

THE SOUTHWEST VALLEY REPUBLIC

Litchfield Park school among 6 that beat the odds

This article was submitted by Deb Mitchell, a spokeswoman with Beat the Odds Institute.

Thomas Heck Middle School in the Litchfield Elementary School District was among six Valley schools with minority-intensive, low income student populations have 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 school, 12448 W. Bethany Home Road in Litchfield Park, celebrated on Feb. 5 with Superintendent Julianne Lein, former Superintendent Thomas Heck, Principal Ron Sterr and Lattie Coor, chairman and CEO of the Center for the Future of Arizona.

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

The 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.

Only schools that attain 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 Arizona Department of Education and must demonstrate consistently improved AIMS scores over three years, plus other criteria.

Other gold award winners were Burk Elementary in the Gilbert Public Schools, Cortez and Washington high schools in the Glendale Union High School District, Emerson Elementary in the Mesa Public Schools and Franklin Police & Fire High School in the Phoenix Union High School District.

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