Welcome to District 1: The Podcast. Your host is Leslie Lenhart, and she is joined by Superintendent Gabriel Trujillo.

Leslie Lenhart: Thank you! That was Jazlyn Arvizu, 5th grader at Warren Elementary School. Hi, Doctor Trujillo, how are you?

Gabriel Trujillo: It is graduation week coming up, so I’m very excited, probably the best part of the school year. I’m looking forward to sharing this wonderful experience as the keynote speaker at Tucson High. So, I’m very excited about sharing graduation with 500 wonderful seniors out there in Badger country.

Leslie Lenhart: Awesome. That will be so much fun. I know all of the high schools are really looking forward to what’s coming next week. The kids are kind of probably counting down. But it’s been a few weeks and we have a lot of things to cover. First, let’s talk about some of the state championships that have happened at Sabino recently.

Gabriel Trujillo: I cannot tell you how proud I am of Sabino High School, and just how proud I am of the girls’ softball team for capturing the 3A State Crown, and 48 hours later, the boys’ baseball team capturing the 3A State Baseball Crown. To see one of our schools in the district complete a very rare double-sweep of softball and baseball within 72 hours is just an absolutely wonderful achievement. And it’s bittersweet, considering the year that Sabino High School has had. This is a school that has been, in my opinion, dragged through the mud, has been treated unfairly, has been humiliated publically. It had its state championship ripped away about a year ago last year. The baseball team lost its state title, and the girls’ basketball team was just really publically humiliated by being removed from the state basketball championship. I really love the story of the boys to a player, 100% of the players returned, and they did the impossible. They came back and won it again, and ultimately had the final word on the state and on the AIA that was questioning their integrity. So, I’m so extremely proud of the Sabercats, our Lady Sabercats for capturing the 3A Softball Crown, and of course, our young men for being crowned Baseball State Champions.

Leslie Lenhart: Yeah, and Sabino is a great school. It’s one of our A-rated schools, which is awesome, and they have had a number of other accomplishments throughout the year on the sports side. So, congratulations to all the students, and the families, and the staff who’ve supported the school throughout the year. We also, this week, at the governing board, had a formal flag placement. You want to talk about that?

Gabriel Trujillo: Yeah, this was long overdue, and I’m very proud that we are one of the first districts in Southern Arizona to formally recognize two of Southern Arizona’s original peoples: the Pascua Yaqui nation and the Tohono O’Odham nation. Together, we serve just under 3,000 Pascua Yaqui and Tohono O’Odham children throughout TUSD. And they have been in the
fabric of Tucson Unified throughout the 150 years of our history. The influence that they’ve had on this district culturally, and artistically, and academically defines who we are, where we’ve been, and who we continue to be. And we celebrate them, we celebrate what they’ve brought to our district, and we’ve memorialized that celebration by officially posting the flags of their two nations alongside the U.S. flag and our state flag that can be seen now every Tuesday night as all of you attend our governing board meetings.

Leslie Lenhart: That’s great. And also at the governing board meetings, we have a lot of things that have been going on. One of them that has been talked about, and I believe will be coming up again soon, is the code of conduct. You want to talk a little bit about where we are with that process?

Gabriel Trujillo: Yeah, we’ve just concluded a pretty collaborative process where we got a lot of community groups together, we met with parents, we met with teachers, we met with administrators to get feedback regarding what specific changes that they would like to see in the code of conduct, and certainly where we can put in some stronger measures. I know we’ve heard from teachers, they want to see stronger accountability for the students, especially at those level 1 and level 2 infractions. Our principals want to see tougher accountability for infractions like fights, or the usage of drugs and alcohol. So, now we’re going to be presenting the list of recommendations to the board for their consideration at our next board meeting next week.

Leslie Lenhart: That’ll be great. What can you tell us about salaries and benefits?

Gabriel Trujillo: Yeah, this is the big news of the season, and I want our employees, and if you’re listening out there, we’re on top of it. It is the #1 priority right now. It has been for the last few weeks. We’re working very closely with all of our employment groups: TEA, and AFSCME, and CWA, and ELI, TEA White Collar. We’re all working together to finalize the details of a salary and compensation package for all groups. We’re really working hard to get that finalized. We’re working with our governing board right now in terms of presenting them some proposals through the negotiations process, so that hopefully on May 28th, we’ll be able come forward with a public proposal for their vote.

