Study aims to

BY ANGELA GONZALES

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Business gum and best-selling author Jim
Collins was in town this week to shine a
light on Arizona's top-performing schools
with high Latino populations.
Latinos are the fastest-growing popula-
tion segment in Arizona, but suffer from
low achievement ^ d graduation rates.
A study by the Center for the Future of Ar-
izona and.the Mdfrison Institute for Public
Policy at Arizona State University identifies
a few good schools that are making a dif-
ference in the lives of Latino children. The
goal is to share their strategies with other schools across the state and nation.
Collins, who offered his services pro bono,
was in town to present the study findings to the business and educational community. The study called "Why Some Schools with
Latino Children Beat the Odds and Others
Don't," used methodology developed by Col-
lins, author of "Good to Great: Why Some
Companies Make the Leap ... and Others Don't."

Only 12 Arizona schools showed either
steady performance or improvements in
key areas between 1997 and 2004. Of those schools, four are in Phoenix: Estrella Mid-
dle School, Granada East School, Larry C. Kennedy School and Phoenix Magnet, Tra-ditional School.
In these schools, students are mostly La-
tino and mostly poor, but still beating the
odds., said Mary Jo Waits, a senior fellow at
the Center for the Future of Arizona.
Waits looked at top-perform ing schools
and schools with less-than-stellar perfor-
mance and found that there are six things that the beat-the-odds schools do. The six practices share three key components found in Collins' "Good to Great" book:

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BY THE NUMBERS

Statistics based on Arizona's
population:

74: The percentage of Latinos
speaking Spanish at home.
68: The percentage of Latinos born
in Mexico who are not high school
graduates.
53: The percentage of the immi-
grants from Latin America who ar-
rived in the United States between
1990 and 2000.
49: The percentage of those speak-
ing Spanish at home who do not
speak English "very well."
38: The percentage of Latinos
under 18.
37: The percentage of Latinos bom
outside the U.S. (93 percent were
from Mexico).
25: The percentage of Latinos liv-
ing in poverty.
25: The percentage of population
made up of Latinos.

Source: 2000 U.S. Census, Arizona Department of
Education database as reported in the "Beat the Odds"
study - ; • -.]

disciplined thought, disciplined people and
disciplined aqtiora $ *
The beat-the-odds schools all:

• Have a clear bottom line, emphasiz-
ing achievement of every student in every
classroom and taking responsibility for that
performance.
• Use ongoing assessments, rather than
waiting for mandated tests and graduation

s' 'beat-the-odds' strategies
rates. These schools track performance on a
monthly, weekly, or even daily basis to stay
on top of each student's progress.
• Have a strong and steady principal, who
manages the school improvement process
by being neither too rigid nor too flexible.
They don't make excuses for their school's shortcomings, but keep pushing ahead, no matter what the roadblocks.
• Collaborate on solutions, with responsi-
bility for improvements distributed among

This is a

message of

hope/

Mary Jo Waits
Center for the Future of Arizona

teachers and staff, who are given owner-ship.
• Stick with the program, which doesn't
mean blindly doing the same thing over
and over. They use class and student perfor-mance data to assess performance regularly and tweak the program along the way.
• Build educational programs tailored to
each student. They place a relentless focus on individual performance, using a per-
petual cycle of instruction, assessment and intervention.]
Frank Terbush^ a principal at Granada
East for 25 years before recently retiring,
said teachers need to realize that students can succeed, despite their poverty levels.
Teachers need to collaborate and regularly
track student performance, he said. "Once

you do this, then you analyze that perfor-
mance data and then you make changes."
Waits said she had been toying with this
type of study ever since 2001 when she is-sued the "Five Shoes Waiting to Drop on Ar-
izona's Future" report while she was at the Morrison Institute. One of those shoes was a lack of educational success of Latinos.
The "Beat the Odds" study looked at 331
of Arizona's 1,709 public schools. The sur-
vey schools were chosen because they had a Latino school enrollment of 50 percent
or more, along with 50 percent or more
poor children as of October 2004. The 331 schools were analyzed for Stanford 9 per-formance, focusing on third-grade reading
and eighth-grade math.
Waits said her team found a few schools
that showed steady improvement over an eight-year period.
"This is a message of hope," Waits said,
because other schools can focus on things they can control, rather than worrying
about a magic bullet to fix their problems, t* Plans call for widely disseminating the
study, said Lattie Coor, chairman and chief
executive of the Center for the Future of
Arizona. He hopes to provide leadership
institutes and a resource center for other schools. '