



### To Improve Student Achievement, Focus on What You Can Control

By Dr. Marjorie Kaplan, Beat the Odds Institute Director

In 2006, the Center for the Future of Arizona released a research report that showed that K-12 schools can successfully educate students under adverse circumstances and, in fact, some Arizona schools were already doing so.

“Why Some Schools with Latino Children Beat the Odds ... and Others Don’t” pointed to six keys, or principles for success, that are within all schools’ control: clear bottom line, ongoing assessment, strong and steady principal, collaborative solutions, stick with the program and built to suit. The study’s findings are particularly relevant today as many Arizona schools start the academic year facing a multitude of challenges.

The Beat the Odds Institute was created in 2007 under the umbrella of the Center for the Future of Arizona to provide training, assistance and support to principals in applying the six keys for success. Fifty-nine Maricopa County K-12 schools participated in the Beat the Odds School Partners Program last year, the second year of the program.

The program will expand beyond Maricopa County to include schools in Whiteriver and the Tucson-area in the 2009-2010 academic year. At press time, more than 80 schools were enrolled. Applications are still being accepted through the beginning of the school year.

The Beat the Odds Institute recently completed analyses of the first-year cohort’s AIMS reading and math scores. While one year of data does not provide conclusive results, the benchmark analyses indicate that some schools have already shown encouraging evidence of improvement. In addition to increasing their rate of improvement in reading and math scores, a number of schools showed improvements in reading and math that were significantly larger than their district’s improvement.

Anecdotal evidence of the framework’s effectiveness has been captured in success stories that appear online at [www.beattheoddsinstitute.org](http://www.beattheoddsinstitute.org). I encourage you to read these inspiring stories. They illustrate that we CAN successfully educate students under adverse circumstances by adopting the right attitude, plan and leadership model.



*Dr. Kaplan joined the Center for the Future of Arizona in 2008 as director of the Beat the Odds Institute. Previously, she was superintendent of schools for the Shawnee Mission School District, the second largest school district in Kansas, and worked for 24 years in education in Phoenix. She was superintendent of the Paradise Valley School District and the principal of Sunset School, a K-8 school in the Washington School District.*