

MEMORANDUM

August 12, 2025

To: Jan Leshar, Pima County Administrator
Melissa Manriquez, Clerk of the Board

From: Andrés Cano
District 5 Supervisor

AC

RE: Sustaining and Strengthening the Pima Early Education Program Scholarships (PEEPS)

Please place the following item on the August 18, 2025 Board of Supervisors agenda:
Sustaining and Strengthening the Pima Early Education Program Scholarships

Background

Since its launch, the Pima Early Education Program (PEEPS) has served over 3,100 children—including 1,923 in FY24—by expanding access to quality preschool for families who need it most. PEEPS strengthens early learning, supports working parents, and aligns with our Prosperity Initiative and school readiness goals. Beginning in FY25, PEEPS will be funded solely by the Library District at an annual cost of \$10.9 million.

To protect and expand this vital program, we must act with urgency—through stabilization funding, cross-sector partnerships, and long-term sustainability planning.

I respectfully request the Board's consideration and direction on the following items:

1. **Authorize a \$600,000 Allocation from the Library District Contingency Fund to Hold PEEPS Scholarships Harmless in FY26**

Authorize a one-time allocation of \$600,000 from the Library District Contingency to cover the gap created by reduced revenues from jurisdictional partners in the current fiscal year. This funding will prevent anticipated service disruptions to 48 PEEPS scholarship recipients and ensure no families or providers lose access to scholarships or classrooms in the 2025–2026 program year.

2. **Convene a Regional Early Education Roundtable and Jurisdictional Participation Review in partnership and communication with the community led coalition, Preschool Promise Working Group**

Direct the County Administrator to convene a standing roundtable with representatives from the City of Tucson, Marana, Oro Valley, Sahuarita, South Tucson, Vail, and appropriate community partners. The roundtable should identify and coordinate non-fiscal commitments from municipalities that support

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preschool expansion and access. These may include the use of public buildings for classrooms, facility or maintenance support, communications and outreach assistance, or shared local advocacy for state and federal funding. Contributions may include the use of public buildings for classrooms, facility or maintenance support, communications and outreach assistance, or local advocacy for state and federal funds.

Additionally, direct staff to prepare a jurisdiction-level participation report that outlines the number of children served and classrooms hosted in each jurisdiction, school district overlaps, historical financial or in-kind contributions, and areas of unmet need. This information will support data-driven collaboration and help avoid duplicative taxpayer burden.

3. Establish the PEEPS Workforce & Business Leadership Council in partnership and communication with the community led coalition, Preschool Promise Working Group

Direct the County Administrator to create a PEEPS Workforce & Business Leadership Council, in partnership with major employers, Pima Community College, the Southern Arizona Leadership Council, the Chamber for Southern Arizona, and the philanthropic sector. This Council will lead a regional strategy to recruit, retain, and sustain the early childhood education workforce while expanding support for middle-income families currently ineligible for PEEPS scholarships.

Council objectives can include:

- Developing credentialing pathways and tuition assistance for aspiring preschool educators*
- Creating hiring and retention incentive strategies for the early childhood workforce*
- Identifying ZIP codes near major job centers where expanded capacity could benefit working families*
- Launching employer-sponsored tuition matching or shared service models for their own workforce and beyond*
- Offering recognition or naming opportunities for founding business sponsors*

This merged initiative reflects national best practices and provides a shared table for public and private leaders to co-invest in quality, early childhood education. It ensures that PEEPS remains responsive to evolving workforce needs and affordability gaps across income levels. These initiatives allow for diversifying funding sources and partnerships to maintain PEEPS strong.

Conclusion

Pima County must secure the future of PEEPS not just for the next year but for generations into the future. By stabilizing the program, strengthening regional coordination, and leveraging business and philanthropic leadership, we can ensure PEEPS remains a powerful tool for equity, access, and economic mobility.



Office of the
Superintendent

2238 East Ginter Road
Tucson, AZ 85706

Tel: 520.545.2025

August 11, 2025

Supervisor Andrés Cano
Pima County Board of Supervisors, District 5
130 W. Congress Street, 11th Floor
Tucson, AZ 85701

RE: Support for Strengthening Early Childhood Opportunities in Pima County

Dear Supervisor Cano,

On behalf of the Sunnyside Unified School District, I am writing to express our support for your efforts to sustain and strengthen early childhood opportunities across Pima County.

For years, we have witnessed the powerful impact that access to high-quality preschool and early learning environments has on families, educators, and entire neighborhoods. Investments in early childhood not only help children thrive—they create ripple effects across generations by supporting working families, stabilizing local economies, and deepening community resilience.