Leslie Lenhart: Awesome. That’ll be good. I’m sure that will help everybody be able to go in and launch into their fun summer plans. A few other things that have happened in this district: we had, a few weeks ago, our OMA showcase, the Menagerie, and I know you and several board members were there. You want to talk about your experience?

Gabriel Trujillo: Yeah, I think Opening Minds through the Arts is really what sets Tucson Unified apart from other districts. It is a program unique to us, to our district, just a beautiful combination of teaching academic skills and abilities through the arts, and merging in multicultural themes along the way. When you teach math and you teach language through song,
through paining, through poetry, you’re really activating all sides of the brain, and you’re really forcing kids to engage in the highest levels of critical thinking and creative thinking. And I think we saw the culmination of that out there at Palo Verde, with just some wonderful performances by our students across the district. Our Arts Integration Specialists just continue to inspire me. I’m very happy. It’s one of our best events and something I look forward to every year. Well-attended, I mean, almost 1,000 people showed up to support their performing artists.

Leslie Lenhart: Yeah, it was an amazing event and the puppets that many of the schools created were phenomenal. So, congratulations to all of the staff and the students who worked so hard to make it a great event. Another great event that we recently had was celebrating our employees at Celebration of the Stars, a fun night. You want to talk about how all of that went and your experience?

Gabriel Trujillo: No, I love Celebration of the Stars. We do that every year. And I want to compliment your Communications Department; I’ve never seen it that well organized and that efficient.

Leslie Lenhart: Well, thank you.

Gabriel Trujillo: And, quite frankly, that succinct. We were out of there in 75 minutes and that was wonderful. This, really, I think, left people wanting more, from the video presentations to the stories behind some of the nominees, and my favorite is just being on stage and shaking hands with our employees, and watching their excitement when they win their awards. We were able to, of course, award the Certified Teacher of the Year, the Classified Support Employee of the Year, the Administrator of the Year, several different categories. It’s a night where everybody gets dressed up, everybody gets excited, family and friends come out and cheer on their favorite nominee. And I think it’s great for all of us to take that time out and celebrate all of the above-and-beyond commitment to service that we see across the district.

Leslie Lenhart: Yeah, it was really fun. And, I will say, my first year of being a part of it, really was a great to see all the excitement from everybody from all the great pictures that we’ve gathered and are showing on various social media and on our district websites. And then, lastly, at C.E. Rose, we had a great volunteer event sponsored by Wells Fargo. You want to talk a little bit about what they did out there?

Gabriel Trujillo: Yeah, this is, like, the sixth year in a row that Wells Fargo’s come together with C.E. Rose and supporting them. We had about, almost 50 team members from Wells Fargo spent the day at Rose leading some sessions, teaching them about money, financial literacy, starting savings accounts, and really teaching some of those soft skills, like communication, teamwork, and problem solving. Teach Children to Save, it’s a free, national program sponsored by the American Bankers Association Foundation, and what it does is it organizes bank
volunteers throughout the year to help young people really develop good habits about saving money. I just think it’s an important skill for young people to have a healthy respect for income, how to manage money, how to make great financial decisions. So, I want to thank Wells Fargo for supporting C.E. Rose and Tucson Unified with this endeavor.

Leslie Lenhart: Absolutely. It was a great privilege. I understand it went super smoothly and really appreciate all of their volunteers joining us out there. So, those are all the big topics for today. Anything you want to say in close before we go into graduation week?

Gabriel Trujillo: No, just that I want everybody to enjoy this very, very special time of the year. Special message to all of our seniors: if you’re listening, or your parents, just have a very, very safe, healthy, and happy graduation season. Make great decisions. I know it’s a time for celebration but it’s also a time to make great decisions. So, be smart, be safe, and celebrate the season.

Leslie Lenhart: Great. Thank you so much! And now, Jazlyn will take us out.

One thing I learned in school was writing a paragraph. This is Jazlyn Arvizu, signing off.