



Newsletter

AZALAS • APRIL 2025

Aspiring LEADERS



"A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way."

- John C. Maxwell



For everyone involved in the *Aspiring Leaders* program, it is truly rewarding to witness their growth and development.

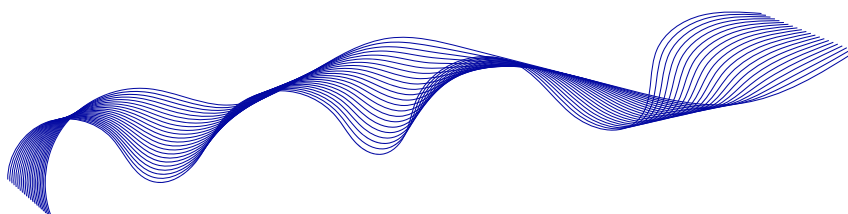
Joe Quintana
AZALAS Training Facilitator

As the school year draws closer to the end, so does this cycle of the Aspiring Leaders workshops. By the end of the month, our year one participants will have successfully completed their first year in the program, while our year two participants will take part in their final workshop, marking the completion of their two-year journey. We are confident that each participant has gained valuable insights into their leadership path, equipping them with the skills and confidence needed to take the next step toward a formal leadership role. For everyone involved in the Aspiring Leaders program, it is truly rewarding to witness their growth and development.

In this edition, we proudly recognize our current year one and year two participants. In addition, we extend our gratitude to the following individuals for representing their cohorts in this newsletter:

- Antonia Morado Romero – Sunnyside School District, Tucson Region (year one)
- Rosa Alvarez – Sahuarita School District, Tucson Region (year two)
- Karen Rascon – Gadsden Elementary School District, Yuma Region (year one)
- Joseph Daily – Yuma Union High School District, Yuma Region (year two)
- Jessica Montelongo – Roosevelt School District, Phoenix Region (year one)
- Ciara Goulette – Saddle Mountain School District, Phoenix Region (year two)

Please join us in celebrating and encouraging these aspiring leaders as they continue preparing for their next steps in administration. With dedicated individuals like them, the future of our schools is in great hands.





Growing as Leaders

Reflections from the AZALAS Aspiring Leaders Cohort

Antonia Romero
Sunnyside Unified School District

My name is Antonia Morado Romero, and I am a proud leader within the Sunnyside Unified School District, currently serving at Elvira Elementary School. Being part of the AZALAS Aspiring Leaders Cohort has been an eye-opening experience, pushing me to grow and refine my leadership skills in ways I never expected.

A huge part of what makes this program so impactful is Joe Quintana. His student-first mindset is at the core of everything we do, reminding us that every decision we make as leaders must serve the best interests of our students. His knowledge, experience, and passion for education are evident in every session, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to learn from him. He is supported by Larry Martinez, a long-time Tucson leader, whose contributions to our discussions push our thinking further. I love hearing the stories and experiences from both of them.

One of the most powerful experiences was hearing from a panel of administrators who shared their journeys into leadership. They spoke candidly about the challenges they faced, the lessons they learned, and the responsibilities that come with being an administrator. Their insight gave us a real-world perspective on what it takes to lead effectively.

Following that, we dove into conducting difficult conversations, a skill that's easy to overlook but absolutely essential in leadership. This wasn't just a theoretical discussion—we simulated real-life scenarios, navigating tough conversations with different stakeholders while Mr. Quintana threw unexpected challenges our way. We took on the role of administrators while Mr. Quintana portrayed the stakeholder, challenging us to navigate a difficult conversation in real time. It was a hands-on, high-pressure exercise that pushed us to think on our feet and respond with confidence and professionalism.

Most recently, we've been focusing on preparing for administrator interviews, which has meant rolling up our sleeves and diving into our resumes and cover letters. It's one thing to have experience, but it's another to communicate it effectively. We conducted a mock interview in which one cohort member served as the candidate while four others acted as the interview panel. We also reviewed the scoring process from a human resources perspective. We've had honest conversations about what makes a strong candidate, and I've walked away with concrete ways to improve my own materials.

I also want to give a huge shoutout to Sunnyside Unified School District for not only hosting this opportunity but for truly investing in leadership development within our Tucson community.

