Beating the odds... .. • ; '
Superior's own John F. Kennedy Elementary received recognition as a successful school recently in a widely publicized study of why some schools do a better job than others in helping students-achieve. (Photo by Cindy Tracy)

By Cindy Tracy
Good news: While many Arizona
schools with a majority of Latino stu-
dents are having trouble figuring out «
how to help their students improve
achievement gains, Superior's John
F. Kennedy Elementary is NOT one
of them.

Kennedy is one of 12 elementary
and middle schools in Arizona whose
students are "beating the odds" and
outperforming comparable schools
around the state.

Kennedy principal Jessie Arroyos
reported on the study, "Why Some
Schools with Latino ChildrenBeat the
Odds.., and Others Don't" at the April
19 school board meeting.
Using methods by author Jim Collins
in his book, "Good to Great," Mary
Jo Waits, senior fellow of theCenter
for the Future of the Arizona, and a
research team used Stanford 9 test
results in third-grade reading and
eighth-grade math to identify the 12
, odds-beating schools. These schools
showed improvement or were consis-
tently strong in these two areas be^
tween 1997 and 2004.
Kennedy, a K-6 school, was studied
as an "improving" school in the read-
ing measurement. Others in this cat-
egory were Alice Byrne, Elementary
School (K-6) in Yuma, Clawson
School (K-5) in Douglas and Orange
Grove Eiernentary School (1^5) in;
Somefton/Yuma; The researchers/
studied one comparison school for
each beat-the-odds school.,
For both the beat-tne-odds schools
and the comparisons, the research-
ers gathered and analyzed informa-
tion about the facilities, conducted
personal interviews and surveys of
administrators and teachers and ex^-
arriined report cards. After creating a
"mini dossier" on each school, a pat-
tern of key themes emerged from the

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they (principals) are flashy superstars,
but when-they stay focused orf the
things that truly improve schools and
keep pushing ahead, no matter what
the roadblocks," the study found.
The best principals recognize they
have a new role in education, some-
thing close to "managing knowledge
Workers in the business world,"
Beat-the-odds schools have a lower
rate of principal turnover than com-'
parison schools.
Looking ahead
The study's authors found that
while there aren't enough beat-the-
odds schools around, it's possible to
create more.

The researchers explored three broad
messages .and strategies' for educa-
tion reform: 1) Successful schools do
things differently from struggling
schools, focusing on the 'right' things
that will make a big difference in stu-
dent achievement; 2) thVthings suc-

cessful "schools do are commonsense
practices, mostly simple, basic pracT
tices of effective organizations; 3)
The "magic" or "fixing" the school
doesn't come from 'outthere'... much
of what it takes is actually in^the
hands of the people within the
schools. .
Recommendations
The researchers, presented a num-
ber of thoughts and recommenda-
tions for the future. "Evert though
much of what it takes to make a big
difference irt student achievement is
within the school," the study found,
"the lessors of these schools also
point to changes in public policy at
me state level that could help schools
with^mostly Latino^mostly poor stu-
dent' population implement these
components of success."
The recommendations, the study
said, come from the knowledge that
the nature of organizations and man-

agement is changing. "Like the inspi-
ration for this study, the best guid-
ance in this arena comes from the
world of business management," the
study concludes. Productivity comes
from gathering new knowledge and
using it for innovation. Leaders need
to set long-term goals but allow oth-
ers to work out the means of achiev-
ing those goals. ; ' -
Other ideas touch on leadership in-
' stitutes for principals, a ?major talent
initiative for teachers" and constant
assessment and use of data in differ-
ent ways.
Schoolboard
Members of the school board and
the audience at the April 19 meeting
received copies of Jessie Arroyos'
presentation outline. She invited the.
board to a planned luncheon honor-
~ ing all at JFK who have worked so
hard to. achieve the recognition Su-
; perior received in the study.
"I think you are to be congratulated,"
said school board president, Yolarida
Ewing, "and we're all very proud of
you."

research. The study showed themes,
among the beat-the-odds schools
that were consistent and different:
from the comparison schools. These
themes formed the basis for the
study's ultimate findings.
The study measured the beat-the-
odds schools to state standards over
the period studied (1997-2004).
Among the "improving" schools in
third-grade reading, Alice Byrne
gained 20 Stanford 9 points in this;
area, surpassing state standards.
Clawson moved from 11 points lower
to nearly even with the state aver-
age. Superior's JFK moved from 11
points lower to five points higher than
the state average. Orange Grove
gained 26 points-to surpass the state
average.
Six keys •
Discovering that "successful-
schools do things very differently
than struggling schools," the re-
searchers said that the beat-the-odds v
schools had six common elements not
found in the comparison schools';
These fell into three basic categories
used by Collins in his monograph (a
scholarly piece of writing of essay or
book length on a specific subject)
"Good to Great and the Social Sec-

tors," a supplement to his. "Good tp;
Great" that dealt with education, non-
profit and non-business enterprises^
GollirtS^|i^ ^
cipline{ $sci ^
plin£d£eipple and disciplined action.\
The study broke these: do\vn into\-

achievement in beat-tfre-odds
schobisra clear bottom line, ongoing
assessment, strong and steady prin-
cipal, collaborative solutions, stickr
ing to the program and a "built to suit"
personalization of help for each
student's needs.

The study found that beat-the-odds
schools have a "clear bottom line."
These successful schools focus on
every student's achievement in the
classroom and take responsibility for
that performance,
Values and culture are among the
strongest, most consistent contrasts
between beat-the-odds schools, and
comparison schools. "In the beat-the-
odds schools, the school's culture can
best be described as taking respon-
sibility," the study reads. These
schools have a no-excuse policy
that the school is accountable and
needs to change when students
don't learn.
A*timeline shows that JFK and the
other beat-the-odds schools took
action for change early on when edu-
cational standards in Arizona schools
began to shift. JFK began its align-
ment of curriculum to state standards
in 2000. In contrast, its comparison
school began the improvement pro-
cess in 2003.

In successful schools, student and
teacher achievement is assessed
"early and often/' the study found.
School personnel use these assess-
ments to create improvement instead
of to assign blame.
In beat-the-odds schools, "princi-
pals help schools succeed not when
See JFK, Page 4