



June 2026

NEWSLETTER



CELEBRATING GROWTH & SUCCESS

This month we celebrate the incredible achievements within our community. Join us as we recognize recent promotions, leadership growth, milestones and individuals helping shape our future.





Leadership & Growth Across AZALAS

Recognizing Members Stepping into New Roles and shaping the future of education across our communities

A SEASON OF GROWTH

As summer begins and fresh energy fills the air, our June newsletter celebrates a season of impressive growth across AZALAS. As Dr. Tusson has emphasized, "Leadership is about bringing people together to create positive change in our communities." That spirit of service and commitment to excellence is reflected in the exciting news we share this month.

CELEBRATING NEW LEADERSHIP

AZALAS is thrilled to spotlight an exciting new chapter: the appointment of several of our members into leadership roles throughout our school districts. These transitions represent far more than new titles—they embody vision, dedication, professional growth, and a renewed commitment to excellence in education.

LOOKING AHEAD

From long-standing members stepping into well-deserved positions to emerging leaders bringing fresh perspectives and innovative ideas, these appointments powerfully reflect the talent, passion, and purpose that define our association. As we look ahead, we are excited to see these leaders shaping brighter futures for our students, colleagues, and communities through their service and commitment.



"Leadership is about bringing people together to create positive change in our communities"
— Mayor Regina Romero





Thank You & Best Wishes



Tracy Harris

Administrative Assistant

"How lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard."

— A.A. Milne

It is both an honor and privilege to have served on the AZALAS team. This has been an invaluable experience that has exceeded my expectations.

As I reflect on my time at AZALAS, I want to take a moment to express my sincere appreciation for the opportunities I have had during my time here.

When I first joined the team in 2023, my initial goal was to help the organization meet an essential need while enhancing my own skill set. Looking back, the experience was far more rewarding and transformative than I could have anticipated. Aside from meeting that need and sharpening my skills, a big advantage was being able to learn so much more about the work of AZALAS and how beneficial the organization is for our leaders and students.

I am particularly grateful for the chance to have worked on the annual conference committee for the past three years, designing various conference branding materials. I have also been fortunate to gain new skills through problem-solving, resilience, and even stronger team communication.

Collaborating with this team has been extremely rewarding. I have learned so much from everyone's commitment to the organization as a whole and dedication to every student. When you read the student reflections and discover how AZALAS has positively impacted their lives, you know the work must keep moving.

I especially want to thank Dr. Marvene Lobato and the board for their leadership and support. It means a lot that they entrusted me to help put a spotlight on the happenings of AZALAS.

As I look forward to this next chapter, I will treasure the insights and relationships I have built. I am truly thankful for this experience and excited to see what the future holds for AZALAS.



1988
ARIZONA ASSOCIATION OF LATINO
ADMINISTRATORS AND SUPERINTENDENTS

Congratulations to Our AZALAS Leaders

Celebrating New Journeys, New Opportunities, and New Impact

The future of education is shaped by leaders who are willing to grow, take risks, and step forward when opportunities arise.

This month, we proudly recognize several AZALAS members who have earned new leadership roles through years of dedication, perseverance, and service to their students, schools, and communities.

Each promotion represents more than a new title. It reflects countless hours of hard work, continuous learning, mentorship, collaboration, and an unwavering commitment to making a difference.

As these leaders begin new chapters in their professional journeys, we celebrate their accomplishments and the positive impact they will continue to make throughout Arizona and beyond.

Congratulations to the following AZALAS members on their well-deserved achievements. Your leadership inspires us all.



Amanda Morris

★ Congratulations ★



The Aspiring Leaders program has provided meaningful professional development that has strengthened my leadership skills. Through real-world scenarios and targeted training, I have gained practical strategies for decision-making, problem-solving, and fostering critical thinking.

This experience has helped prepare me to take on new leadership responsibilities and continue growing in my new role.