Sunnyside understands that strong leaders build strong schools, and their commitment to ensuring every student is college, career, and community ready is inspiring. “Our Impact, Their Future” isn’t just a saying—it’s the work happening every day in our district.

I want to recognize my fellow cohort members in the Tucson Year One Cohort. Their discussions, perspectives, and insights have made this journey even more meaningful. It’s been an honor learning alongside such passionate and dedicated educators.

I walk away from each session feeling more prepared, more inspired, and more confident in my ability to lead. I’m incredibly proud to be part of AZALAS Aspiring Leaders, and I look forward to what’s ahead.

“

**A leader takes people
where they want to go.
A great leader takes
people where they
don’t necessarily want
to go, but where they
ought to be.**

- Rosalynn Carter

”

TUCSON REGION

Year One

Sunnyside Unified School District

Angela Estrella
Tiffany Mendibles Munoz
Antonia Morado Romero
Kevin Paulson
Ken Skeggs
Yasmin Silva
Vicki Staley
Courtney Vasquez

Tucson Unified School District

Alma Carmona Alday
Jessica Bernal Mejia
Jeaneette A. Gutierrez
Maritza Mason
Nicole Ramirez

Santa Cruz Valley Unified School District

Luz Andrade
Michelle Cota
Alex Palumbo

Nogales Unified School District

Alfred Battu
Melina Hernandez
Lizette Ocampo
Bernardo Sanchez
George Thomas



Growing as Leaders

Reflections from the AZALAS Aspiring Leaders Cohort

Rosa Alvarez
Sahuarita Unified School District

As an aspiring leader, I recognize—along with all participants in the Tucson Region Year Two Cohort—that education is an ever-evolving field requiring continuous learning and adaptation. I, Rosa Alvarez from Sahuarita Unified School District, am honored to be part of this journey alongside a dedicated network of educators. The knowledge we have gained, the strategies we have developed, and the perspectives we have shared will continue to shape our leadership and the educational communities we serve. Our shared commitment to Latino communities remains at the heart of our work, ensuring that we foster inclusive, equitable, and culturally responsive learning environments where all students can succeed.

Through thought-provoking dialogue, we have explored essential topics in educational leadership, equity, and advocacy. Our cohort has delved into the complexities of school administration, instructional leadership, and

community engagement, while striving to improve educational outcomes for all students. We have examined a wide range of topics, including school finances, résumé building, interview preparation, and ethical leadership, ensuring that all decision-making aligns with students' academic achievement and well-being. With the collective expertise within our Tucson Region Year Two Cohort, we bridge the gap between theory and practice, applying our learning in meaningful, real-world ways to drive positive change. As participants in the AZALAS Aspiring Leaders Tucson Region Year Two Cohort, we represent several school districts, each contributing valuable insights and expertise. Together, we embrace the responsibility of continuous learning and leadership, ensuring that our collective efforts drive meaningful and lasting change in education.

TUCSON REGION

Year Two

Nogales Unified District:

Lizette Gamez
Daniela G-Salazar
Anabelle Gerardo
Elizabeth Haros
Michelle Osuna
Edith Sarmiento

Sahuarita Unified School District

Rosa Alvarez

Santa Cruz Valley Unified District

Lizette Arellano
Tania Barojas
Brandi Clarke
Bahavana Gupta

Sunnyside Unified District:

Diana Nunez
Jesse Ortega
Karina Paco
Kerri Ravenscroft
George Renteria
Jennifer Smith
Roman Tellez



Year of Growth and Connection Reflections from the AZALAS Aspiring Leaders Cohort

Jessica Montelongo
Roosevelt School District

This year, the Phoenix Region Year One Aspiring Leaders Cohort, facilitated by the incredible Joe Quintana, has been nothing short of transformative. The cohort is made up of passionate educators from across the Valley—teacher leaders, coaches, deans of students, and assistant principals—all united by a common goal: to grow as aspiring school leaders and make a lasting impact in their communities.

From the very first workshop, which included a superintendent panel featuring leaders from Roosevelt, Cartwright, and other districts, the cohort engaged in rich conversations around leadership, systems, and the real-life experiences of those guiding schools across the state.

Throughout the year, the cohort participated in a variety of meaningful learning experiences—ranging from mock assistant principal and principal interviews to practicing how to navigate difficult leadership conversations.

