



METROPOLITAN
EDUCATION
COMMISSION

OUR VOICE • OUR COMMUNITY • OUR FUTURE

OUR VOICE, OUR COMMUNITY, OUR FUTURE.



Annual Report 2022-2023

Our Voice, Our Community, Our Future

History: The Metropolitan Education Commission was established by the City of Tucson and Pima County in 1990 as a joint Commission for educational and advocacy purposes. The Commission's primary functions are to advise, make recommendations, and serve as an advocate in all the areas as they affect the educational welfare of the citizens of Tucson and Pima County.

Mission: To advocate for a quality and affordable education from preschool to post-secondary for all residents of the City of Tucson and Pima County.

Vision: Students of all ages and backgrounds will be academically prepared, successfully graduate, and pursue a post-secondary pathway and career of their choice.

Our work is informed by the following goals:

Our Voice - To equip students, families, educators, business and community leaders with information that will empower them to advocate for the educational welfare of the citizens of the City of Tucson and Pima County.

Our Community - To form strategic collaborations with individuals and organizations to advocate for all levels of education, pre-kindergarten to post-secondary. To engage youth and families in advocating for education. To recognize individuals and groups within the community who demonstrate exemplary service to students and to education.

Our Future - To promote graduation from high school as a first step toward an enriched future for students and a realistic sense of their place within the community. To guide students through various dynamic pathways and prepare them to contribute to a highly skilled workforce.

Our Programs and Services - To offer programs and services that prepare students for a more equitable and meaningful future:

- Youth Advisory Council
- Regional College Access Center
- Teen Town Hall
- Civic Engagement Day
- Keys to Employment
- Crystal Apple Awards

Land Acknowledgement

We honor the tribal nations who have served as caretakers of this land from time immemorial and respectfully acknowledge the ancestral homelands of the Tohono O'odham Nation and the multi-millennial presence of the Pascua Yaqui Tribe within Pima County. Consistent with Pima County's commitment to diversity and inclusion, we strive toward building equal-partner relationships with Arizona's tribal nations.

2022-2023 Accomplishments

The Metropolitan Education Commission has experienced several successes this year. This section will highlight specific accomplishments within the Regional College Access Center, the Youth Advisory Council - including TeenTown Hall and Civic Engagement Day, MEC Outreach and Community Engagement, and MEC events/initiatives, such as Key to Employment and the Crystal Apple Awards.

Regional College Access Center (RCAC)

Established in 2008, the RCAC remains the original community-based college access center in Pima County. The purpose is to reach low-income, first-generation students and their families to assist with the search and application processes to any post-secondary pathway, i.e. certificate, vocational, technical programs, community college or university.

College and Career Support in the 2022-2023 Academic Year

The RCAC serves students across Tucson and Pima County throughout the academic and calendar year. From July 2022 through June 2023, RCAC staff, AmeriCorps Peer Coaches, and volunteers have provided college and career support to over 4,721 students, families, and counselors. We greatly expanded our presentation and event offerings, available to all community partners and school sites. With the help of MEC staff, the majority of these offerings were made available in both English and Spanish.

RCAC Network Meetings were hosted quarterly, bringing together our counselors, community partners, and Arizona college and university representatives to share relevant information in support of the goals of our Tucson and Pima County high school youth. A special thanks to the Flinn Scholarship, JA Inspire, ABOR, Ask Benji, Superintendent Dustin Williams, UArizona's KEYS Research Internship, the Community Foundation of Southern Arizona Scholarship program, Pima County One Stop Employment Center, and the Marge Christensen Gould Memorial Scholarship for presenting to the Network!

Growing strategic partnerships across Arizona's wide college and career access network is a top annual priority of the RCAC. We are proud to have established new partnerships this year with the following organizations: Unidas Teen Philanthropic Program, Southern Arizona Aids Foundation, Pima County Prosperity Initiative, and UArizona's Project Outreach FAMILIA.

Oncoming partnerships were strengthened, including with Arizona Serve, Santa Rosa Neighborhood Center, Youth on Their Own, Pima County One Stop Employment Center, Pima

County JTED, Scholarships A-Z, Flinn Scholarship Program, Earn to Learn; Education Forward's Ask Benji and College Knowing and Going programs; UArizona's Steps 2 STEM and OLEH pre-college programs; UArizona's Arizona Admissions, NewStart, and TakeCharge Cats teams; Higher Ground, Pima County Public Library, and the Community Foodbank of Southern Arizona. The RCAC continued its partnership with the Arizona Statewide Virtual FAFSA Assistance program, supporting students in completing their FAFSA applications. The RCAC Program Coordinator attended the ABOR FAFSA Summit at the Helios Campus in Phoenix, Arizona.

