

West Valley VIEW

The community newspaper of Avondale, Buckeye, Goodyear, Litchfield Park & Tolleson, AZ ♦ Phone (623) 535-8439

L. Thomas Heck 'beats the odds'

by **Jeannette Cruz**
staff writer

L. Thomas Heck Middle School was one of six Valley schools with minority-intensive, low-income student populations to overcome obstacles to win gold awards and be named "Beat the Odds Schools" by Beat the Odds Institute, an initiative of the Center for the Future of Arizona.

The West Valley school is in the Litchfield Elementary School District.

A school celebration was held Feb. 5 to recognize the students for their achievements.

Beat the Odds is a rigorous, multi-year school improvement program based on research led by best-selling author Jim Collins.

Beat the Odds' six keys to success include:

Clear Bottom Line — Emphasize the achievement of every student in every classroom and take responsibility for that performance. No excuses.

Ongoing Assessment — Assess student performance early and often. Use information to drive improvement rather than to assign blame.

Strong and Steady Principal — Leaders are focused on the things that truly improve schools and keep pushing ahead, no matter what the roadblocks.

Collaborative Solutions — Responsibility for improvement is shared among all, not concentrated at the top.

Stick with the Program — Magic occurs when the

school finds a good program and sticks with it.

Built to Suit — Customize instruction and intervention to fit the needs of each student. One size does not fit all.

"Our award winners demonstrate that demography is not destiny. Successful schools do things differently and don't make excuses," Marjorie Kaplan, executive director of Beat the Odds Institute, said in a release.

Only schools that attain the gold-medal status, the highest level of achievement in the Beat the Odds program, are conferred the title of a Beat the Odds School.

Beat the Odds Gold Level schools must have a "B" or better from the Arizona Department of Education and must demonstrate consistently improved AIMS scores over three years, plus other criteria.

"The support that Beat the Odds provides with ongoing assessment of the students allows teachers to have a very active and responsive process where they can know at any given point how well the students are doing towards the learning points," Principal Ron Sterr said. "The improvements are fairly clear to measure — students get better test scores, feel more confident with the subject matter, like that they have more options, and it reduces their anxiety. Now they know that they can get the extra help and just concentrate on the learning."

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