

EXPECT MORE ARIZONA E-NEWSLETTER



RAISING EXPECTATIONS - NOVEMBER 2009

Despite Challenges, Some Arizona Schools Continue to Beat the Odds

By Marjorie Kaplan, Ph.D., Director, Beat the Odds Institute



With so much news about the challenges facing Arizona education, it is easy to overlook those schools that are raising the bar and expecting more of themselves and their students. Among them are the growing number of high-minority, low-income student populations that are experiencing academic success.

These schools are beating the odds by applying six research-based concepts that focus on what is within schools' control, and raising expectations of students, teachers and administrative staff, with no excuses. The six concepts that comprise this framework are: a strong and steady principal, a clear bottom line, data driven instruction, collaboration, programming to suit individual students, and sticking to the program.

These Beat the Odds schools emphasize the achievement of every student and take responsibility for performance. They are willing to assess individual student performance early and often. They identify what's working and use classroom data to drive improvement. The leaders of Beat the Odds schools are focused on things that truly improve student achievement and keep pushing ahead no matter what the roadblocks. They work on collaborative solutions so problem solving is encouraged at all levels, not just concentrated at the top. Schools that beat the odds also find ways to customize instruction and interventions to fit the needs of each child.

The Beat the Odds Institute provides year-round training and support to principals in applying these concepts that have been shown to increase achievement among these student populations. Services include ongoing mentoring from an experienced principal; monthly training sessions covering the six concepts; administering a school self-assessment to identify strong areas and areas needing improvement; and creating and implementing an action plan for the school that focuses on the improvement areas and includes benchmarking student progress.

During 2006-2008, the majority of schools that participated in the Beat the Odds program showed significant improvement on the AIMS tests in reading and math. A number of schools showed year-to-year improvements in reading and math that were significantly larger than their district's improvement. Twenty-one percent of schools showed a significantly larger improvement in AIMS math and reading scores compared to their previous year's change in scores. The Beat the Odds Institute is currently analyzing 2008-2009 state test results.

Since Beat the Odds was established in 2007 with 27 pilot schools, participation has grown to 85 schools for the 2009-2010 academic year. A recent grant from the Arizona Community Foundation and Helios Education Foundation will enable the Beat the Odds Institute to expand its program to 120 schools in 2010-2011 by adding the Flagstaff and Yuma areas, and to at least 200 schools by 2015. For more information about Arizona schools that are "beating the odds," please visit: www.beattheoddsinstitute.org.