New Position

Academic Behavioral Support
Specialist (ABSS)

Elvira Elementary, Sunnyside
Unified School District

Past Position

Teacher Coach

Elvira Elementary, Sunnyside
Unified School District

**"Education is not received. It is
achieved."**

— Albert Einstein



Andrea Barrera

★ Congratulations ★



New Position

Chief of Public Relations
Fowler Elementary School
District

Past Position

ELA & Social Sciences
Cartwright School
District

I am so grateful to have always had leaders who believed in me! If it were not for Dr. LeeAnn Aguilar Lawlor and Ms. Ema Jauregui, I would not have had the opportunity to participate in the AZALAS Aspiring Leaders training program, which prepared me for my instructional leadership journey and connected me to many other Aspiring Leaders in this field. I am looking forward to serving the Fowler community in this new role by learning about and uplifting the incredible work of this educational community!

When I began my Aspiring Leaders journey in 2023, I was unaware of the profound impact it would have on me. The professional panels with superintendents and administrators provided deep insight into the mindsets that kept educational leaders grounded in the work. Successful leaders build strong teams and grow leaders that are committed to strong outcomes for all scholars in their care. Additionally, the leadership simulations offered eye-opening scenarios that challenged us to utilize our discernment to handle delicate situations with respect to district policy and applicable laws, all while maintaining a high level of integrity and dignity for all involved parties. Working through these situations collaboratively and discursively highlighted the importance of listening to and incorporating various perspectives to arrive at a sound resolution. Lastly, the resume review and interview scenarios truly prepared me to take a leap in my career. Mr. Joe Quintana offered astute feedback to grow how we present ourselves and our accomplishments professionally to help us meet our leadership goals. AZALAS Aspiring Leaders connected me to incredible people in our field who are all working to uplift Arizona's youth to new heights. I loved the time I spent in the program and the lasting bonds with cohort members. My time in Aspiring Leaders is invaluable to the goal of improving student outcomes across the state of Arizona, and its proliferation is vital to our field.



Antonia Morado Romero

★ Congratulations ★



The AZALAS Aspiring Leaders 2-year training program, facilitated by Joe Quintana and supported by Larry Martinez, was consistently a professional development experience that left me feeling inspired.

Throughout my time as an ABSS, I found myself constantly referring back to the practical topics we covered. Ultimately, the program inspired me to take the next steps in my leadership journey, leading to my recent application and appointment as the Assistant Principal of Challenger Middle School.

New Position

Assistant Principal

Sunnyside Unified School District
(Challenger Middle School)

Past Position

Academic Behavior Support
Specialist (ABSS)

Sunnyside Unified School District
(Elvira Elementary)



"Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today."

- Malcolm X



Dalia Garcia

★ Congratulations ★



Through AZALAS, I gained a deeper understanding of community needs, strengthened my confidence as a leader and I became more intentional about serving students and families.

The experience has inspired me to continue advocating for educational opportunities and empowering others to reach their full potential.

New Position

Assistant Principal over Teaching and Learning

Red Mountain High School/Mesa Public Schools

Past Position

English Teacher, 22 years

Red Mountain High School in Mesa Public Schools

"The beautiful thing about learning is that nobody can take it away from you."

- B.B. King



Essence Calhoun

★ Congratulations ★



The Aspiring Leaders Training Program has helped me refine my interview skills and build confidence in presenting myself as a leader. Through the program, I have become more comfortable discussing my experiences, highlighting my strengths, and communicating my vision for supporting students, staff, and the school community.

New Position

Academic & Behavior Support
Specialist (ABSS)

