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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **California Schools That Beat the Odds**

### ***New report updates and confirms previous findings about positive school climate***

San Francisco, California — March 11, 2014 — WestEd recently released the 2013 list of California Beating The Odds Schools. A school that beats the odds is defined as one whose student test scores are better than would be predicted based on its student demographic characteristics for four consecutive years.

Overall, 192 or 2.9% of California public schools were identified as beating the odds, including 122 elementary schools, 37 middle schools, and 33 high schools.

This list was compiled in response to interest generated by a WestEd study published last year, entitled *A Climate for Academic Success*, that identified 40 California public middle and high schools that beat the academic achievement odds from 2007-08 to 2010-11. This updated list of beating-the-odds schools uses data from 2009-10 to 2012-13 and includes elementary schools.

"Educators are always looking for successful exemplars to learn from. Too often, success is defined by absolute test scores. But test scores are highly related to the demographics of a school's students," says Greg Austin, Director of the Health and Human Development Program at WestEd. "The fact that schools with largely affluent student populations are often successful offers little useful direction for trying to improve struggling schools with low-income student populations."

WestEd created the Beating The Odds Schools list to identify schools that consistently perform better than their peer schools with similar demographics. The list includes schools with a variety of demographic compositions. For example, some beating-the-odds schools serve all low-income students and some serve none. A school made the list by consistently outperforming predictions based on its demographics.

Austin adds, "These schools have demonstrated exceptional levels of academic performance compared to their peers. The natural next step for education researchers and policymakers is to learn what it is about these schools that caused their success — especially what allowed those schools serving low socioeconomic status populations to break the well-established connection between demographics and achievement. The answers to this question can provide useful guidance for school improvement."

One answer may be a more positive school climate, which includes such factors as student safety, high group morale, and student engagement. The 2013 WestEd study *A Climate for Academic Success* documented that school climate is strongly associated with beating the academic achievement odds among middle and high schools. In this year's list, school climate still appears to differentiate schools that beat the academic odds.

A wide range of resources are available to help schools improve their school climates on the website of the California Safe and Supportive Schools Project ([www.californiaS3.wested.org](http://www.californiaS3.wested.org)).

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WestEd, a national nonpartisan, nonprofit research, development, and service agency, works with education and other communities to promote excellence, achieve equity, and improve learning for children, youth, and adults. WestEd has [15 offices](#) nationwide, from Washington and Boston to Arizona and California. Its corporate headquarters are in San Francisco. More information about WestEd is available at [WestEd.org](http://WestEd.org).

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