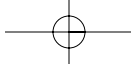

Foreword

Throughout my reading of *Teachers DO Make a Difference*, I found myself continually feeling gratitude—gratitude for the heart and humanity of the six wonderful teachers described in this book, who are indeed making a difference in the lives of the youth in their care, and gratitude for my friend and colleague Judy Deiro, for capturing and recording their voices. Lastly, my deep gratitude goes out to you, the readers (and teachers), who care enough about young people to pick up this book in the midst of your overwhelmingly busy lives. You will not be disappointed. In fact, you will be affirmed and invigorated.

I have spent the last twenty years seeking to understand and identify factors that protect young people from high-risk behaviors, including school failure and dropping out. I heartily concur with the theme of Judy's book: establishing caring, respectful, inviting relationships with young people *is* the bottom line for promoting their healthy emotional and social development *and* the number one prerequisite for student learning.

"He knew I had a lot of problems, but he always believed I was a good person and could do good things. I credit him with my life. Without his belief in me, I couldn't have stopped doing the things I was doing." These are the words of one of the teachers in this book, describing a teacher who made a difference in his own life. The teacher's words echo what thousands of young people growing up in high-risk environments have told us in interviews, in qualitative studies of turnaround schools, and in longitudinal developmental research about the power of a nurturing teacher, classroom, and school to transform their life experience from despair to hope and from chaos to meaning.

Judy's book, more than any other I have read over my many years in prevention and education, encapsulates precisely what teachers are able to do to support both the healthy development and successful learning of their students, even those students dealing with multiple challenges and adversities. Judy identifies the specific practices and beliefs of teachers who make a difference—teachers who motivate and engage *all* their students, especially "those students" that others have given up on. Through actual



x **Teachers DO Make a Difference**

classroom vignettes, Judy paints a picture of what caring, respect, and invitational relationships look like. She then ties these classroom portraits directly to the principles of practice that they illustrate.

The book you hold in your hands conveys *good* news: “closing the achievement gap” and creating “high-performing” schools depends not on *what* we teach but *how* we teach. Judy Deiro clearly shows that schools do not need yet another curriculum, but rather positive adult-student connections as well as caring and respectful learning communities in our classrooms. The challenge to all caring educators in this age of high-stakes testing and one-size-fits-all standards is to get the message of this book out to preservice and practicing teachers and administrators, to educational policymakers, and to the general public: *All students can learn, relationships matter, and teachers DO make a difference!*

—Bonnie Benard

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