
I S S U E B R I E F

Resource Center on Educational Equity

**TEENAGE PREGNANCY:
State Education Agencies
and Prevention**



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COUNCIL OF CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) is a nationwide, nonprofit organization composed of the public officials who head departments of elementary and secondary education in the states, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Education Activity, and five extra-state jurisdictions. CCSSO seeks its members' consensus on major educational issues and expresses their views to civic and professional organizations, federal agencies, Congress, and the public. Through its structure of standing and special committees, the Council responds to a broad range of concerns about education and provides leadership on major education issues.

Because the Council represents the chief education administrators, it has access to the educational and governmental establishment in each state and to the national influence that accompanies this unique position. CCSSO forms coalitions with many other education organizations and is able to provide leadership for a variety of policy concerns that affect elementary and secondary education. Thus, CCSSO members are able to act cooperatively on matters vital to the education of America's young people.

RESOURCE CENTER ON EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

The CCSSO Resource Center on Educational Equity provides services designed to achieve equity and high quality education for minorities, women and girls, the disabled, limited-English proficient, and low-income students. The Center is responsible for managing and staffing a variety of CCSSO leadership initiatives to ensure educational success for all children and youth, especially those placed at-risk.

HIV/SCHOOL HEALTH PROJECT

The HIV/School Health Project assists state education agencies in providing effective HIV/AIDS education as part of a coordinated approach to school health. Current activities include producing and disseminating materials that chief state school officers, state health officials, their staff, and other interested colleagues can use to engage the public concerning the importance of taking a coordinated approach to school health. The project assists state education agencies to strengthen their capacity to support school-linked approaches to preventing teen pregnancy and to assure that effective HIV prevention programs are targeted to young people who are disproportionately at risk for contracting HIV. The Project also produces The Directory of Coordinated School Health Program Staff. This work is funded through a cooperative agreement with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/Division of Adolescent and School Health. The Council also operates the Comprehensive Health Education Network, a listserv that connects state education agency staff and colleagues around the country who work on school health issues.

Council of Chief State School Officers

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WHAT SEAs NEED TO KNOW... About Preventing Teen Pregnancy

Introduction

“Success for all kids.” This has become the battle cry of schools, districts, and states across the nation as they strive to ensure that all children have the opportunity to succeed in school and in life. The hallmarks of this effort are high standards, high expectations for all students, and accountability for results.¹

As CCSSO has pointed out in an earlier publication, high standards and high expectations cannot do it all. There is also “...a responsibility to make sure support, assistance, and information are available to help schools and communities with the task of boosting education results across the board while closing the achievement gap between disadvantaged students and their more affluent peers.”² When schools, districts, and states look at students at risk for failure, there is one group that stands out: the young women who become mothers prior to completing high school. The link between too-early parenthood and school failure is a complex one. Neither can be said to “cause” the other, but they are closely related. Because of this, educators need to use multiple strategies for strengthening the academic and social well being of young women.

Teen Pregnancy: The Costs

The United States has the highest teen pregnancy rate of any industrialized nation.³ Despite declines in the last few years, 4 out of 10 females will become pregnant at least once before they are 20. Put another way, almost one million teenagers become pregnant each year and 8 in 10 of these pregnancies are unintended.⁴

Early pregnancy and childbearing can have a dramatic impact on the lives of young women, their families, and their communities. Early parenting reduces the chances that a young woman will complete high school, go on to postsecondary education, or have the necessary skills to support herself. Fewer than one-third of the young women who give birth before age 18 will complete high school and early parenting is the leading cause of dropping out among young women.⁵

The costs of too-early parenting extend beyond the teen parents. Children of teen mothers are more likely to do worse in school and are 50 percent more likely to repeat a grade in school than the children of older mothers. In addition, these children are more likely to have health problems and to receive less health care, the daughters of teen mothers are more likely to become teen mothers themselves. Most dramatically, the sons of teen mothers are more likely to go to prison.⁶

Teen Parenthood: Who's at Risk

While any young woman might become pregnant, some are at greater risk of early parenthood than others. Approximately one-third of the women who become teen mothers have dropped out of school prior to their pregnancy.⁷ Girls who tested in the lowest 5 percent on one test of basic skills were 38 times more likely to become an unmarried mother than girls who tested in the upper 5 percent.⁸

Another way of thinking about the young women most at risk is that they are more likely to share a set of common experiences. They have higher rates of absences from school, are lower academic achievers, participate less often in extracurricular activities, and have lower expectations for their future. In addition, they are more likely to live in communities with high residential turnover, high poverty rates, and low educational levels.⁹ In other words, they are disengaged from school and from a sense of future.

