

# Apache Junction Unified School District

# FOCUS IN SCHOOLS

## AJHS Charity Week



Student Council members Brandon Fields and Nora Heilman display one of the several large commemorative quilt patches that high school students constructed during Charity Week to send for inclusion in the national memorial quilt. Other special events included a Blood Donation Drive that yielded more than 100 donations and a Charity Dance.

## Governing Board Directs AJUSD Reorganization

As a first step toward reorganizing and restructuring the school district to better serve students and achieve the goal of making sure that all graduates are ready for “Year 13” educational opportunities, the Governing Board of the Apache Junction Unified School District has directed district administrators to work out the cost savings and details of closing two schools next year.

This move is a key part of a plan being formulated for achieving the academic excellence necessary to attain that college readiness for all students. The plan’s foundation will be the three-pronged basis of Rigor, Relevance and Relationships, according to Superintendent Dr. Chad Wilson, and teaching approaches emphasized in classrooms will be individualized instruction and Project Based Learning (PBL), facilitated by 21st Century classroom technology tools employed by both teachers and students.

Schools that are being considered for closure are Gold Canyon Elementary School and Thunder Mountain Middle School. A reconfiguration of the student population would be necessary, entailing a shift to educating students in grades K-6 at the district’s elementary schools, and introducing a new technology-intensive approach to educating 7th and 8th graders in a junior high school setting at Desert Shadows (currently a middle school—6,7,8).

Governing Board President Wendy Moore has also further instructed that all other areas, items and positions also be examined for changes and cuts that could recover additional savings for the district that could be channeled toward more rigorous and technologically oriented academic goals.

These directives to examine

a reorganization of the school district came as board members are exploring solutions to addressing an enrollment decline, and meeting the challenge of cutting \$2.4 million budget from the district’s 2010-2011 budget due to the defeat of the continuation of the district’s 10 percent M&O Override at the polls in November.

It was noted that the district would be required to proceed through a legal process of posting notice and holding public meetings before a final decision regarding the school closures is made at a public meeting. Letters announcing the dates of the public meetings to be held at each school (Jan. 19 and 20) were mailed to parents on Dec. 18.

In the letter, Dr. Wilson reiterated the district’s commitment to providing students an excellent education that will prepare all of them for pursuit of post-secondary learning opportunities, and cited financial challenges requiring “bold decisions.”

He stated, “Closing schools

is never a ‘preferred first choice’ solution.” However, he emphasized that having the resources available to realize the attainment of certain crucial academic goals for students may necessitate it.

His letter also noted if these closures were enacted for 2010-2011, a reconfiguration of student populations and attendance areas would be necessary, and asked for the patience, support and cooperation of parents.

Two public meetings have been scheduled in January regarding these issues (see insert in story for details).

A copy of the letters sent to parents and a video message from Dr. Wilson are currently posted at [www.ajusd.org](http://www.ajusd.org) under “News.” By Monday, January 4, the district will have in place a special webpage devoted to information on this issue, and also a feedback form that will allow community members to send their comments to the Governing Board and Superintendent.

## Muzak Grant



The only “Music Matters” grant awarded to a school in Arizona from Muzak’s Heart and Soul Foundation went to Four Peaks Elementary School recently in the amount of a \$2,464.66 check to purchase 17 Yamaha student keyboard. Heart and Soul Foundation awards grants each year to support and redefine music education in the U.S. Adam Huxhold, Sales and Client Relations Manager for Muzak, presented the check to FPES Music Teacher Mrs. Pam Turner and several students at a recent assembly. Muzak is the world’s leading music, messaging and sound systems provider.

## Successful S.P.E.E.R. Project

Thunder Mountain Middle School’s S.P.E.E.R. classroom recently sponsored a school-wide Inclusion Awareness project called the “Special Inclusion Files.”

S.P.E.E.R. Teacher Melisa Mel went into each classroom to discuss inclusion and explain that it means bringing together students of all learning styles, different capabilities and needs, shoulder to shoulder, with general education students.

In addition, 107 TMMS students entered a poster contest with entries illustrating what inclusion meant to them in their school. Eighth grade student Briana Lara was the winner of the contest, and received a \$25 gift certificate prize. Sixth grader Kalleigh Reichwald took Second Place and won a \$15 gift certificate and third place and a \$10 gift certificate went to Ivette Renteria.

Ms. Mel commented, “Thunder Mountain Middle School is a wonderful campus where students go out of their way to help all feel included. The data collected in the testing reflected this vividly.”



TMMS Principal Mark Blomgren congratulates poster contest winners (l to r) Kalleigh Reichwald, Ivette Renteria and Briana Lara.

## March Override Rejected

At the Dec. 8 Governing Board meeting, it was voted unanimously (5-0) not to hold another M&O Budget Override Election this spring, although an Arizona Attorney General’s opinion of recent special legislation passed by the Arizona Legislature would have allowed it.

Comments by Governing Board members before the vote included references to “a still uncertain economy” and the fact that “nothing has really changed” to positively influence the passage of the Override question in March.