The RCAC expanded its school partnerships as well, connecting with INOVA High School in Casa Grande and presenting at the 23-24 Sunnyside High School Freshman Experience. The second annual Mock Interview & Networking event was held at the MEC office, made possible by the time and expertise of three volunteer community partners, two MEC Commissioners and MEC staff.

RCAC AmeriCorps Peer Coach Program

*"Being a Peer Coach has been so inspiring and has taught me things that I can use in my everyday life. I love being able to help others and make a difference in my service."
(22-23 Rincon High School Peer Coach)*

*"I found the Peer Coach program a great way to further my education while helping others do the same. It's really nice knowing I'm making a difference for my generation's future."
(22-23 Tucson High Magnet School Peer Coach)*



The RCAC AmeriCorps Peer Coach Program was facilitated in the following schools during the 2022-2023 academic year: (Tucson Unified School District) Tucson High Magnet School, Rincon High School, Sabino High School, Sahuaro High School, Pueblo High School; (Sunnyside Unified School District) Sunnyside High School, Desert View High School; (Vail School District) Empire High School; Saint Augustine Catholic High School; and Tanque Verde High School.

On Saturday May 6, 2023, the RCAC hosted the final Peer Coach Program team meeting of the 2022-2023 academic year/2023 fiscal year. The May team meeting is reserved to celebrate the upcoming graduation and accomplishments of the Peer Coach cohort. All 22 cohort members who began the RCAC-AmeriCorps Peer Coach Program in July 2022 completed their 300 hours of AmeriCorps National Service and graduated from their respective high schools across Tucson and Pima County the week of May 22, 2023.

These recently graduated students have plans to attend the following colleges & universities: University of Arizona, Arizona State University, Howard University, Barnard University, University of Notre Dame, and Brigham Young University.

Collectively, this group of youth leaders completed over 7,000 hours of AmeriCorps service this year, supporting their peers in their college & career planning. They hosted one-on-one postsecondary pathway consultations with their peers, hosted FAFSA nights at their school campuses, facilitated classroom presentations and discussions around college and career topics, attended community service events, and overall increased the college and career going culture at their schools. These students also took part in three personal finance modules, offered by UArizona's TakeCharge Cats.



We are excited to welcome our 2023-2024 RCAC AmeriCorps Peer Coach cohort, including 19 students representing eight high schools across Tucson and Pima County. These schools include: (Tucson Unified School District) Tucson High Magnet School, Rincon High School, Sabino High School; (Sunnyside Unified School District) Sunnyside High School, Desert View High School; (Vail School District) Empire High School, Andrada High School; and Saint Augustine Catholic High School. These students will receive training in college and career readiness, personal

finance, civic leadership, community dialogue facilitation, youth mental health first aid, and much more; thanks to the RCAC's diverse and vast array of community partnerships.

Thank you to all the volunteers, students, school personnel, community based organizations, college and university partners, City of Tucson and Pima County employees, and more who made the work of the RCAC possible this year. Your time, expertise, and commitment has made possible the support of thousands of local students seeking postsecondary pathways across Arizona and the United States.

Special thanks to Chelsea Forer, RCAC Program Coordinator, for her dedication, creativity, fortitude, and diligence in advancing postsecondary attainment and career readiness for youth in Pima County and the City of Tucson.

Youth Advisory Council (YAC)

In 2022-2023, the YAC had a productive year which was led by a dedicated and diligent officer team. The officers were passionate, committed, and organized. Hannah began the fiscal year as a Youth Commissioner, then became elected as Vice President.

| | | |
|--------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Christopher Amanat | President | Basis North |
| Hannah Liu | Vice President YAC Commissioner | University High School |
| Nina Raju | Secretary | Catalina Foothills High School |
| Emilia Kim | Treasurer | Basis Oro Valley |
| Katie Rose Wilbur | YAC Commissioner | University High School |

YAC meetings occurred throughout the academic year, and were held virtually. In addition, the YAC officers met monthly, both virtually and in person, and communicated regularly via text and email. The officers also participated in an officer training that was held at the MEC office and facilitated by Dr. Daisy Rodriguez Pitel.

| Meeting Date | Location/Event | Attendance |
|--------------|-----------------------|------------|
| September 7 | Virtual meeting | 13 |
| October 5 | Virtual meeting | 15 |
| November 9 | Virtual meeting | 12 |
| February 28 | Virtual meeting | 13 |
| March 5 & 29 | Virtual meeting | 11, 14 |
| April 26 | Virtual meeting | 14 |
| May 22 | YAC Appreciation, MEC | 13 |

The YAC Appreciation event was held in person at the MEC office and was attended by YAC members and officers. This celebratory event included food, fun, and recognized the students who volunteered and participated in the YAC throughout the year.



