of bicultural youth sees the law as an ally, not as an enemy.”

# 2026 SCHOLARSHIP

# WINNER



*Jessica Quijada*

Douglas High School, Douglas Unified School District

“Some of the most important lessons in my life did not come from a classroom, but from my family. My family is from Sonora, Mexico. Growing up in a Latino household, I was surrounded by love, traditions, and the smells of home-cooked meals that brought our family together. At the same time, growing up in a Latino community made me aware of challenges that others face. I have seen families work multiple jobs, struggle with language barriers, or fight for opportunities that are often taken for granted. These realities motivated me to push myself even harder in school, get involved in extracurriculars and sports, and take advantage of every chance I could to learn and grow. It made me realize that my background is a source of pride and strength, not a limitation. It inspired me to dream bigger and work to create opportunities for others like me.

Looking ahead, I plan to attend Arizona State University and pursue a degree in marketing. More importantly, I want to use my skills to create opportunities for others and inspire future generations, especially those who share my heritage. I want people to feel seen, valued, and empowered, just like my family always made me feel.”

2026 SCHOLARSHIP

# WINNER



*Jose Sandoval*

Red Mountain High School, Mesa Public Schools

“My commitment to serving others has been continuous throughout my high school career. As a scout leader, I dedicate my evening once a week to help other scouts achieve the Eagle Rank. Without scout leaders, I would not have earned my Eagle Scout rank and grown as a leader. My service to others can also be seen in school. I saw a need for a club that sought to promote Latin American culture and highlight opportunities for our Latino students. This observation turned into the creation of the Latino Student Union club. Starting a new club is no easy feat, yet I knew the necessity of it. As a club, we have worked to accomplish that goal, and we hope to reach more students for years to come.

My dedication to serving others, which is rooted in my Latino heritage, has inspired me to become a public servant and lawmaker. By holding this role, I intend to advocate for working-class families and ensure our government represents our communities.”

# 2026 SCHOLARSHIP

# WINNER



*Sophia Sandoval*

Nogales High School, Nogales Unified School District

“Growing up Hispanic and bilingual has not only shaped the way I see healthcare but also the role I want to play in it. I have dealt first-hand with relatives who hesitate when turning towards western medicine, feeling that with time or at-home remedies, all will be solved. That is rarely ever the case. In addition to this, many people often feel more comfortable trusting someone who understands their language and their culture. I have seen how a familiar face and similar background can ease a person’s worries more than any words of affirmation. It creates a kind of trust that is often the deciding factor in someone getting the care they need or walking away from it. I want to become a doctor because I know I can bridge that gap by speaking to patients in the best language for them, taking away intimidation, and helping them feel safe and cared for.

Becoming a doctor is more than a personal aspiration, but rather, a way of giving back to the community that raised me. Not only can I serve the community, but I can also be the familiar face that inspires other students to believe that anything is possible because I did the impossible.”

# 2026 SCHOLARSHIP

# WINNER



*Camila Delgado-Encinas*

Douglas High School, Douglas Unified School District

“My mother, as well as the rest of my family, has always expressed how one must take advantage of opportunities, especially education. I aspire to pursue higher education and eventually earn a degree in chemical engineering. My aim is to not only ensure a stable future for myself, but also use my education to address environmental issues within my community. In addition, I hope to promote sustainability through different innovations. Most importantly, I hope to give back to those that once helped me become the person I am today. I want to be able to look back and know that my accomplishments are the product of their tireless efforts and sacrifices. Because of their values, I am committed to create positive impacts on others through my education.”

2026 SCHOLARSHIP

# WINNER



*Zayret Lopez*

Douglas High School, Douglas Unified School District

“As a former China Poblana, I was taught the power of small acts, even when you are the most vulnerable. Whether I am helping a teammate with their track block, with homework, or donating clothing to the House of Hope, I practice humility like in the China Poblana. I am not only attending ASU for a degree, but I also look forward to reaching opportunities like studying abroad, research programs, and internships to see parts of the world God has created. Whether is was stepping onto an airplane for the first time for HOSA internationals or making history in top three placing proves my heritage made a branch that bends, but does not break.”

# DOUGLAS UNIFIED

## School District



# MESA PUBLIC SCHOOLS



# NOGALES UNIFIED *School District*



# TOLLESON UNION

## High School District



# TUCSON UNIFIED

## School District



# YUMA UNION

## High School District





# Thank you

*Ana Samaniego, Superintendent - Douglas USD*  
*Andrea Barrera, Assistant Director - Cartwright SD*  
*Aneela Pradhan, Teacher - Nogales USD*  
*Dr. Carla Boyd, AZALAS Friend*  
*Dr. Carlos Perez, Director Safe Schools - Cartwright SD*  
*Christina Boston, Director - Tolleson UHSD*  
*Ciara Goulette, Coordinator - Saddle Mountain USD*  
*Dr. LeeAnn Lawlor, Retired Superintendent - Cartwright SD*  
*Gisselle Herrera, Superintendent - Tolleson ESD*  
*Jigar Mehta, Principal - Nogales USD*  
*Jorge Moreno, Director, Career and Technical Education - Tolleson UHSD*  
*Juan Ceja, Administrator of HR / Title IX Coordinator - Tolleson ESD*  
*Juvenal Lopez, Chief Operations Officer - Tucson USD*  
*Larry Martinez, Retired Administrator*  
*Leticia Anaya, Principal - Yuma Union HSD*  
*Lizette Esparza, Superintendent - Gadsden ESD*  
*Marco Ruiz, Asst. Superintendent - Cartwright SD*  
*Mario Castro, Director, Career and Technical Education - Sunnyside USD*  
*Monica Martinez, Chasse Construction*  
*Monica Mesa, Assistant Superintendent - Mesa PS*  
*Nora Gutierrez, Retired Superintendent - Tolleson UHSD*  
*Dr. Ovetta Chapman, Lead School Psychologist - Laveen ESD*  
*Ramiro Alvarez, Public Information Officer - Pendergast ESD*  
*Rosa Alvarez, ELD Coordinator - Sahuarita USD*  
*Dr. Rosalinda Rodriguez, Multi-lingual Coordinator - Tucson USD*  
*Sheila Berger, Educational Consultant - IXL*  
*Ulysses Navarrete, ALAS Executive Director*  
*Zel Fowler, Gifted Coordinator - Littleton ESD*



## *“A New Beginning”*

*Today we honor all you are, and all you’ve worked to be.  
The dreams you held, the strength you found; the person that we see.*

*We’ve watched you grow throughout the years with pride beyond compare.  
Through every challenge, every change, through every hope and prayer.*

*This moment shines because of you, because you made it here,  
with courage in your steady heart and purpose bright and clear.*

*This moment is a doorway, a gentle turning page;  
the start of something beautiful, a brand-new waiting stage.*

*May you carry every lesson, every memory, every smile.  
May you trust the road before you, even when it takes a while.*

*And when life asks you to be brave, may you remember, too,  
there is a love that follows you in everything you do.*

*So, walk ahead with open heart, with hope in every stride.  
You have so much within you, and we are so filled with pride.*

Make it a great day!

*Tracy Harris*



1988

ARIZONA ASSOCIATION OF LATINO  
ADMINISTRATORS AND SUPERINTENDENTS