Liberty Elementary
Sunnyside School District

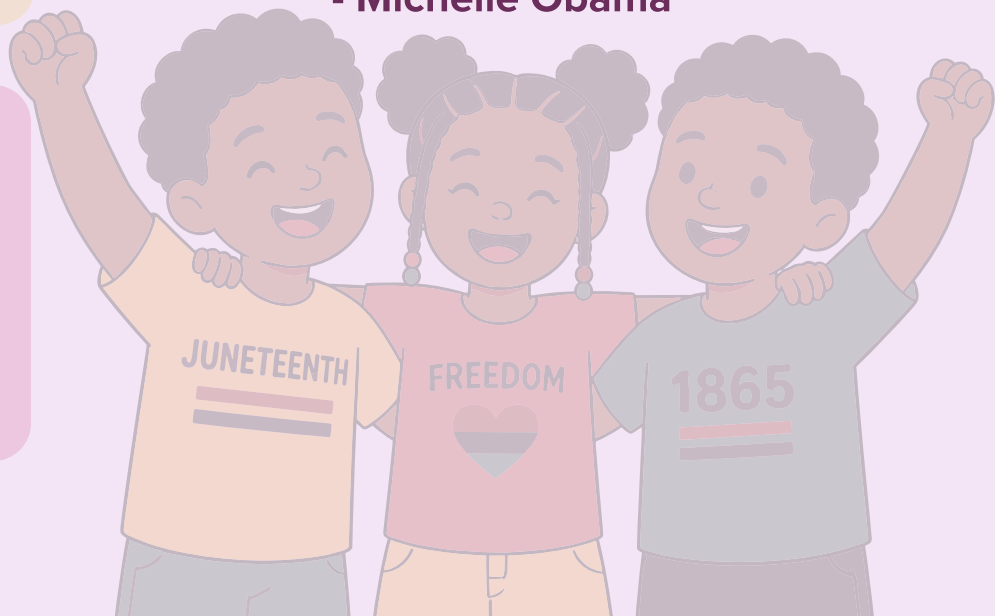
**"Success isn't about how much money
you make; it's about the difference
you make in people's lives."**

- Michelle Obama

Past Position

Teacher Coach

Liberty Elementary
Sunnyside School District





Elizabeth Sousa

★ Congratulations ★



The Aspiring Leaders Cadre contributed to my leadership journey by connecting me to other Latine leaders in districts across the greater Phoenix area facing the same challenges

I thought I was facing alone. It illuminated the allies that I didn't know existed, and expanded my knowledge and ways of thinking through collaboration, communication, and community.

New Position

Director of Curriculum

Roosevelt School District

Past Position

District Literacy Coach

Roosevelt School District



"Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn."

— Ellen Ochoa





Esteban Ruiz

★ Congratulations ★



New Position

Principal

Mesa Public School

Past Position

Assistant Principal/ Athletic
Director

Mesa Public School

As I reflect on my two-year journey with the AZALAS Phoenix Region Aspiring Leaders Cohort, I am filled with gratitude for the mentors, experiences, and relationships that have shaped me as a leader. I began this journey as a first-year assistant principal and athletic director eager to learn and grow; today, I complete the program while preparing to step into my first principalship. Through the leadership of Mr. Joe Quintana, every workshop, panel, and conversation challenged me to lead with greater purpose, integrity, and heart.

As a Latino educator, this experience reinforced the importance of representation, advocacy, and ensuring that leadership reflects the communities we serve. Most importantly, AZALAS reminded me that leadership is not a solitary pursuit; it is built through mentorship, collaboration, and a commitment to lifting others as we climb. I am deeply grateful to everyone who invested in my growth, and I look forward to paying that investment forward by supporting the next generation of educational leaders.



Dra. Jessica Bernal-Mejia

★ Congratulations ★



The Aspiring Leaders Training Program has been an important part of my leadership journey. It provided valuable networking opportunities, real-world problem-solving through meaningful discussions, and exposure to multiple perspectives that strengthened my leadership skills.

Most importantly, it created a space where leaders of color can thrive, feel supported, and develop the confidence to lead authentically while advancing equity in education.

New Position

Principal of Catalina High School

Tucson Unified School District
(TUSD)

Past Position

Assistant Principal of Catalina High School

Tucson Unified School District
(TUSD)



"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

— Nelson Mandela



Jessica Larsen

★ Congratulations ★



As I begin my new role as Chief of Schools in Fowler School District, I am guided by a fundamental belief that strong schools are built through strong leadership and a commitment to developing others. While I was not a participant in the Aspiring Leaders Program, I have had the privilege of supporting and working alongside many educators who were. Their growth as leaders, confidence in their decision-making, and commitment to serving students are a testament to the power of intentional leadership development.

