



Latino Children Can Beat The Odds...

**...but district leadership
and support is required**

By Dr. Lattie F. Coor

As all of us know, Arizona's Latino students are not doing well. At all grade levels, the odds are that their student achievement scores fall well below the state average. Even more sobering is the fact that roughly only half of our Latino students who should be graduating from high school actually do so.

The consequences of this kind of low student achievement are very costly. The Center for the Future of Arizona estimates the cost to society of a single high school dropout to be between \$311,130 and \$496,785

(in 2007 dollars) with 20 percent to 50 percent of this figure attributed to factors other than lost earnings potential. This estimate rises to between \$2.2 million to \$3 million if the dropout becomes a career criminal or is a drug user.

The harsh reality is that if we don't improve student success for all students, at least through high school, we will pay a significant price in the years ahead.

Addressing "the Latino Issue" in Education

We, at the Center for the Future of Arizona, believe there is a way to

improve student achievement in Latino-intensive, low-income schools. Our belief is based on a very important study we completed in 2006 entitled "Why Some Schools with Latino Children Beat the Odds ... and Others Don't."

With the active involvement of Jim Collins, author of the highly influential book "Good to Great," we studied 12 elementary and middle schools throughout Arizona — schools with a majority of Latino students from low-income communities that were outperforming all expectations. In short, they were able to beat the odds

by succeeding in improving student achievement no matter what the circumstances.

We worked very closely with these 12 successful schools in a quest to determine what it was that made them successful where others had failed. We found six keys to success within schools' control that, when implemented together, lead to better than expected student achievement among all students.

The findings strongly suggest that demography is not destiny and that all schools serving Arizona's large and growing Latino student population can lead their students to more successful student achievement.

To ensure that these research findings are implemented in Arizona schools, the Center for the Future of Arizona has partnered with 27 K-12 schools in the Phoenix metropolitan area, many of which have predominantly low-income, minority student populations, in a new program called Beat the Odds Partners. Joining us, as well, is University of Phoenix, which has just pledged \$500,000 over three years to help us underwrite the costs of implementing the Beat the Odds findings in these schools.

The Center for the Future of Arizona's staff, mentors and researchers began work in Fall 2007 with the principals of our Beat the Odds School Partners, providing group and one-on-one support to help them implement the Beat the Odds findings in their schools as a framework that their teachers and staff can apply to their current efforts and programs.

At the end of this rigorous process, the Center for the Future of Arizona will certify schools that meet their goals to be "Beat the Odds schools." It will be a title that will be hard-won, but worth the effort.

Important Lessons Learned

In just a few short months we have learned a great deal about moving schools toward greater student achievement. This information is of value not only to the Beat the Odds School Partners, but to education

leadership throughout the state.

Our most important findings to date include:

- The magic is within the school.

By this, we mean that success comes from focusing on the things that you can control; creating a collaborative work environment; and supporting and developing strong and steady principals. This also includes creating a school culture in which expectations are high for all students. Individual student achievement is the clear bottom line.

- Ongoing assessment must drive daily instruction.

This requires schools to have the tools and training to effectively use data to manage progress towards student achievement. This includes training teachers to use the resultant data. Districts need to provide both philosophical and financial support.

- You must stick with the program.

With so many good programs and tools available, it is tempting to try another one if the one you are using doesn't provide immediate results. Oftentimes, this has the unintended effect of setting back progress towards student achievement.

The "Beat the Odds" research report emphasized that there is no single program or tool that is a silver bullet in improving student academic achievement. Schools that succeed find programs and tools that work for them and continually improve them.

- Success is "built to suit," school by school and student by student.

Since each school is unique, the best ideas for what needs to be done usually can be found at the school level. Schools need their district's support for shared leadership and decision making at the school level if they are to succeed. This includes creating time for school members to collaborate, and providing professional development training to hone teachers' and principals' skills.

Esteemed educator returns to Arizona to lead institute, help students beat the odds

The Center for the Future of Arizona, a Phoenix-based nonprofit, announced in January that it has named Dr. Marjorie Kaplan director of its newly created Beat the Odds Institute. Kaplan's duties include developing and managing the Beat the Odds Institute programs, operations and community relationships. She will join the institute full-time upon her retirement July 1 as superintendent of schools for the Shawnee Mission School District in metropolitan Kansas City, Kan. In the interim, Kaplan will advise the Institute on key matters.

Kaplan worked for 24 years in education in Phoenix prior to moving in 1992 to Kansas City. She was superintendent of the Paradise Valley School District and the principal of Sunset School, a K-8 school in the Washington School District. During her tenure in the metropolitan Phoenix area, she was named one of the Top 100 Educators in the United States by *Executive Educator* magazine. Kaplan also received the Arizona Superintendent of the Year award from the American Association of School Administrators, and the Outstanding Arizona Superintendent Award from the Arizona School Administrators Association.

As superintendent of the second largest school district in Kansas, she is responsible for 28,158 students, 4,300 employees and an annual budget of nearly \$424 million. During her tenure, Shawnee Mission has evolved from a homogenous, English-speaking, middle and upper-middle class district to one in which 22 percent of students qualify for a free or reduced price lunch (an indicator of poverty) and 2,076 of the district's students are identified as English language learners (ELL). Latinos comprise 10.4 percent of the district's student population.

- Effective mentoring varies with the players.

One style of mentoring may be highly successful with one individual, smothering to another, and too aloof for a third. It's vital to recognize that when it comes to mentoring, there is no one "right" way.

What Your District Can Do to Beat the Odds

We believe the widespread implementation of the Beat the Odds principles in schools throughout Arizona will enable us to begin the steady climb to greater success for all students. The following are recommended steps if your district wishes to start on the path to beating the odds:

- Engage board members or your governing board and district superintendents in a book study of

the "Beat the Odds" research report and Jim Collins' book "Good to Great."

- Conduct a self-evaluation of your schools based on the six Beat the Odds principles.
- Develop goals and identify resources.
- Collaboratively create an action plan.
- Conduct a follow-up assessment at the end of the academic year.

To get started, download the "Beat the Odds" research report at www.beatheoddsinstitute.com. In the "Toolbox" section of the Beat the Odds website, you also will find recommended reading on topics such as after-school learning communities and data-based decision-making. This will help provide a comprehensive

overview of what is working in the field of education.

Our state's future economic vitality and the quality of life of its citizens depend upon the academic success of these children. We hope you will join us in this endeavor.

About the writer:

Dr. Lattie F. Coor is president emeritus of Arizona State University and chairman and CEO of the Phoenix-based nonprofit organization, the Center for the Future of Arizona. Information about its Beat the Odds education initiative is available at www.beatheoddsinstitute.com.



KEYS TO SUCCESS

From "Why Some Schools with Latino Children Beat the Odds... and Others Don't"

Disciplined People

Strong and Steady Principal: Focuses on what truly improves the school; keeps pushing forward no matter what the obstacles.

Collaborative Solutions: Problem solving takes place throughout the ranks; leadership is shared instead of concentrated in a few people at the top.

Disciplined Thought

Clear Bottom Line: Individual student achievement is emphasized — no excuses.

Ongoing Assessment: Student and teacher assessments are made early and often; information is used to spot problems and intervene, rather than assign blame.

Disciplined Action

Stick with the Program: Select a good program, stick with it and continually improve it.

Built to Suit: Interventions are personalized to suit each student's needs.