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OUR OPINION

A needed plan to cut Latino

dropout rate

Arizona has held the embarrassing dis-tinction off and on for years of having the highest high school drop-out rate in the nation.

And Arizona's Latino students are drop-ping out at an even higher rate.
The problem has defied solution, even though it has been a subject of ongoing debate among educators, business leaders and elected officials.

Is there any reason to hope things might change in any near future? Perhaps.
The new Ctenterjfor;jhe Future of Ari-zona, which regards itec^^
ISink tank but a "do tank" that pulls together the best research and puts it into action, has made the dropout rate of His-panics its first project.
The center has solid backing from a pri-vate foundation that has pledged $200,000 over the next five years to fund its Arizona Dropout Initiative.

Latinos focus of education study
The money will cover a large share of the $380,000 needed to hire the Morrison Institute for Public Policy at Arizona State University to conduct a Latino education study. Latinos are the focus because they have a higher rate of poverty and a dispro-portionately high share of dropouts, center officials said.

The study will identify a uniform way to track high school dropout rates through-out the state, since discrepancies in cur-rent record-keeping make it difficult to
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Half of the K-12 population in both Phoenix and Tucson are Latino, according to Lattie Coor, a former ASU president and now chairman and CEO of the center. And according to standardized test scored, Lati-nos have problems in school, especially in science and math.

The "best practices" of successful schools will form the basis of policy recom-mendations that the center will take to decision makers in the form of a five-year plan to decrease the dropout rate. Those practices could include programs to enhance preschool and elementary school readiness, third and fourth grade reading and math achievement, and mid-dle school transition assistance.

The center won't just look at high schools, but the whole continuum of edu-cation that precedes it.

Expect improvement in a few years
Coor said the study should be completed by the end of the June. He's optimistic that the study will give state lawmakers and educators compelling reasons to move for-ward with at least some of its recommen-dations.
If they do, Coor predicts the public will start seeing improvement in the high school graduation rate in the next two to three years.
The study also will be an important con-tributor to plans by University of Arizona President Peter Iikins plans to increase UA's Latino enrollment. If more Latinos graduate from high school, UA will have a larger pool of potential students.
A good education not only improves the lives of individuals, it strengthens the foundation of society. As baby boomers age and tax the Social Security system, for example, a younger work force will be forced to shoulder the burden. Educating the nation's growing Hispanic population would ease that economic burden.
A well-educated work force and a decent school system also would attract more business and industry to the state. What the center hopes to accomplish is daunting. But it's off to a promising start.