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**CENTER FOR THE FUTURE OF ARIZONA ANNOUNCES  
FIRST MILESTONE IN THE ARIZONA DROPOUT INITIATIVE**  
*Coalition achieves consensus on high school graduation data and documentation methods*

**PHOENIX, February 13, 2004** – The Center for the Future of Arizona (Center) has achieved its first major milestone since launching the Arizona Dropout Initiative – establishing a consensus on how dropout and graduation rates should be measured and reported. The Center has spent the last several months working with a coalition of education, business, policy and non-profit leaders to forge this consensus, and agreement has been reached to focus on and redefine graduation rates as the means to document the success rate among Arizona students. (List of coalition member is attached)

Graduation and dropout calculations currently vary across the state, and even across the nation, resulting in inconsistent data collection and reporting practices. The disparities in basic documentation make it difficult to understand the problems that have kept Arizona's high school dropout rate among the highest in the nation. The coalition is recommending that the Arizona Department of Education calculate the graduation rate as four year plus summer to capture the students who successfully complete high school requirements the summer following their senior year. This recommendation also aligns Arizona with national standards and allows for better state-to-state comparisons.

"In order to tackle the problem, you must clearly understand it," said Dr. Sybil Francis, the Center's executive director. "Consistency in definition and documentation are important and necessary first steps in this process. By aligning reporting and data collection methods within the state, we will have accurate data that can then be analyzed and understood. Without this information, we simply do not have a clear picture of the actual situation."

Following several months of research and discussions, the coalition has developed a consensus document outlining its findings and recommendations for aligning graduation definition and documentation methods. As its next step, the coalition will meet with additional education stakeholders, elected officials and interested business leaders to put an action plan into place based on these recommendations. (Consensus document is attached)

"There is a great deal of interest and support for this effort," said Nadine Basha, president of the State Board of Education and a member of the Center's board of directors. "People recognize that data inconsistencies present a real issue that must be resolved. Reaching statewide consensus on these issues lays the foundation for everything else we do to improve Arizona's dropout rate."

Another of the coalition's recommendations is that Arizona take its proposal for more uniform data collection and reporting standards to other states in the region, leading eventually to the establishment of a regional index of student achievement.

"This effort could become a model for the region," said Jim Zaharis, vice president of Greater Phoenix Leadership. "Border states that share characteristics that are unique to this region could benefit greatly from similar reporting methods. Shared information will help us all understand who is graduating, and who isn't, and why, so we can implement programs that encourage success."

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## **ARIZONA DROPOUT INITIATIVE/2-2-2**

The Center is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization funded through the donations of philanthropic individuals and organizations dedicated to Arizona's future well-being. Dr. Sybil Francis serves as the organization's executive director, and Dr. Lattie Coor serves as chairman and CEO. In addition, the Center is governed by a board of directors comprised of distinguished community leaders committed to improving the lives of Arizonans. For more information, visit the Center's Web site at [www.ArizonaFuture.org](http://www.ArizonaFuture.org) or call (480) 727-5005.

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