

KERA UPDATE

April 2000

About The Kentucky Education Reform Act

#45

Results Matter, But Only If You Have The Real Results

The Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) recently published *Results Matter*, a tenth anniversary report on the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA). This *KERA UPDATE* is the third in a series of critiques on specific data presentations in *Results Matter* and deals with KDE's incomplete portrayals of Kentucky public school dropout statistics.

The top graph on page 82 in *Results Matter* shows Kentucky's annual grade 9 to 12 dropout rate. This rate increased from 5.06% in 1993 to 5.34% in 1998. The increase doesn't seem significant — until you consider that this is just an annual rate. **In 1993 Kentucky lost 9,942 dropouts. The state lost 10,856 students in 1998.** In a state the size of Kentucky, 914 more dropouts a year adds up awfully quickly to a large percentage of adults who will face disadvantages for the rest of their lives.

So, *the Kentucky dropout statistics, by themselves, are discouraging.* But, exactly how does this reflect on KERA? Specifically, how are other states doing? Don't forget that the court case which brought us KERA and the KERA preamble itself both require our students to compare favorably to those in other states. Can we use this data in *Results Matter* to make such an analysis?

The answer is, the *Results Matter* dropout figures cannot be compared to other state or federal figures. This Kentucky statistic isn't calculated in the same way as the Common Core of Data dropout rate reported by the federal Department of Education. Kentucky's calculation artificially reduces the rate by an unknown amount. In fact, Kentucky doesn't even report this rate to the federal government. **So, KDE reported dropout rates cannot be**

compared to other rates (although some try to do that, anyway).

Is there a solution to this problem? The answer is yes, but finding the best data to evaluate KERA's performance is a little tricky.

The federal Bureau of the Census conducts monthly telephone surveys (the Comprehensive Population Survey, or CPS) of households around the country. One of the data points collected is whether individuals are not in school and not a graduate, either. In other words, the data reflects the dropout status. But, this data is collected for all age groups, creating problems when the goal is evaluation of public education. The federal Department of Education tries to get around this by posting a CPS based dropout rate for only the 16 to 24 year age group. But, that really isn't the answer, either. The CPS counts graduates from all schooling sources and GED programs as graduates. Because KERA does not deal with either non-public education or the GED program, it isn't a good idea to consider such a broad age group as the 16 to 24 year collection.

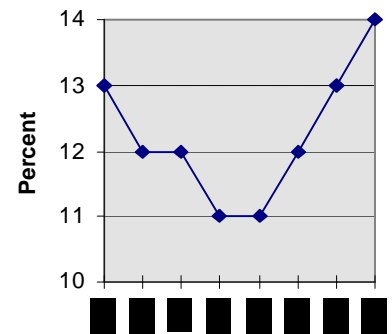
Is there a better answer — YES! The Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF) realized the shortcoming of the federal dropout calculation. Casey now analyzes raw CPS data for only the 16 to 19 year old group. That removes most of the GED diploma winners while capturing the prime years when dropouts actually occur.

What does the Casey research show? Quite simply, Kentucky's dropout performance up to 1996, the most recent data available, has been terrible. **Casey's Kids Count 1999 rates the state 49th out of 50 states plus Washington, DC, for**

dropout performance. From 1985 to 1996 Kentucky's dropout rate increased 8 percent while the nation's dropped 9 percent. As graphed below, in the 1990's Kentucky experienced both a serious increase in our percentage of dropouts and a serious slide in state rankings.

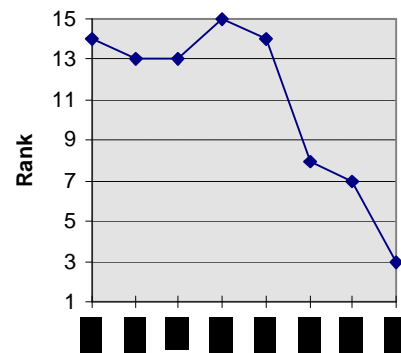
Those are the real 'results.'

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



Source: AECF's Kids Count, 1999

Kentucky's Rank From the Bottom of the List of the 50 States and Washington DC, 16 to 19 Year Old Dropouts



Note: A higher number is better performance