Throughout my career, I have served in leadership roles in various capacities. One belief has remained constant: our greatest impact as leaders comes from building the capacity of others. The Aspiring Leaders Program exemplifies this belief by providing emerging leaders with a strong foundation, a shared language for leadership, and opportunities to reflect on and refine their own leadership style.

One of the highlights of this year was having the opportunity to recognize and celebrate program graduates at their award ceremony. Hearing their stories and witnessing their growth as leaders affirmed what I have long believed: investing in leadership development is one of the most powerful ways to strengthen schools and improve outcomes for students. As I step into this next chapter, I am grateful for programs like Aspiring Leaders that help cultivate talented educators who are prepared to lead with purpose, inspire others, and create positive outcomes for students, staff, and their communities.

New Position

Chief of Schools

Fowler Elementary School
District

Past Position

Executive Director of
Curriculum and Instruction

Cartwright School District



Jessica Montelongo

★ Congratulations ★



AZALAS, and especially the Aspiring Leaders program, had a huge impact on my journey to becoming a principal. The professional development, networking, mentorship, and support pushed me to grow as a leader and gave me the confidence to take that next step.

What makes AZALAS special is being surrounded by people who understand our stories, our students, and our communities. It reminded me that representation matters and that leadership is about uplifting others. I'm incredibly grateful for the experience and AZALAS didn't just help me prepare for the job it helped me believe I was ready for it.

New Position

Principal

Isaac Middle School
Isaac School District #5

Past Position

Assistant Principal

K-8 Campus
(3 Years)



"We do not need magic to change the world. We carry all the power we need inside ourselves already."

— Sonia Sotomayor



Mario E. Castro

★ Congratulations ★



Participating in the ALAS Four Corners Latinx Leadership Academy was a unique and memorable experience that highlighted the strength of a collective leadership journey. One of the most valuable aspects was the opportunity to build connections and collaborate within their organizations. The program underscored that while there is a common purpose driving this work, each context brings its own distinct nuances, challenges, and opportunities. Through the activities, shared experiences, and meaningful conversations, the cohort cultivated a stronger capacity to listen, adapt, and lead with greater awareness and flexibility. The continued connection among participants and the ongoing growth and success of the group reflect the lasting impact of this academy and the power of the ALAS leadership network.

New Position

Director of College and
Career Readiness

Sunnyside Unified School
District

Past Position

CTE Director

Sunnyside Unified School
District

"Education is the most powerful weapon
which you can use to change the world. But
first, you must believe in yourself."

— Luis Valdez





Ondrea Estrada

★ Congratulations ★



The AZALAS Aspiring Leaders Tucson Region Year One Training workshops provided me with the opportunity to grow alongside other aspiring leaders while learning from the shared lessons, knowledge, and expertise of Joe Quintana and Larry Martinez. The sessions provided valuable insights that I was able to apply in my day-to-day work as a Dean of Students throughout my first year in a leadership position, while also challenging me to reflect on and strengthen my leadership practices. Successfully completing that first year and being appointed Assistant Principal at Ray Borane Middle School affirmed the value of continuous learning, mentorship, and collaboration.