We appreciate the County's thoughtful leadership in advancing early learning strategies that are rooted in collaboration, long-term vision, and local innovation. As an organization dedicated to promoting community well-being and educational opportunity, Sunnyside welcomes the County's continued commitment to building a strong, accessible, and sustainable early learning ecosystem.

We look forward to engaging in ongoing conversations about how philanthropy, business, and educational and community partners can contribute to this shared vision for the children and families of Pima County.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "J. Gastelum", is written over the word "Sincerely,".

Jose Gastelum
Superintendent
Sunnyside Unified School District



Dustin J. Williams
Superintendent of Schools

Deborah Bryson
Chief Deputy Superintendent

520.724.8451
schools.pima.gov

August 11, 2025

Pima County Board of Supervisors

130 W. Congress Street

Tucson, AZ 85701

RE: Support for the Pima Early Education Program (PEEPs)

Dear Chairman Scott and Members of the Board,

As the Pima County Superintendent of Schools, I am writing to express strong support for the Pima Early Education Program (PEEPs). This program is a proven investment in our community's future, providing young learners with access to high-quality preschool experiences that build the foundation for academic success, social development, and lifelong learning.

Across our county, educators see the impact of early childhood education every day. Children who have the opportunity to attend high-quality preschool arrive in kindergarten more prepared, more confident, and better equipped to thrive. PEEP not only benefits these students, but also strengthens our schools, supports working families, and contributes to the long-term health of our economy.

As the cost of childcare continues to rise, the expansion of eligibility criteria within PEEP will allow more families to access this essential resource. The County's continued investment—paired with collaboration among our cities, towns, and the business community—ensures that PEEP can remain a stable, sustainable, and accessible program for years to come.

I commend the Board of Supervisors for its leadership in protecting and strengthening PEEP, and I look forward to continued partnership in advancing educational opportunities for every child in Pima County.

With Gratitude,

Dustin J. Williams
Pima County Schools Superintendent



LETTER OF SUPPORT

RE: Sustaining and Strengthening the Pima Early Education Program Scholarships (PEEPS)

August 18th, 2025

Honorable Chair Scott, and Members of the Pima County Board of Supervisors,

This is a formal letter of support for Supervisor Cano's agenda item: Sustaining and Strengthening the Pima Early Education Program Scholarships.

The Center for Economic Integrity's (CEI) mission is in alignment with this proposed agenda item on multiple levels. CEI works to build economically strong communities for all utilizing data driven policy solutions and at the same time CEI opposes unfair corporate and government policies and practices that exacerbate the extreme economic divides in our communities.

CEI was deeply disappointed that the Tucson City Council could not find a fiscal path forward during the FY25-26 budget process to continue its commitment to fully funding PEEPs scholarships. The early childhood community turned out in large numbers to advocate for continued city contributions to PEEPs. PEEPs is a vibrant and vital part of the broader early childhood education ecosystem and is in direct alignment with the county and city adopted *Prosperity Initiative*. We were grateful for the final City Council negotiated compromise which included a small contribution to PEEPs. Some is better than none. Sadly, the losers of the city budget process were children and families.

Many of the problems local governments wrestle with including lack of adequate affordable housing, health disparities, environmental sustainability, equity, workforce and economic development (to name just a few) as identified in the *Prosperity Initiative* require long-term public and private sector investments. It is imperative that even during times of fiscal headwinds, we as a community stand together. We must resist policies that are focused on the short-term. This isn't about the next budget or election cycle. It is about having a firm, long-term commitment to investing in our greatest assets: our children and families. This is what the research and data point to as a successful policy strategy. We must believe in ourselves and our collective capacity to sustain our commitments to policy interventions that have far reaching positive social and economic impacts. This is a different conversation than pitting one local jurisdiction or one program against another. This is about all of us together.



LETTER OF SUPPORT

RE: Sustaining and Strengthening the Pima Early Education Program Scholarships (PEEPS)

August 18th, 2025

The Pima County Board of Supervisors, Pima County Staff and Administration are to be commended for your vision and commitment to bringing all sectors of our community together to work toward evidence-based policy solutions that strike at the heart of generational poverty. The proposed actions before you are a strong message of commitment that goes beyond “holding PEEPs harmless” to cover the gap created by the City of Tucson’s reduced funding contribution this budget cycle. This is a message of unity of purpose. *It is a signal to all PEEPs partners that the county is in this for the long haul and continued investment in this highly successful program makes good business sense.*

PEEPs is a bright light in an increasingly dim social and economic policy landscape. Your vote today will continue to infuse this light with the resources and commitment community partners like CEI relies on so we can grow this light into a beacon. It is our sincere hope that this beacon will eventually become a navigation aid that leads to a better future for all of us --- together.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kelly S. Griffith".

Kelly S Griffith, Executive Director

Center for Economic Integrity