Members also had the opportunity to learn directly from sitting principals, gaining insight into what a principal needs to succeed in their first year and how leadership evolves over time—from the steep learning curve of year one to the strategic, visionary work of year five and beyond. These insights have been invaluable in helping the cohort reflect on who they are as leaders and who they aspire to become.

What has truly made this cohort special is the leadership of Mr. Joe Quintana. Through his storytelling, mentorship, and exceptional professional journey, he has grounded the cohort's learning in the values of community, service, and cultural pride. He represents the very heart of AZALAS—passion, purpose, and people. The cohort is grateful for his guidance, wisdom, and unwavering support.

The cohort also wishes to acknowledge and celebrate the remarkable aspiring leaders who have been part of this journey.

PHOENIX REGION

Year One

Avondale

Audriana Gates

Balsz

Alexandra Moya

Cartwright

Jason Edwards

Vanessa Lozano

Morgan Mendryzcki

Alexandra Wisneski

Isaac

Areli Jimenez

Littleton

Angela Ilzarbe-Nijdl

Jeanette Kelley

Raquel Pierce

Elliot Wasbotten

Cassandra Lockard

Mesa Public Schools

Janelle Cota

Jose Esteban Ruiz

Alysia Torres

Phoenix Elementary

Rosalia Berumen

Alicia Rosado

Jennifer Sumida

Phoenix Union

Yolanda Jackson

Reyna Preciado

Evette Romero

Roosevelt

Anahi Montelongo

Jessica Montelongo

Elizabeth Sousa

Tolleson

Viviana Arroyo

Jesse Delgado

Jennifer Gardner

Vanessa Recio

Gabriela Rodriguez

Ashleigh Morton

Ernesto Tostado

Dr. Juan Zamora Tellez

The cohort thanks each member for their commitment to growth, openness to learning, and shared vision for leading schools and communities into the future.



Growing as Leaders

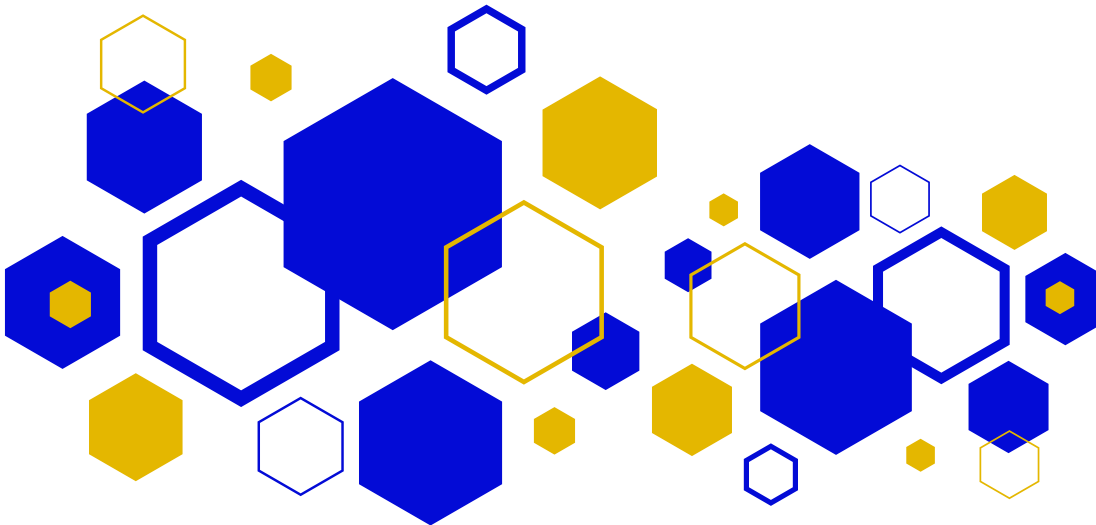
Reflections from the AZALAS Aspiring Leaders Cohort

Ciara Goulette
Saddle Mountain School District

As we approach the end of the school year, I am honored to recognize the Phoenix Region Year Two Aspiring Leaders Cohort. During this experience, it was evident that each educational leader of the cohort possessed their own unique insights and experiences, which, in harmony, showcased a collective passion for equity, inclusion, and excellence in education. Mr. Joe Quintana's training inspired many members, myself included, to reach new professional heights to positively impact the communities we serve. I want to warmly congratulate those who have taken on new leadership roles this school year and commend you for your resilience and dedication to making a difference in public education.