Teen Town Hall

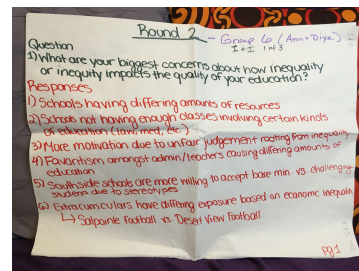
This year, the Teen Town Hall (TTH) was largely planned, coordinated, and implemented by the Youth Advisory Council and led by Co-Chairs, Youth Commissioners, Katie Rose and Hannah. Active planning began in late November and continued through early February. The Center for Community Mediation and Facilitation assisted in critical ways; they provided facilitation training, prepared the scripts, and supported the YAC TTH planning process.

The Teen Town Hall was held in person on February 9, 2023 at the Santa Rosa Neighborhood Center. Seventy-eight students participated and represented 12 high schools across 4 public school districts and 3 private programs in Tucson and Pima County. The high schools included Basis Oro Valley, Basis Tucson North, Catalina Foothills High School, Sunnyside High School, Vail Academy and High School, Desert View High School, Pueblo High School, University High School, Rincon High School, Salpointe High School, Star Academic High School, and Tucson High School.

Critical conversations occurred at the Teen Town Hall and focused on these topics: College Access and Career Readiness, Substance Abuse, Addiction, and Violence, Mental Health, Youth Suicide, and Support Systems, and Inequality and Inequity.



In their small groups, participants discussed one specific topic, sharing their perspectives and experiences then brainstormed recommendations on addressing their area.



Another important aspect of the day included conversations with community leaders, such as Tucson Council Member Lane Santa Cruz, MEC Commissioner Dr. Marla Franco, MEC Commissioner Dr. David Dore, and University of Arizona Administrator Dr. Heather Haeger.

**A summary of the student recommendations can be requested from the MEC staff.*

Civic Engagement Day

The Youth Advisory Council Officers worked diligently in preparing and organizing Civic Engagement Day (CED), including marketing, registration, and other logistics. CED was scheduled for Monday, May 15, 2023.

The CED organizers worked tirelessly to arrange meetings with eight different legislators, including Nancy Gutierrez, Lupe Diaz, Mariana Sandoval, Oscar De Los Santos, Justine Wadsack, Michele Pena, Consuelo Hernandez, and Rosanna Gobaldon.

Student participants also attended Civic Engagement Training on Sunday, May 7, to become familiar with the expectations of CED, write their individual narrative, and practice meeting as a group with an elected official. Pictured here with Pima County Supervisor Adelita Grijalva. Mark Hanna, former Pima Community College board member, also met with students.



On the Friday prior to the scheduled Civic Engagement Day, legislators learned that they would be participating in a floor meeting the following Monday to discuss and possibly vote on 8-10 bills. Civic Engagement day was postponed and rescheduled for Friday, September 8, 2023.

Outreach and Community Engagement

The MEC has been active and visible in promoting the services offered and provided by the MEC through tabling opportunities at Columbia Library, attending Lunch & Learn events, participating at the 11th Annual Youth & Peace Conference in November, and being visible at a number of different high schools (Desert View, Sunnyside, and Pueblo) - tabling as well as conducting presentations. The MEC has also broadened our visibility through partnering with College, Knowing and Going (CKG), another college readiness organization, as well as participating in a monthly meeting as a member of the Pima County Behavioral Health Committee. Also, Youth Commissioner Hannah Lui met with Representatives Andres Cano and Leezah Sun to discuss a proposed Asian American curriculum bill proposal for K-12 public schools. YAC Officers attended Tucson Mentoring Kids' "Thanks" and "Giving" event which was graciously funded by Commissioners Dave Mason and Kendra Davey.

In October, the Interim Executive Director served on a virtual roundtable entitled, "Women Leading in the 21st Century" where she shared her experiences and perspective as a leader. Dr. Pitel also led a presentation during Filipino American History Month on her book, "Nakikita: More than a Month" at San Diego State University. The Interim Executive Director initiated and coordinated a virtual leadership event entitled, RISE UP, with Mita International School in Tokyo, Japan and Tucson high school students in December.



