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Arizona's dropout rate worst in nation for 3rd straight year

PHOENIX (AP) — For the third
consecutive year, Arizona ranked as
the worst in the nation for teens age
16 to 19 who have dropped out of
school, according to a report
released last week.
The findings — in the annual Kids Count Data Book by the ^nnje E. Casey Foundation in Baltimore — show that Arizona's high school dropout rate is almost double the national rate.
The study, based on 2001 Cen-sus data and released last week, shows dropout rates ranging from 4 percent in North Dakota to 16 percent in Arizona. The national rate was 9 percent.
Some education officials called the study unreliable.
Superintendent of Public Instruc-tion Tom Home pointed to a recent study by the state's universities that said Arizona's reputation of having too many dropouts may not be the fault of schools but the result of missing or bad information: "It appears that a lot of these conclu-sions depends on who is manipulat-ing the data."
Home noted dropout rates are cal-culated over a one-year period. He said graduation rates, measured over

four years, are a better measure. Arizona's graduation rate in 2002 was 72.7 percent, according to state reports, meaning more than a quarter of kids don't g;et their diplomas. Still, it's better than the national graduation rate in 2001 of 70 percent.
Arizona's longtime dismal rank-ings prompted retired Arizona State University President Lattie Coor, along with Sybil Francis, a public policy specialist and wife of current ASU President Michael Crow, in February to create the J Center for the Future of Arizona. "Ine center is designed to attack the dropout problem.
"There's a great network of peo-ple, all working together," Coor said. Still, improving the dropout rate will take time. Coor suspects Ari-zona could show progress by 2012. Coor said the Kids Count data are generally considered a good measure of what is happening nationally.
Carol Kamin, director of the nonprofit Children's Action Alliance, agreed: "Compared across the board, we are dead last. We have problems, and it's time we address them."