The experience of year two refined our leadership approaches, ensuring that every decision we make is as student-centered as possible. The discussions reflected a stronger level of ethical expertise, decisiveness, and time efficiency, surpassing even those we had in our prior year as a cohort. Engaging in breakout groups, simulations, and personal narratives fostered collaboration and connection for all. As a developing professional, being in a room with such bright leaders—including a former superintendent, administrators, and leading teachers—has been an invaluable and unforgettable experience for me.

In closing, I would like to celebrate each member of our cohort for another accomplished year. May you continue to embrace your gifts, compassion, and leadership as you embark on the next chapter of your journey.



PHOENIX REGION

Year Two

Cartwright School District

Andrea Barrera
Myisha Dixon
Erica Andrade Faitala
Shawn Little
Ramon Lopez

Isaac School District

Heather Ayres
Joseph Baca
Manuela (Nelly) Duran
Laura Galindo
Kristen Jahrman

Mesa Public Schools

Kayla Thrushman

Pendergast Elementary School District

Ovett Chapman
Leah Froke
Richard Helm
Julie Porter

Roosevelt School District

Isidro Alvarez
Maria Alvarado
Armando Galindo
Aldie Lopez
Daniel Rangel

Saddle Mountain Unified School District

Ciara Goulette

Tolleson Elementary School District

Wendy Ceja Sanchez
Aleksandra West Taylor

Tolleson Union High School District

Lindsey Christiana
Sara Contreras
Jason Fleming
Camie McReynolds



AZALAS Aspiring Leaders *Experience*

Karen Rascon
Gadsden Elementary School District

As a 7th-grade ELA teacher, mentor teacher, and Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) member, I have had the incredible opportunity to participate in the AZALAS Aspiring Leaders program while completing my Master of Arts in Education, Administration and Supervision internship. This experience has been transformative, providing invaluable insight into leadership, the administrative role, and the essential qualities of an effective school leader.

Throughout our sessions, we have engaged with experienced educational leaders who have shared their journeys, challenges, and perspectives on what it takes to lead a successful school or district. A recurring theme has been alignment—ensuring that student achievement, well-being, and organizational goals move in the same direction. We've also navigated complex scenarios that have challenged us to reflect on our leadership styles, decision-making processes, and ability to engage in difficult yet necessary conversations.

One of the most impactful lessons I've taken away is the importance of knowing when it's time to take the next step. As one of our mentors shared, "The moment you start questioning whether you're ready to lead, you likely already are."

Additionally, we've explored the significance of emotional intelligence, learning to be comfortable with discomfort and recognizing the weight of leadership decisions.