## Public Meetings on School Closures will be Jan. 19, Jan. 20

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By law, when school closures are being considered, a public meeting must be held for input from the community.

Public meetings to solicit citizen input regarding the possible closures of two of AJUSD schools—Gold Canyon Elementary School and Thunder Mountain Middle School—were mailed home to parents on Dec. 18.

The meetings will be:

- Tuesday, Jan. 19 –  
Gold Canyon Elementary School – 6:30 p.m.
- Wednesday, Jan. 20 –  
Thunder Mountain Middle School – 6:30 p.m.

## AZ Tax Credit Deadline is Dec. 31st

You have until Dec. 31, 2009, to make the most of the Arizona Tax Credit program.

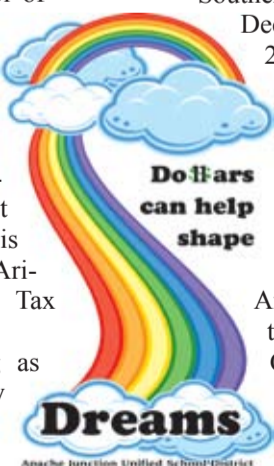
This win-win opportunity is for those with an Arizona Income tax liability. The law, allows Arizona taxpayers to donate money directly to the school of their choice for extra curricular programs and take the donation as a dollar for dollar tax credit against what is owed on the Arizona Income Tax Return.

Those filing as single may donate up to \$200. Married

couples, those filing jointly may donate up to \$400.

**To make a donation:**  
Online: [www.ajusd.org](http://www.ajusd.org),  
By mail: Sandra Bohr, 1575 W. Southern, Suite #1, Apache Junction, AZ 85120  
In person: District Office corner of Ironwood Dr. and Southern Ave.  
Dec. 21-23; Jan. 28-30. 8 a.m. - 4 p.m.

A receipt will be given to you for your records and to submit with a special form with your Arizona income tax return.  
Call 480-982-1110, ext. 2001 for more information.



## IMPORTANT DATES

- Jan. 4 – Classes Resume
- Jan. 12 – Gov. Bd. Meeting
- Jan. 13 – District Spelling Bee
- Jan. 14 – Advanced Placement Info Night (AJHS)
- Jan. 18 – Civil Rights Day (No School)
- Jan. 19 – GCES Closure Meeting
- Jan. 20 – TMMS Closure Meeting
- Jan. 27 – Incoming Freshman Parents Night (AJHS)

## Economic Grinch Foiled by AJ Community’s Generosity

Despite a still shaky economy lurking like the uninvited Grinch, this year’s “Stuff a Bus” campaign to collect toys, clothes and food for needy local families was a huge success, thanks to efforts of the AJUSD Transportation Department and the unflagging generosity of businesses, groups, and individual AJ community members.

Christa Rizzi, bus driver and one of the prime movers in this campaign for the last two years, commented, “I can’t believe how generous people were this year. Some people could only afford a dollar or some change, but they wanted to donate. Maybe people understand better now what it is like to be struggling financially because they are too.”

Project HELP Coordinator Lailoni Capozzi-Gorman estimated that the “stuffed bus” that rolled in to deliver her agency the goods this year was more than twice as full as last year’s. Toys, clothes,



cash, gift cards and foodstuffs crammed every aisle and seat of the bright yellow school bus almost to the ceiling of the vehicle. Collection boxes had been placed throughout the community at schools, and local businesses and volunteers from the Transportation Department had spent their Saturdays all month manning the effort.

“We could hardly believe it,” she commented. “I think it is so wonderful how the department that got Project HELP off the ground many years ago is still so enthusiastically sup-

porting the program more than 30 years later. We are so grateful to all of them and the community for the terrific support they showed this year.”

### A Special Thank You...

to the following local agencies and businesses: Apache Junction Fire District, Pizza Hut, Apache Junction Chamber of Commerce, Walgreens in Gold Canyon, Crow’s Nest, Cobbs Restaurant, Village Inn, Bank of America, Meridian Manor MHP, Kmart at Power Rd. and Hampton, Feed Bag Restaurant, Dirtwater Springs, Filly’s Roadhouse, Los Gringos Locos, Vista Medical Center, Gentle Dental, Pueblo MHP, Dollar General Store, Holiday Inn, Chase Bank, AJ Urgent Care, Food City, Gloria’s Beauty, City Signs, Home Depot, Bashas’ in Gold Canyon, Bashas’ on Signal Butte & Apache Trail, Fry’s in AJ, Safeway at Meridian & Apache Trail, UFB Skate Shop, Cimmarron MHP, staff and students at Apache Junction High School, Desert Shadows Middle School, Thunder Mountain Middle School, Desert Vista Elementary School, Gold Canyon Elementary School, Superstition Mountain Elementary School, AJUSD District Office personnel, Maintenance Department, Food Services Department, and the Technology Department.



Santa’s Helpers in the form of AJUSD Transportation Department employees not only collected all of the toys, food and clothes, but helped unpack them at Project HELP as well.