



Manzo Student Kyasha Villa distributes school grown produce at Manzo Market

Manzo School Garden Origins

Manzo Elementary School is a Title 1 neighborhood school in the Tucson Unified School District (TUSD), located in the Barrio Hollywood neighborhood of Tucson. [The Manzo School Garden Program](#) started in 2006 as a facet of the school counseling program to better respond to students in crisis and connect with parents of students who struggle with attendance, behavior, and academic achievement. At that time Manzo was under-enrolled by over 100 students and was underperforming academically based on state standardized testing. Standard-practice interventions such as in-the-office crisis response counseling, unannounced home visits, and cold-calling parents were not working.

Fall 2006 Manzo Student Council organized a neighborhood cleanup on a vacant lot across the school which soon became the Manzo counseling office. When students were in crisis they would be taken across the street with rakes, watering cans, and shovels. Ongoing care for the space greased the wheels for meaningful conversation and connections with the natural world. Compared with conventional school counseling in the office, counseling in the garden elevated self-awareness and self-management, and responsible decision making. Through conversations with students it became apparent family members were steeped in trade skills and there was a deep neighborhood culinary and food production heritage. Parents who were once

called regarding student behavior and poor attendance were called to share their expertise in the building and maintenance of gardens. Parents who were once difficult to reach were on campus weekends and after hours, and began coming to school early and staying late. Students who were labeled as difficult took leadership roles garden and were proud to show off parent contributions.

[Over a 6-year period](#) multiple gardens were built across campus and Manzo was producing upwards of 1000 pounds of produce per school year. Manzo began distributing produce at parent pickup and in 2014 was certified by the AZ Dept. of Health Services to use student grown produce in the cafeteria. Today Manzo hosts a Food Literacy Lab which serves a community culinary teaching space, and an [agrivoltaics](#) research garden where students grow produce and conduct research under a photovoltaic overstory. The impacts of the program are broad and deep, breaching artificial silo doors. The Manzo school gardens have transformed school climate and culture by boosting student self-esteem and self-efficacy, supporting academic achievement, informing food choices, and improving food access.

As the Manzo program grew, University of Arizona interns became an integral part of the maintenance and operations of the Manzo gardens. In 2014, a formal arrangement between the University of Arizona and TUSD was forged through a joint-funded liaison who supports school gardens across TUSD and the University of Arizona Community and School Garden Program (CSGP). The liaison has access to institutional support systems in both organizations and navigates both systems as an insider. On the university side, access to financial systems and fundraising is a workaround to the draconian finance and procurement regulations placed on public schools. On the school district side, keys and badges provide access to school buildings

and garden sites. Working for the district also allows for easier collaboration with the continuing education department for teacher professional development trainings and creates a more seamless working relationship with district facilities departments integral to the installation and maintenance of gardens on district property.

University of Arizona Community and School Garden Program (CSGP)

The heartbeat of CSGP is a university course (the Community and School Garden Workshop or CSGW) that enrolls over 50-60 undergrad and graduate students each semester and is cross-listed in nine UA units from American Indian Studies and Geography to Nutrition, Plant Science, and Teaching Learning and Sociocultural Studies. The course trains these students to extend their own classroom learning through internship placements in 24 Title I schools with gardens in Tucson. The fundamental ethos of the class is that schools are foundational to the greater good and school gardens expand that ethos into equity, justice, and healthy food access. This hands-on course facilitates a form of learning by doing where genuine listening, group decision-making and collaborative problem-solving are practiced and a commitment to furthering the well-being of under-resourced people introduces them to gardens not just as sites of food production but also of community empowerment. University interns provide stability to fragile school garden programs that are routinely hobbled by budget cuts, teacher and administrative turnover, and now COVID-19 school closures.

In creating a larger program around the course, we have been able to further extend outreach to Title I schools that are too distant from campus to host UA interns. And so, through fundraising efforts, the CSGP team also includes three program coordinators who help maintain gardens and train teachers to use the gardens as experiential learning sites through standards-based curriculum that has been rewritten to reflect local natural history, ecology and culture. With both the course and the larger program, we partner with nine community organizations ranging from

the Pima County Department of Health Services and Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona, to Flowers and Bullets Collective—a grass roots organization dedicated to sustainability, art and food production—to the National Park Service, and Native Seed/SEARCH. Another very important component of the CSGP is the Green Academy, a monthly professional development series that trains over 60 K-12 educators from across the region each month in garden-based teaching. CSGP also hosts annual multi-day teacher conferences in garden-based education each summer. Finally, we have established a pre-K-to-UA pipeline through donor support for Title 1 high school students to take the university school garden course for university credit with the aim that they will see themselves in higher education. As a recently-designated Hispanic Serving Institution, the UA is a place that welcomes them and will support their goals to address, as professionals, the issues critical to their communities' success.

Replicable Program Components:

- Joint-funded program liaison: .5 Postsecondary, .5 public school district
- Postsecondary community engagement course which:
 - Trains postsecondary interns
 - Places and supports interns within a network of school gardens
- Ongoing professional development (PD) trainings for teachers
 - PDs occur during paid district time
 - PD hours count towards continuing education and recertification requirements
- Mechanisms for channeling community knowledge and expertise into school gardens
 - Utilize parent trade skills to build and maintain gardens
 - Capture [traditional and family knowledge](#) around growing and preparing food

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- Utilize school gardens as a conduit for local knowledge and skill to enter schools and flow back into student homes
- Program for encouraging higher education among first generation students
- Student-to-student connections between Title 1 schools and UA
- Bringing philanthropy into the school district

Synthesis

The Manzo school garden program was created as a social-emotional learning tool and evolved into a food production and food systems hub, providing nutrition education and food access in a community overrepresented in both food scarcity and food related illness. The evolution was a natural progression and over time it has become clear nutrition and social-emotional wellness are interconnected: the way we feel impacts the way we eat and the way we eat impacts the way we feel.

Beyond therapeutic benefits and improved food access, school gardens also can provide context for classroom learning, boost achievement and serve as a conduit for community knowledge to enter school campuses. The UA Community and School Garden Program sits at the nexus of K12 and postsecondary education; gardens provide K12 enrichment and serve as a community engagement experience for UA students. The multifaceted benefits of school gardens are synergistic and defy the artificial silos we use to categorize services and outcomes. The key to pushing this forward is identifying synergies and asking the question: how can my work move forward your work? Within these alignments we see institutional change.