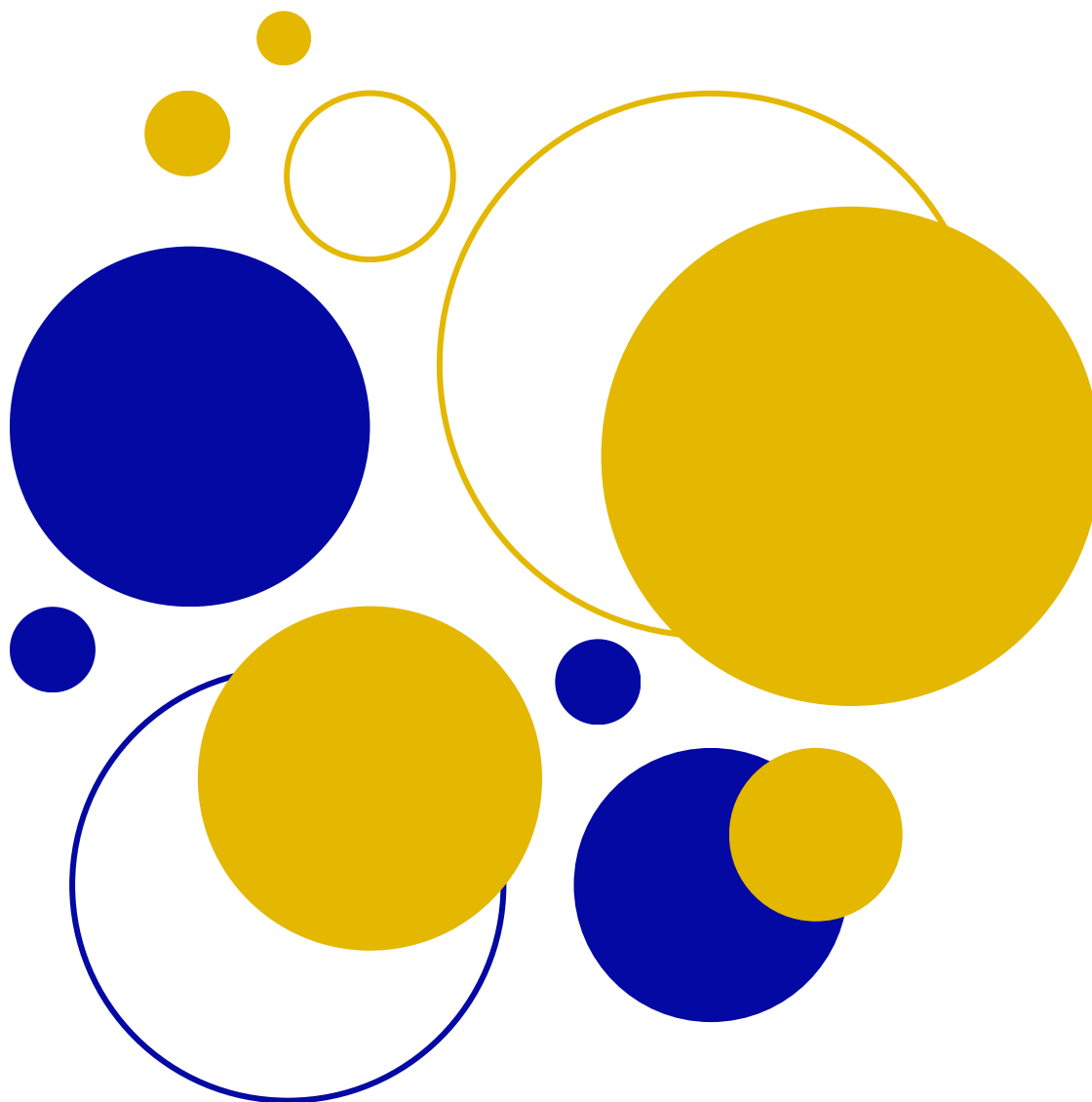
Beyond the content of the program, the cohort experience itself has been invaluable. We come from diverse districts, grade levels, and backgrounds, which enriches our discussions and broadens our perspectives. This diversity allows us to analyze key leadership principles through multiple lenses, ensuring we remain reflective and adaptive in our leadership approaches. Our facilitator, Joe Quintana, has been an incredible mentor, guiding us through insightful discussions and bringing in experienced principals, superintendents, and district leaders. These guest speakers have reinforced the idea that leadership is not about dictating change but about listening, supporting, and valuing what is already in place. We've discussed the significance of establishing a culture of respect, making decisions based on collective priorities, and leading with dignity for all school stakeholders—certified and classified staff alike.

Acknowledging our Cohort

As we near the completion of this cycle, it is important to take a moment to recognize and appreciate every member of our AZALAS Aspiring Leaders cohort. Each of us has brought unique experiences, perspectives, and strengths to the table, enriching our learning and pushing us to grow into the leaders our schools and communities need. This program has reaffirmed that leadership is not about “I” but about “we.” It is about ensuring that every member of a school community feels valued and empowered.

As we continue preparing for future leadership roles, we do so with a commitment to fostering positive, student-centered change in the schools and districts we serve.

To my fellow cohort members—your dedication, insight, and passion for education have made this journey an inspiring one. From AVID coordinators and instructional coaches to assistant principals and mentor teachers, each of you play a vital role in shaping student success. This program would not be the same without the collective wisdom and camaraderie we share.



