

Ellie Martin

From: Betty Villegas [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, August 11, 2026 3:45 PM
To: COB_mail
Subject: [SUSPECT]Fwd: SAEC Contract Renewal, an Additional Perspective
Attachments: Letter to BOS MEC-RPerez.docx

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I forgot to include you. So sorry!

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From: Betty Villegas [REDACTED]
Date: Tue, Aug 11, 2026 at 12:05 PM
Subject: SAEC Contract Renewal, an Additional Perspective
To: <jan.lesher@pima.gov>, <matt.heinz@pima.gov>, andres.cano@pima.gov
 <andres.cano@pima.gov>, jen.allen@pima.gov <jen.allen@pima.gov>, Rex.Scott@pima.gov
 <Rex.Scott@pima.gov>, <Steve.Christy@pima.gov>
CC: <Steve.Holmes@pima.gov>, <Carmine.DeBonis@pima.gov>

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Hello Everyone,

After reading the public comment submitted by Senator Sally Ann Gonzales regarding the Southern Arizona Education Council contract, I felt compelled to share another perspective.

I have attached a letter outlining why I support the continued partnership with SAEC and Rocque Perez's leadership, including information on the organization's accomplishments, reported student outcomes, and the accountability measures being recommended as part of the contract renewal.

I understand the importance of the decision before you and respect the responsibility you have to ensure that public dollars are used effectively and transparently. I hope the information I am providing is helpful as you consider the full record and determine what is in the best interest of our students and Pima County.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Best,
Betty Villegas
 Arizona State Representative, LD 20

August 11, 2026

**Pima County Administrator Jan Lesher and Pima County Board of Supervisors
Re: Southern Arizona Education Council Contract Renewal**

Members of the Board:

I am writing in strong support of renewing Pima County's partnership with the Southern Arizona Education Council and of Rocque Perez continuing his leadership as its President and CEO.

I agree that public dollars require accountability. As someone who has spent much of my career in public service, I believe we should be able to show taxpayers what their investment accomplishes. But accountability also means looking at the full record—and that record demonstrates that this organization is producing meaningful results for young people throughout Pima County.

Rocque did not simply arrive in this position through political connections. He was selected in 2024 following an extensive year-long search. He brought experience from both Arizona State University and the University of Arizona, and he knows the work of this organization from a perspective few others can offer he participated in its youth programs himself before becoming a first-generation university student.

The results reported to Pima County are significant. In 2024–25, MEC deployed 23 Peer Coaches across nine high schools, providing 7,234 hours of service and reaching more than 6,000 students. The organization held its 30th Teen Town Hall with 179 participants, involved students from 12 high schools in its Youth Civic Fellowship, and revived *An Evening to Empower Ed*, drawing more than 260 participants.

The following year, the Peer Coach initiative grew to 61 coaches and 19 advisors across 19 high schools. Participating schools were reported to have an average FAFSA completion rate of 53.23 percent compared with a contemporaneous statewide rate of 40 percent. County-transmitted reports estimate between 5,690 and 5,750 FAFSA completions and potential access to more than \$42 million in federal Pell Grant aid for Pima County students.

Those are outcomes. Those are students and families being reached.

I also believe it is important to distinguish between the County's **\$122,000 contract with SAEC** and Rocque's compensation. They are not the same thing. The County contribution supports the organization and its work. SAEC's current budget includes approximately \$129,000 for programs and services, compared with approximately \$95,000 in total personnel expense. Rocque's annual salary under his employment agreement is \$91,770.

Historical salary comparisons should also be made carefully. IRS records show that former Executive Director received \$70,937 in salary in fiscal year 2014, in addition to \$13,830 in

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other compensation. Adjusting the salary alone for inflation puts that \$70,937 at approximately \$100,000 in today's dollars, than Rocque's current \$91,770 salary. Comparing dollar amounts separated by more than a decade without adjusting for inflation does not provide taxpayers with an accurate picture.

Questions have also been raised about Rocque's temporary service on the Tucson City Council and subsequent return to SAEC. The public record is clear. He resigned from his paid position because of conflict-of-interest considerations when he assumed the Council seat, served the organization in an unpaid capacity as the City's representative, and his potential return was publicly approved subject to a later formal vote. His new employment agreement was subsequently considered and approved by the Executive Committee.

There are certainly areas where SAEC can improve. I expect the Teen Town Hall to return. I support timely meeting minutes, clear financial reporting, measurable deliverables and full transparency. But those are reasons to strengthen accountability—not reasons to dismantle or destabilize work that is demonstrating value.

That is why I believe the recommendation from the County Administrator strikes the right balance: renew the contract for one year while requiring specific monthly, quarterly and annual deliverables, conditioning payments on review of those reports, and providing quarterly reports to the Board of Supervisors.

Rocque brings institutional knowledge, firsthand understanding of the young people these programs are intended to serve, experience within our state's higher-education institutions, and an ability to build partnerships across schools, universities, government and community organizations. He has also helped lead a significant expansion of the Council's college-access work.

Public support from elected officials should neither qualify nor disqualify someone from a position. **Performance should. Results should. Accountability should.**

On those measures, I believe Rocque Perez has earned the opportunity to continue this work.

I respectfully urge the Board to approve the one-year renewal, together with the enhanced accountability measures recommended by County staff and allow SAEC and Rocque to build on the progress already underway.

Sincerely

Betty Villegas

Pima County District 5 Resident