

NUGGET

State rates "C" on helping children

SALEM, Ore. (AP) — Seven years after Oregon set benchmarks to improve the lives of its children, an advocacy group is still giving the state only a C grade for its efforts.

The annual report by Children First for Oregon said Oregon showed no improvement in childhood poverty, teen dropouts and juvenile suicide attempts.

The Portland-based group tracks statistics on nearly 800,000 children.

The nonprofit group also reported Wednesday, November 35 (35), that it found the state lagging behind its goals for curbing child abuse and neglect, collecting child-

support payments and providing affordable housing and immunizations.

But the report said Oregon had cut its rates of infant mortality, juvenile arrests and teen pregnancy.

Mike Leachman of the Oregon Center for Public Policy, an independent research and education organization based in Silverton, said the Children First findings are consistent with trends his center has been tracking.

In addition to improving

education, Leachman advocates pegging the minimum wage to inflation and making a larger portion of child-care payments refundable to minimum-wage families.

Sen. Gene Derfler, R-Salem, who supports parental training and nursery programs, said the upcoming Legislature faces some tough decisions "that are going to determine how many of those programs are successful."