YUMA REGION

Year One

Yuma High School District

Sarah Akins
Ta Leasa Broskowski
Greg Brown
Gaudelia Castro
Ayleen Cerda
Annette Elias
Jason Flora
Ismael Hernandez
Michael Jankowski
Halley Johnson
Gabriella Krukoski
Heather Madrigal
Virdiana Medina
Ernesto Mendoza
Clarissa Monroy
Kristina Murray
Chris Navarro
Amber Pacewic
Jonathon Parrish
Jasmine Pinela
Kassandra Ramirez
Dave Robinson
Itzel Rodriguez
Rocio Ruiz
Lucion Sanchez
Loren Simpson
Brenda Smith
Patricia Toledo
Liz Vasquez

Gadsden Elementary School District

Ericka Clark
Angie Gutierrez
Katrina Herrera
Arlin Mena
Alejandra Padilla
Karen Rascon
Armando Sanchez
Tanhya Vasquez
Karla Vega de Vargas

Somerton School District

Heather Acosta
Vicky Anaya
Francisca Canchola
LaDonna Crabb
Chris Fermanis
Walther Flores
Ruben Jaramillo
Valeria Orozco
Connie Rivera
Olivia Santana
Kristell Zepeda

Thank you all for your collaboration, dedication, and leadership. The future of education is in good hands with leaders like you!



AZALAS Aspiring Leaders *Experience*

Joseph Daily
Yuma Union High School District

Two years ago, I was entering my second year of administration as an assistant principal. I was two months away from completing my masters program, preparing for the principal certification tests, and barely keeping my head above water with my job duties and responsibilities. I remember being invited to this AZALAS Aspiring Leaders Cohort and not knowing what to expect. I also had a feeling of being overwhelmed by adding these workshops to my already busy schedule. When I showed up to our first workshop in August 2023 at Somerton High School, I recognized that I was in a room full of other educators who were in the same boat as me—overwhelmed, busy, and not knowing what to expect.

Our first session taught me quickly that slowing down and being in the moment was critical. The workshop environment had a positive and safe feel to it, and this was due to aspiring leaders of the Yuma Union High School and Gadsden School Districts. We had a variety of leaders including teacher leaders, instructional coaches, directors, and assistant principals. Each member brought valuable insights that made this journey impactful. From that first meeting, I looked forward to attending each session as it was an opportunity to reflect, collaborate, and grow.

Completing year two of the AZALAS Aspiring Leaders Workshop through the Yuma Region has been a transformative and empowering experience in our leadership journey. The program consistently challenged us to step outside our comfort zones, reflect deeply on our leadership styles, and embrace growth through vulnerability and feedback. One of the most impactful aspects of the workshop was the opportunity to engage in real-life scenarios that highlighted how our decisions as leaders can significantly affect our school communities—especially our students. These experiences have helped to sharpen our decision-making and reinforced the weight and responsibility of educational leadership.

For me personally, the AZALAS workshops not only deepened my leadership knowledge but also empowered me to act. Over the past two years, I've applied for two principal positions—something I may not have had the confidence to do before this experience. Although I was not selected for the first role, the process gave me invaluable insight and motivation to keep growing. The second time I applied was the last week of March of this year. Fortunately, this time, I was given good news: I will be recommended to the governing board in April for a principal position within the Yuma Union High School District. I am forever grateful to AZALAS for instilling confidence and supporting me throughout this journey.

I am not the only aspiring leader in this cohort who has sought a higher leadership position. We have many more success stories within our cohort, and more will follow as confidence builds within our group.