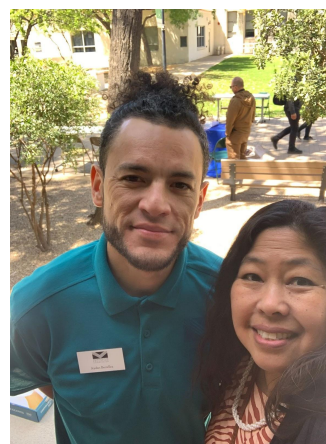
RCAC Program Coordinator Chelsea Forer assisted with the facilitation and Youth Commissioner Katie Rose Wilbur was instrumental in sharing her experiences.

To increase greater visibility and awareness of MEC events, a few new efforts were implemented. The development and distribution of a quarterly e-newsletter, *The Metropolitan Minute*, was established. The MEC also translated various college readiness presentations from English to Spanish.

Key to Employment

The Metropolitan Education Commission partnered with Pima Community College to co-sponsor the Key to Employment event. Since the pandemic has entered our lives, Key to Employment had not occurred in person. The 24th Annual Key to Employment Symposium was held on Tuesday, April 4, 2023 from 8am-Noon at the Downtown Campus, utilizing the Amethyst Room, classrooms, and outside pavilion.

Over 50 Exhibitors participated, including various higher education institutions and STEM disciplines. 150 youth participated from 5 different high schools (Andrada High School, Catalina High School, Mountain View High School, and Sunnyside High School) and noted these highlights: PCC Campus Tour, students learning about hospitality, health care, and EMT through classroom presentations and demonstrations.



Student Comments included:

“I learned about what forest rangers do and more about the automotive industry.”

“College isn’t as bad as I thought, you can do many things.”

“I learned about machines and robotics.”

“I learned about cybersecurity, and new job opportunities.”

“That many different careers are offered and there are many different ways to not have to pay for tuition and school.”

Crystal Apple Education Award

Every Spring, the MEC recognizes outstanding individuals who strengthen the educational experience in the City of Tucson and Pima County. Nominations are received, reviewed, and evaluated by a committee of MEC Commissioners and YAC student leaders.

The award categories include: Outstanding Teacher, Outstanding Counselor, Outstanding Higher Education Advocate, Outstanding Education Advocate, Outstanding Youth, Outstanding Student Leader, Outstanding Community Partner, Dr. June Webb-Vignery Advocate Award, and The Lifetime Achievement Award.

To kick off Teacher Appreciation Week in the beginning of May, the award recipients were recognized with a Crystal Apple Award at their educational institution. The recipients for this year:

Hakima Abdulkadir, Outstanding Student Leader, Sunnyside High School
Casandra Chavarria, Outstanding Youth, Sunnyside High School
John Contreras, Outstanding Teacher, Pueblo High School
Roberto Cruze, Outstanding Education Advocate, TUSD
Adelita Grijalva, Lifetime Achievement Award, Pima County Supervisor/TUSD Board
Dr. Alexei Marquez, Outstanding University Advocate, The University Of Arizona
Christina Tellez, Outstanding Counselor, Desert View High School
The Center for Community Mediation and Facilitation, Outstanding Community Partner
Governor Katie Hobbs, Dr. June Webb-Vignery Advocacy Award



Thank you to the Commissioners, Monica Brinkerhoff, Dr. Karen Tam, Dr. Treya Allen, Mark Hanna, Katie Rose Wilbur, and YAC Officers, Hannah Liu and Nina Raju, who assisted in reviewing and scoring the nominations, and presenting the awards.

2022-2023 Challenges

A few challenges, distribution of funding, commissioner engagement, and personnel changes, impacted the MEC's level of productivity and efficiency this fiscal year. Fortunately, these challenges did not disrupt our ability to accomplish our goals.

Funding

In the beginning of the fiscal year, the MEC experienced a delay in receiving funding from both Pima County and the City of Tucson. Gratefully, the delay of funding did not adversely affect the level of motivation and productivity of our team.

Commissioner Engagement

There has been inconsistent engagement by the commissioners, especially around monthly meeting attendance, active participation in MEC roles, events, and initiatives, and fundraising efforts.

Meetings

During the spring, there were repeated months where the MEC Commissioner Meetings failed to reach quorum. This disrupts the MEC's ability to engage in conversation about MEC operations and services, appoint and introduce new commissioners, and relay timely information.

