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## Study gives schools tips on Latinos

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*Discipline among staff is key*

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When it comes to helping struggling Latino kids learn, success has little to do with money, class sizes, fancy reading programs, parent involvement or tutoring, a study released Thursday concluded.

Those things can be found at both good schools and bad.

Here's what separates the best from the faltering: principals and teachers who test and retest students, who use the results to teach and re-teach, and who don't stop until they find a way for every kid to grasp the lesson.

Latino students make up more than 405,000 of the state's 1 million school kids. They are a growing population but are lagging behind their academic peers. About 30 percent of Latino students drop out before high school graduation.

The Center for the Future of Arizona, headed by former Arizona State University President Lattie Coor, and ASU's Morrison Institute conducted the three-year study. They were helped by Jim Collins, a former Stanford University business professor and author of the best-selling *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap . . . and Others Don't*.

Collins' book examined why some companies organized themselves into steadfast successes by comparing them to twin companies that stayed flat or burst onto the scene and then failed. The study applied Collins' methodology to compare 12 of Arizona's best schools, in its poorest neighborhoods, to 12 similar but failing schools, sometimes in the same district.

The result is *Why Some Schools With Latino Children Beat the Odds . . . and Others Don't*. It's a fresh how-to manual created to help schools still struggling to catch up with an education reform movement that successful principals put in place nearly 10 years ago.

### Path to success

The report concluded a successful school in tough circumstances is not an accident, or a flashy miracle, and doesn't require a grand change in public policy. Here is what it reported makes the difference in a successful school:

- **Disciplined thought:** These principals and teachers admitted failure and changed their approach. Johnny Chavez, principal of Phoenix's Larry C. Kennedy School, said he judged himself and each teacher on the daily, weekly and monthly test results of each child. If a child wasn't making progress, Chavez and the teacher worked together in the classroom and consulted other teachers until they found a better way. "You have to have honest dialogue with your staff," Chavez said. "I'm not looking to make friends."
- **Disciplined people:** These principals pushed ahead despite roadblocks and used their entire staff to find solutions. They fought through children suffering from poverty, drugs and crime. They fought through bad reading programs imposed by districts, oversized classes, underpaid teachers and public mandates that created mounds of paperwork. Juli Peach, principal of Yuma's Alice Byrne Elementary School, said it's not just one hurdle: "It's hurdle after hurdle." For eight years, Peach has fought to keep every adult focused on making sure each child learns reading and math. "It's not anything other schools can't do."
- **Disciplined action:** The principal and staff select one program or plan, stick with it and make it better and better. Frank Terbush had been principal 17 years at Phoenix's Granada East School when the state labeled his school "underperforming." It was 1997, and Terbush said to himself: Well, that's the last time that's going to happen. "It's not the (test) data that's so important," Terbush said. It's teachers taking responsibility for every one of the 28, 32 or 35 kids in their class. "It's who is using that data and how they're using it."

### Comparison and contrast

Since retiring from ASU, Coor has been looking for a way to turn struggling students in Arizona schools into engineers, doctors and business leaders. He asked Collins for help.

The study has nothing to do with imposing business values onto schools, Collins said, because the same mediocrity and undisciplined focus plaguing many schools also plagues businesses.

It is about comparing and contrasting twin organizations, he said, whether they are businesses, sports teams or symphony orchestras, and discovering what makes one fail and one great.

"I see Arizona as a state with a growing Latino community, and if Arizona can do it right, it can be a beacon of hope for the rest of the country," Collins said.

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