COMMUNITY COLUMNIST

hile Valley 'immigrants- were
showing us-what life would be
like without them on May 1, I
was inside a West Valley classroom learn-
ing about why some schools with majority
Latino .students succeed while others
don't
The information from the study of good
vs. average schools was surprisingly simple
— which is not.the same as easy .'
It was done by the .Center for the Future
of Arizona, a self-described "do tank"
headed by former ASU President Lattie
Coor. It applied the method of researcher
and business author Jim Collins (Good to
Great), who studied companies that made
rapid and sustained improvement after
puttering along for years. Collins made de-
tailed and layered comparisons of per-
forming companies to companies as simi-
lar in every way except making that leap to
excellence*

a

:;'. The Arizona study also

compared schools with

higher than expected, giv-

en language skills and so-
; • cioeconomic cireum-

HAL .schools-that did not beat
PEKEYSER the odds. : '
~ ~" ~~ The answer, it seems, is
discipline. If s not the whack-'em-in-the-
fanny discipline; Ifs discipline" demon-
strated by teachers and administrators..
Performing schools are those that ac-
cept responsibility but not excuses,,and for
all students, not just for the institutional
average. They don't accept that less famil-
iarity with English, higher mobility, lower
income, a run-down neighborhood or
fewer involved parents allow them to -let
any kid fail. There are no Mulligans, no
failing kids who don't count. Schools test

and monitor and correct and do it all. again
repeatedly and consistently.
That's simple, not easy, and certainly not
universally recognized and done.
" Surprisingly it doesn't seem to matter
what instructional method is used, as long
as it is applied consistently and constantly
(discipline again). Money isn't a main fac-
tor, although consistent and more teacher
and principal training is necessary to pull it
off more broadly. And teachers must help
determine and buy into the teaching pro-
gram used, which gets down to how princi-
pals are trained to run schools. Principals
are the key.
The results remind me of how New York
City got a handle on its crime problem. In-
stead of ignoring subway turnstile jump-
ers, graffiti vandals and low-level hooli-
gans because there weren't enough cops to deal with them all, a new police chief
rounded them all up and prosecuted even

small offenses. That showed that the two-
bit criminals were the same as (or became)
the more troublesome thugs, and dealing
consistently and constantly with problems
early — taking responsibility for all crime
— worked best. Ifs like not allowing the
"first broken window in the abandoned fac-
tory, because if you do, they'll all be shat-
tered.
Mary Jo-Waits, a researcher and author
of the study wants Arizona to create a na-
tionally prominent institute to train princi-
pals to run schools like this. If great princi-
pals are essential, it makes sense to focus first on training them. What team is going
to win with an average quarterback?~

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