Active Engagement

Throughout the year, Commissioner engagement has been inconsistent. When there is an MEC event, 1-6 Commissioners participate; this number includes Board members. The Board has been unable to fill the secretary role and there are several Commissioner vacancies.

Fundraising

The MEC has struggled with our fundraising efforts. In the fall, the MEC raised a little over \$400. In the Spring, the Key to Employment Exhibitor fees brought in a surplus of \$1549. Also, three Commissioners donated \$300 to Mentoring Tucson Kids that supported four YAC Officers to attend. The greatest MEC fundraiser has been the Crystal Apple Awards luncheon which the MEC has not organized or held since 2019.

Personnel

The MEC staff experienced some unanticipated personnel changes in February and June. The staff began the fiscal year with four staff, two full-time and two part-time, and concluded the year with two. During these changes, responsibilities were shifted to meet the needs and goals of MEC operations.



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MEC Data for 2022-2023

| Higher Education Pathways: Regional College Access Center Activities | |
|---|---|
| <u>High School Counselor Support</u> : RCAC Network Meetings and Professional Development Workshops/Trainings | 4 RCAC Network Meetings |
| <u>Peer Coach Program Participants</u> : Number of high school students who serve as a career and college readiness Peer Coach (Arizona Serve) | 22 |
| <u>Peer Coach Program School Sites</u> : Number of high schools who agree to implement the Peer Coach Program | 10 |
| <u>Resources Through Technology</u> : Use of Website & Social Media Technology, unique website visits, # of social media followers | Not monitored |
| <u>Advising Appointments</u> : Number of individual unduplicated career and college advising appointments with students and/or parents. | 253 <i>Conducted by RCAC Prog. Coord. & 22-23 Peer Coaches</i> |
| <u>College Admission</u> : Number of individual students who received assistance with completing a college admissions application AND <u>FAFSA Completion & Verification</u> : Number of individual students who received assistance with the completion and verification process | 4,411 <i>PChip Output Goal: 5000</i> |
| <u>Workforce Training</u> : Number of students | 251 |
| <u># of participants receiving mental health resources</u> | 59 |
| <i>Total number of students served in 2022-2023</i> | <i>4,721</i> |
| Youth Program Functions | |
| Youth Advisory Council (YAC) meetings: Number of students involved | 105 |
| Youth Advisory Council (YAC) meetings: Number of schools involved | 5 |
| Youth Advisory Council (YAC): Number of community leaders involved | 6 |
| RISE UP- virtual: Number of students who participated | 20 |
| Teen Town Hall- virtual: Number of students who participated | 78 |
| Teen Town Hall- virtual: Number of community leaders who participated | 8 |
| Teen Town Hall- virtual: Number of schools that participated | 12 |
| Key to Employment- in person: Number of students who participated | 150 |
| Civic Engagement Day Training: Number of students who participated in the event | 11 |
| <i>Total number of students served in 2022-2023</i> | <i>364</i> |
| <i>Total number of community leaders who participated in 2022-2023</i> | <i>14</i> |

| | |
|---|---------|
| Community Engagement | |
| Crystal Apple Awards | |
| # of participating school districts | 2 |
| # of participating elected officials | 10 |
| # of awards presented | 9 |
| Leveraged Funds | |
| Value of other federal, state, county, city, private, foundation funds and in-kind donations secured for the year | ~\$1000 |

| | |
|--|----|
| Commissioner Engagement | |
| Number of Commissioner meetings | 9 |
| Average Number of Commissioners who attended MEC meetings | 14 |
| Number of Commissioners who served on Executive Board | 5 |
| Number of Commissioners who participated in MEC fundraisers | 8 |
| Number of Commissioners who participated in MEC activities | 22 |
| Number of Education Advocacy activities led/co-led by MEC | 1 |
| Number of Education Advocacy Collaborations with State, City, County & Community Organizations | 1 |

Much gratitude to the MEC Commissioners, Executive Board, and MEC staff for your individual and collective support, contributions, and encouragement during 2022-2023, especially during unstable moments and unexpected challenges throughout the year.

My deepest gratitude to the MEC staff, Chelsea Forer, Aydan Berrellez, Hannah Lansa, and Donna Wertman, who have been instrumental and integral players in the MEC's accomplishments. Thank you for your patience, compassion, diligence, and efforts as we moved forward with our services, always striving for effectiveness, greater stability, and excellence in all that we do!