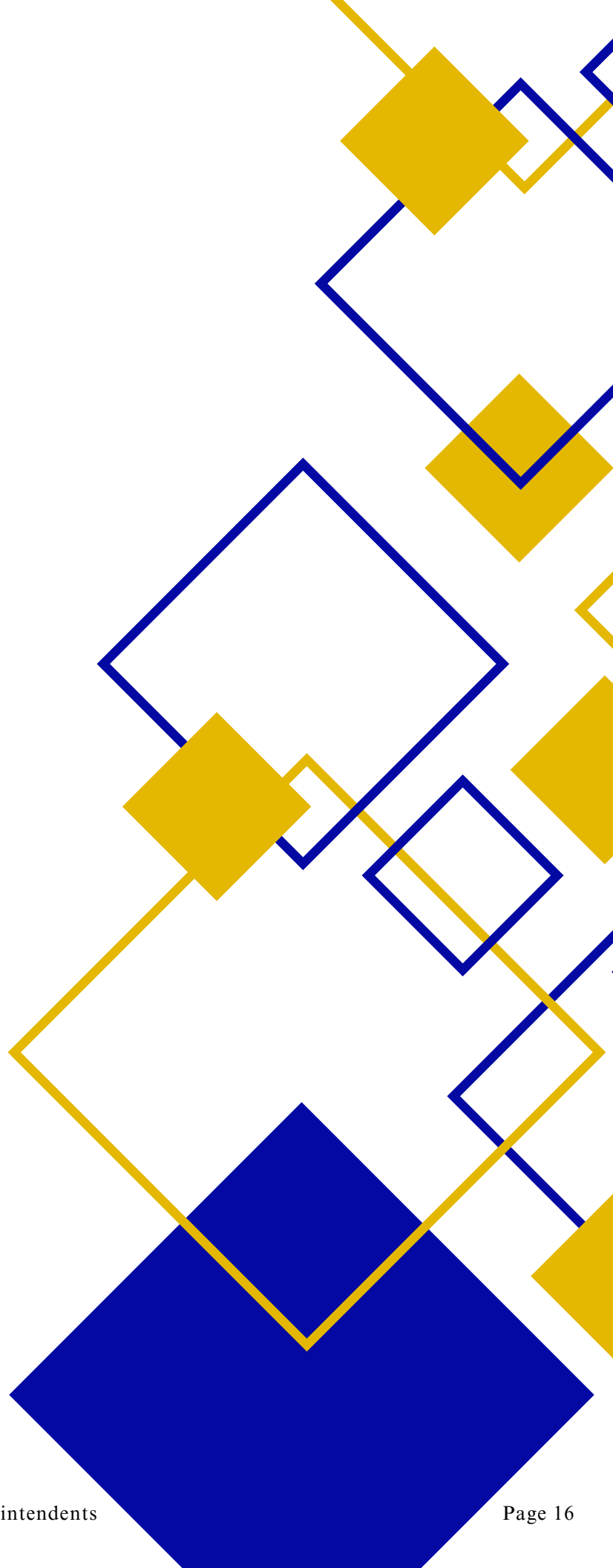
As we wrap up our last session on April 25, we want to thank Mr. Joe Quintana, who has been instrumental in our cohort's growth and success. His lessons were engaging, challenging, and fun. Mr. Quintana has helped develop the future leaders of the Yuma Union High School and Gadsden School Districts.

In addition, we want to thank Somerton High School, Lucky Arviso (Principal), and David Barrios (Assistant Principal - Cohort Member) for hosting our workshops these past two years! We appreciate your hospitality and sharing your beautiful campus with us. We also want to thank the leadership of Yuma Union High School and Gadsden School Districts for investing in your future leaders. We want you to know that these workshops have been invaluable. At the end of the day, our students will be the ones who will get the benefit of being a part of schools with well-rounded leaders.

Lastly, I would like to thank my aspiring leader colleagues in the Yuma Union High School District and those of our sister district, Gadsden. I wish you all the best of luck as you continue your leadership journeys. Remember, we are in this together and only a phone call away.

Thank you,

Joseph Daily



YUMA REGION

Year Two

Yuma High School District

David Barrios
Jeremy Beck
Kristin Collins
Ian Coltman
Roxanne Cordell
Joseph Daily
Anastasia Dawson
Janeth Guerra
Jaclyn Hill
Teresa Laurean
Cecile Lopez
Alba Mazariego
Marielis Rivera
Marcia Sanchez
Tiffany Tipton-Pavey
Ansel Traynor
Loraine Zaragoza

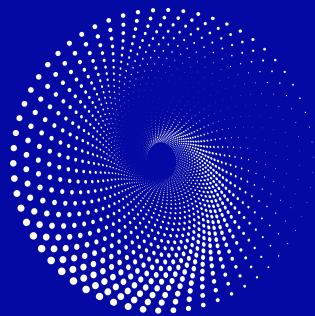
Gadsden Elementary School District

Pablo Duran
Ana Fausto
Mayra Franco
Vanesa Gonzales
Ada Juarez
Erika Loya
Michelle Nunez
Anyly Ontiveros
Maria Ortiz
Paloma Peralta
Maria Robles
Jessenia Wong Cazares



SchoolSims offering simulation-based experiential learning, allowing educators to practice critical decision-making

One of our Tucson Region groups working through a simulation related to the workshop topic. We appreciate Ken Spero and SchoolSims for their sponsorship and access to the simulations.



IF YOUR ACTIONS
inspire OTHERS
TO *dream* MORE,
learn MORE, *do*
MORE, *become*
MORE, THEN
YOU ARE A LEADER.

- John Quincy Adams

Make it a great day!

Tracy Harris