

KERA UPDATE

June 1998

#26

Where'd They Goooooo??!! (Dropouts, Part II)

The recent release of the Annie E. Casey Foundation's 1998 report, *Kids Count*, created a real stir in Kentucky. At a time when discussions about school violence have reached the point of hysteria, the newest edition of *Kids Count* shows Kentucky's youth crime rate skyrocketing, up nearly 400 percent from 1985 to 1995.

Lost in the crime data uproar was any discussion of another very disturbing statistic in *Kids Count*: **Kentucky's high school dropout rate is definitely rising, and the state's rank slid a dramatic eight places between 1992, when KIRIS testing began, and 1995, the most recent data year available! Kentucky's rate is now even higher than West Virginia's!**

See for yourself:

Annie E. Casey Foundation
701 St. Paul Street
Baltimore, MD 21202

Phone: 410-547-6600
On the Web: <http://aecf.org>

The Casey dropout information is interesting for a number of reasons. It does not rely on data from either the Kentucky Department of Education or the United States Department of Education. Instead, *Kids Count* uses a sophisticated statistical sampling survey conducted by the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics. While the estimates are subject to sampling error, BLS reduces the error significantly by averaging the data over a three year period. Thus, the figure reported for 1995 is actually averaged over 1994, 1995, and 1996. The result is clearly solid enough that Casey felt comfortable publishing the figures and providing hard state-to-state comparisons. Those state-to-state comparisons have never been possible using KDE or US DOE data.

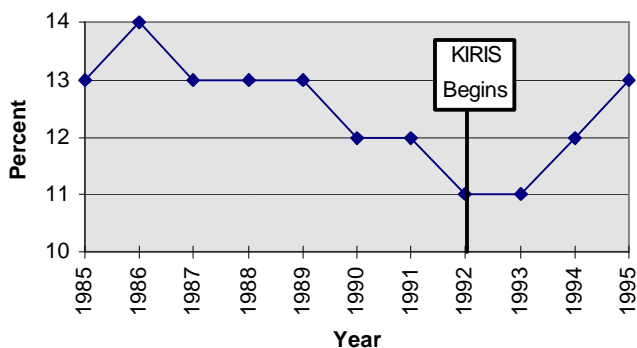
The Casey report makes something very clear: **Kentucky's dropout performance, whether we look at the absolute rate, or the state-to-state ranking, entered a very notable decline after KIRIS testing began in 1992.** From 1992 to 1995, the state experienced a dropout rate increase for the 16 to 19 year old age group of two

points. Kentucky lost 8 places in the state-to-state rankings as a result. Kentucky's current dropout rate of 13 percent slides us back to where we were in 1985! We erased all the progress made between 1985 up to the time when Kentucky's education reform began to really impact the classroom with the first edition of the KIRIS test.

KIRIS, by the way, was the key element in Kentucky's education reform. KIRIS was specifically designed to drive instructional changes in the state. Certainly, sharp changes in dropout performance coinciding with the start of KIRIS should not be casually dismissed as unrelated.

At present, key state leaders are debating the replacement for KIRIS. Clearly, the *Kids Count* dropout data offers a warning: **if the new CATS assessment is little changed from KIRIS, then there may be scant reason for hope Kentucky's currently deteriorating dropout situation will improve.**

Percent of Kentucky Teens Who Are High School Dropouts (Age 16 to 19)



Kentucky's Relative Dropout Rate Rank Among the 50 States and Washington, DC

(Higher Number Indicates Better Performance)

