New front opening in war on state's HS dropout rate

Sunnyside High School juniors DanieHa Madrid (center), tion into Jobs for Arizona Graduates, which helps non-16, and Gaby Saenz, 17, practice for next week's indue- college-bound grads find jobs and training. Stony, 7A

2001-02 high school dropout rates
Desert View 8.85%
Pueblo 6.91%
Cholla 6.04%
Marana 6.0%

Amphitheater 5.38%
Flowing Wells 5.01%
Vail Charter 4.6%
Sahuarita 4.52%

Sunnyside 3.3%
Santa Rita 2.58%
Marana Mountain View 2.53%
Rincon 2.42%

Canyon del Oro 2.21%
Catalina 2.06%

Palo Verde 1.96%

Tucson High 1.82%
Sabino1.24%

Iron wood Ridge 1.01%
Howenstine 0.97%
Catalina Foothills 0.96%

Vail Cienega 0.92%
Sahuaro 0.75%

University 0%

Statewide

dropout rate

9.5%

New group looks for solutions,
will develop five-year plan
By MARY BUSTAMANTE
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Arizona's dropout rate, among the nation's
highest, will face formidable new foes in the
effort to solve a problem that educators say
affects not only the individual's economic well-
being but also the state's future.
The Center for the Future of Arizona - a

new privately-funded "do" tank, instead of
think tank - has identified the dropout rate as
the first issue it will focus on, said Lattie F.
Coor, its chairman and chief executive.
The group will analyze successful programs
and build a consensus on changes to lower
dropout levels, said Coor, president emeritus of
Arizona State University.
The group then will develop a five-year plan
to build on "best practices" that will be identi-
fied in part through a $380,000 statewide His-
panic education study conducted by the Morri-
son Institute of Public Policy. The research will

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Five-year project targets state's dropout ra
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be funded by the Bruce T. Halle
Foundation, ASU, Valley of the
Sun United Way and Phoenix.
"From a list of schools with at

least 50 percent Latino student
bodies and at least 50 percent of
students on free or reduced
lunches, the institute will identi-
fy those sites that are succeed-
ing and s6e what they have in
common . . . and then compare
them to similar schools that
aren't achieving as well," said
Mary Jo Waits, associate direc-
tor of the institute.

Jim Collins, author of the
best seller "Good to Great,"
which analyzes characteristics
of companies that become supe-
rior in their field, will be
involved in the study, she said.
"If we show people there is a
sensible pathway to lowering
the dropout rate," then Arizo-
nans will ask politicians about it
and the path should become pol-
icy, said Coor, who spoke at a
Tucson Citizen Editorial Board
meeting Monday.
'We want to be able to say,
These Arizona schools are the

ones that are performing well,
and this is what they are doing.
This is what works. Let's move
toward it,'" Coor said.
He predicted a noticeable
reduction in the Hispanic
dropout rate within two to three
years and said he could see the
same thing applied for other
minority populations.
The center will work
on the dropout issue for
five years.
Various studies
show high schools lose
30 percent to 50 percent
of Latino students
before graduation, Coor
said. The goal is to make
sure Arizona is doing
what it should be to

make things work.
Waits said the study,
which will rely on Stan-
ford 9 scores to identify
successful schools,
should be completed by
the end of June.

Pima County's
largest school district, Tucson
Unified, is taking an aggressive
approach to decreasing its
dropout rate, Prevention Inter-

vention Specialist Doris
Williams said.

Seven of the district's 11 high
schools have dropout preven-
tion specialists. Another special-
ist is in charge of all middle
schools, and there is one each
for alternative schools and the
department for American Indi-
an studies.
When a student isn't
in school, the special-
ists make phone calls,
send letters and visit
homes.

They talk to the fam-
ily and try to identify
the problem, Williams
said.

• "They work with the
teachers, counselors,"
she said. "And I can't
stress enough how
important it is to work
with the parents. If we
can get parents to buy
into what we're doing
with the student, it
makes a world of differ-
ence.

"We look at reasons why stu-
dents drop out. We look at the
home environment and the com-

munity. A lot of times our stu-
dents need to work or need to
stay home and watch siblings so
parents can work.
"We work with the communi-
ty to say, Here is what we can
offer this family so the student
can stay in school.'"
Schools have in-school sus-

pension alternatives where stu-
dents get one-to-one attention
from dropout specialists or
counselors, she said.
And adult volunteers help
mentor students through school
and job opportunities through a
Youth Opportunities Program.
For Hispanic students, there
is a big push for academic devel-
opment within the curriculum
Williams said.
"When students see them-
selves in the curriculum, when
they see themselves as the
teacher, see themselves as part
of school and part of the commu-
nity ... see that their language is
important in school, they get
excited and feel more compelled
to stay in school," she said.
"If you take an interest in a
student and "walk them through
it, they'll want to stay."