New Position

Dean of Students

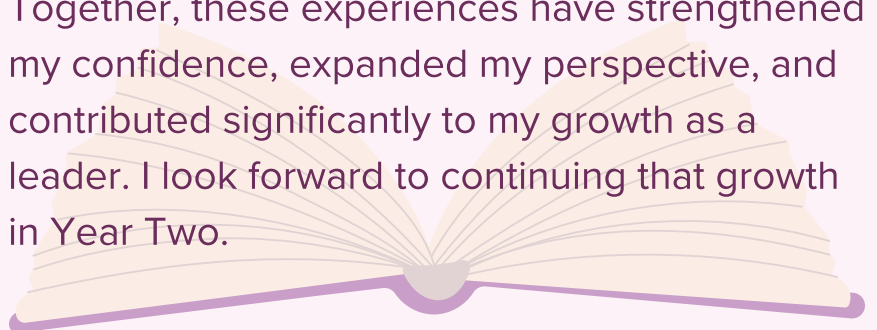
Ray Borane Middle School,
Douglas USD

Past Position

Assistant Principal

Ray Borane Middle School,
Douglas USD

Leadership journeys are so much lighter when you walk alongside others and learn from those who have already walked the path you're walking. I am grateful for the guidance, relationships, and experiences gained through both the Aspiring Leaders Program and the Estrellas en Ascenso Mentor Program. Together, these experiences have strengthened my confidence, expanded my perspective, and contributed significantly to my growth as a leader. I look forward to continuing that growth in Year Two.





Dr. Rosalinda Rodriguez

★ Congratulations ★



I have had the privilege of being an alumna of both the Four Corners Latinx Leadership Academy and the ALAS Superintendent Leadership Academy.

Both programs played a significant role in advancing my career by providing invaluable learning experiences, meaningful networking opportunities, and access to accomplished educational leaders who generously shared their expertise, insights, and guidance. The knowledge and relationships I gained through these academies have helped shape my leadership journey and continue to influence my professional growth.

New Position

Assistant Superintendent of
Human Resources

Cartwright Elementary School
District

Past Position

Director of Multicultural
Curriculum

Tucson Unified School District



"The education of our people is the most powerful weapon we have to change the world."

— Sylvia Mendez



Vanessa Alegria-Rivas

★ Congratulations ★



The Aspiring Leaders and Four Corners Leadership programs have been instrumental in my leadership journey. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to participate in these experiences, which strengthened my leadership skills, built my confidence, and encouraged me to recognize my potential as an educational leader.

Through self-reflection, mentorship, and meaningful collaboration, I gained a greater understanding of my strengths, areas for growth, and the responsibility we have to positively impact those we serve. As a Latina leader, I was empowered by these programs to embrace my voice, share my experiences, and lead with authenticity, purpose, and humility.

Most importantly, they reinforced the values of servant leadership, cultural responsiveness, and advocacy. They deepened my commitment to understanding and supporting the diverse needs of our Latino community while ensuring that all students, families, and staff feel valued, supported, and empowered to succeed.

I am thankful for the knowledge, guidance, and relationships I gained through Aspiring Leaders and Four Corners. These experiences continue to shape my leadership practice and inspire me to create opportunities, foster equity, and serve others with compassion and dedication.

New Position

Principal of San Cayetano
Elementary

Santa Cruz Valley Unified School
District #35

Past Position

Assistant Principal of
Calabasas School,

Rio Rico, AZ (6 years)



Vanessa Lozano

★ Congratulations ★



New Position

Principal

Alhambra School District

Past Position

Assistant Principal

Alhambra School District

The Aspiring Leaders Program supported my leadership development and strengthened my understanding of effective instructional leadership. Over two years, it gave me the opportunity to collaborate with fellow aspiring leaders and learn from experienced superintendents, principals, directors, and other educational leaders.

Through meaningful discussions and shared experiences, I gained a deeper understanding of the skills and challenges instructional leaders face while building a strong network of professional collaboration and support. I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in this program and would highly recommend it to aspiring leaders seeking to grow their leadership skills and professional network.



"Every moment is an organizing opportunity, every person a potential activist, every minute a chance to change the world."

— Dolores Huerta





Welcome to the AZALAS Team!



★ Nisha Wallace ★

Administrative Assistant

I am excited to join AZALAS. I love building relationships and creating connections. Whether professionally, personally, or within my community, I believe some of the best opportunities happen when people feel supported, included, and inspired.

I have always naturally found myself stepping into spaces where I could bring people together, create positive change, and build meaningful communities.

I am incredibly excited to be part of AZALAS and look forward to continuing to learn, grow, collaborate, and contribute alongside so many inspiring leaders."