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New reports offer improved stats for Arizona schools
By JOANNA DODDERp^TPAQ|e graduation rate (see

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The Daily Courier
PHOENIX - Two new
studies shed a favorable
light on the often-maligned
Arizona education system.
A new Arizona Depart-
ment of Education study
shows that 73 percent of the
state's class of 2002 gradu-
ated in four years, compared
to the national average of 67.3
percent.
Arizona also calculates
that 76.4 percent of that class
graduated after five years of
high school. Comparable
national statistics are not
available, said Brian Owin,
an Arizona Department of
Education research associ-
ate.

At least half of Yavapai
County's schools also beat

chart, Page 12A).
Arizona Schools Superin-
tendent Tom Home joined
other organizations includ-
ing the Center for the Future
of Arizona, Arizona Business
Education Coalition and Ari-
zona Center for Public Policy
in advocating the use of the
graduation rate instead of
the dropout rate, calling the
latter misleading.
The Arizona Center for
Public Policy just released a
new study to illustrate how
misleading states' dropout
rate can be.
The study compares Ari-
zona dropout rates to those
in Texas/removing as many
variances in calculations* as
possible.

the national four-year aver- See SCHOOLS, page 12A

• SCHOOLS

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The study notes that state-pub-lished statistics : report \ Arizona's dropout rate at 7.1 percent and Texas' rate at 0.9 percent.
After applying Arizona's dropout definition and calculation to Texas so the numbers compare "apples to apples," the study concludes that the Texas rate is somewhere in the range of 5.2 percent to 7.1 percent, depend-ing on the numerical treatment of students who withdrew to enroll in schools out of state.
"The study Underscores the importance of consistent definitions .when comparing states," Home said. "Arizonansi will be happily sur-prised when proper comparisons are made."

Other reports conclude that Ari-zona is among the states with the worst dropout and graduation rates, Owin noted.
* "It's important to show,/Hey, we're right there with everybody else,'" he said.
The Center for Public Policy chose Texas, the model state for the sweep-ing federal No Child Left Behind law, becaujse it has similar student demo-graphics and economic interests to Arizona.
The states' different definitions
of "dropout" contribute to the varia-tions in published dropout rates. Also, Arizona doesn't require school districts to submit informa-tion on individual students. Texas does, allowing it to conduct a more thorough data verification process,

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the study concludes.
Most Yay^pai County schools where infc^nation was available recorded dfopout rates lower than the Arizonaiverage.
But the state doesn't provide directly comparable numbers for grades 7-12 for individual schools and school districts. The schools' numbers are separated into two categories: grades 7-8 and grades 9-12.

When split into those two cat-egories, statewide dropout rates are 2.8 percent for grades 7-8 and 8.5 percent for grades 9-12, Owin said. Texas doesn't separate those statis-tics, he noted.

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