KERA UPDATE

Dropouts: They just keep going and going, right out of our schools!

Kentucky's public school dropouts now provide perhaps the most unsatisfactory indicator of all that Kentucky's education reform is on the wrong track. The Annie E. Casey Foundation's 1999 report, *Kids Count*, shows Kentucky experienced an almost continuous rise in dropouts since our schools started using the reform's new assessments in 1992.

> ***Kentucky's dropout rank slid twelve places between 1992, when the KIRIS assessment began, and 1996, the most recent data year available!***

There is added cause for concern in the latest Casey figures. According to data compiled by the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE), the Grade 9 to 12 dropout rate stayed flat at 5.53 percent between 1994-95 and 1995-96. The Casey figures indicate that didn't happen, and that the dropout rate actually increased by at least half a point. The different trends in the Casey and KDE data raise an important question about the accuracy of KDE's dropout data.

> *Is the Kentucky Department of Education's dropout data*

What if the KDE data isn't accurate? KDE dropout numbers are part of Kentucky's school assessment. Every other year, that assessment determines which schools share rewards worth about $25 million and which schools get expensive, limited resources to improve. If KDE's dropout data is wrong, then the assessment results might not be accurate, either.

There are other problems, too. In 1998, the Kentucky legislature passed a law that set a dropout rate cutoff of 6 percent for rewards eligibility. Now, that bad law really comes home to roost. Six percent is almost half a point higher than the state's current average rate (it's twice the rate considered acceptable in Maryland, which has an assessment similar to Kentucky's). How can we in good conscience reward schools with below average dropout performance when the state is third from the bottom nationally in this important school indicator??!!!
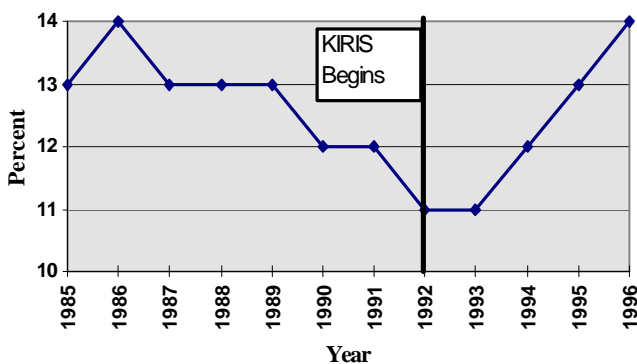
By the way, *Kids Count* uses data from a sophisticated survey conducted every month by the US Census Bureau. While the results are subject to sampling error, *Kids Count* reduces the error significantly by averaging the data over a three year period. The result is solid enough that the Annie E. Casey Foundation feels comfortable publishing the figures, including the state ranks. That was never possible using either KDE or US DOE data. And, these important results from Annie E. Casey clearly show that:

> ***Kentucky education has a very serious, growing problem with***

See for yourself:

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

Kentucky's Dropout Rate Ranking Among the 50 States and the District of Columbia
(Based on percent of 16 to 19 year old dropouts)
(Note: Higher Number is Better Performance)