Less is known about the young men who father children. Some are out of school or past school age, making it difficult to gather information on them. However, 14 percent of high school-aged males report causing at least one pregnancy. Older men who are involved in a teen pregnancy are less likely to have completed high school and are more likely to be unemployed.¹⁰

A Role for Education

The costs cited above all have an impact on educational achievement. Improving the educational achievement of all students, particularly those at high risk of school failure, is the critical teen pregnancy prevention element that the education community can accomplish.

In addition, the requirement that teen parents who receive benefits under the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) be enrolled in school means that schools are likely to be re-enrolling teen mothers who may have dropped out. This, combined with the negative impact that too-early parenthood has on a young woman's chances of academic success, strengthens the need for education to be a partner in the prevention of teen pregnancy.

Some will assert that the issue of teen pregnancy is one that is best left to parents and the family. Certainly, parents and other family members are key to helping young people make responsible choices. Parental and family values have a strong influence on the choices young people make. However, surveys of students find that teachers and counselors are their second most reliable source of sexuality information, after parents.¹¹

What Schools and Education Can Do

Discussions with educators and education policymakers stress that although schools can't prevent teen pregnancy, they do have an important role. The research on teen pregnancy suggests several strategies that schools and the education community can undertake to support prevention efforts:

- ***Include school-based policies and strategies for enhancing academic outcomes as key components of prevention initiatives.***

Adolescent health data suggest that students who have a strong connection to families and schools and who receive a strong overall program that links curriculum and instruction to high standards and provides academic support services are less likely to be involved in risky behavior, including behaviors that can lead to pregnancy.¹²

- ***Foster a sense of purpose and a vision for the future.***

Students with high expectations of their futures are more likely to succeed in school and avoid behaviors that result in pregnancy.¹³ By implementing strategies that are designed to foster a sense of purpose, schools can help to strengthen young peoples' vision of a productive future in which delaying parenthood makes sense.

- ***Incorporate youth development principles and practices as foundations for prevention and education initiatives.***

Youth development initiatives that are school based and community supported, are proving to be helpful in lowering rates of early sexual activity. These programs use strategies such as school-to-work activities, service-learning, peer and adult mentoring, tutoring, and after-school activities to build assets and increase academic success.¹⁴

- ***Provide HIV and STD education in schools, as well as pregnancy prevention programs.***

Studies have shown that the provision of effective HIV and sexually transmitted disease education can help young people avoid and reduce the likelihood of engaging in risky sexual behaviors.

- ***Participate in community and state partnerships to prevent teen pregnancy.***

Schools cannot do it alone. They need to be partners in comprehensive efforts to prevent teen pregnancy. Success requires the active involvement of families, schools, community and faith organizations, and public health service providers.

The Role of State Education Agencies

- ***By setting high academic standards and working to assure that all children succeed, state education agencies can play a major role in preventing teen pregnancy.*** By facilitating an environment in which all children are supported in achievement, both academically and developmentally, the state education agency works to reduce the risk.
- ***State education agencies can support instruction that is designed to help young people avoid and reduce the risks they face.*** While strong core academics are important, young people also need health information and skills to make the choices necessary to avoid and reduce risks. Teen pregnancy prevention is helped by instruction and youth development that provides information and skills related to making healthy and responsible behavioral choices.
- ***Partnerships are key to the role of the state education agency.*** In a number of states partnerships and collaborations that originate in the governor's office are playing key roles in teen pregnancy prevention. Examples include Ohio's "Governor's Initiative on Family and Children First.", and Maryland's Governor's Council on Adolescent Pregnancy. State education agencies participate in these partnerships and help to assure that the importance of academics is not overlooked. In other states collaborations are the result of several entities identifying a problem and coming together. In California, the State Legislature, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the Governor have all identified delaying the onset of sexual activity and reducing teen pregnancy as high priorities. This has resulted in a legislatively established teen pregnancy prevention initiative in the state's public schools and the Governor's "Partnership for Responsible Parenting" implemented through the state's Health and Human Services Agency. State agencies have established collaborative working relationships to facilitate implementation of these initiatives.
- ***State education agencies can help local districts and schools with their information and training needs.*** Through surveys such as the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, state education agencies can help local districts gain a clearer picture of the risks their young people are taking. State education agencies can offer training in a variety of areas to local districts to support the development of effective prevention efforts.
- ***The state education agency can help policymakers in other areas to understand the links between education and pregnancy prevention.*** Because the SEA has expertise in education and is at the center of the movement to strengthen academic outcomes, it can work with others concerned about teen pregnancy to promote comprehensive approaches that incorporate both educational success and healthy development.

What CCSSO Is Doing

As part of a cooperative agreement with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CCSSO is working to support state education agencies in preventing teen pregnancy. The Council is working in partnership with seven other national organizations¹⁵ to develop a coordinated approach to strengthening the role of the education community and to build support in the health and youth development communities for education's special role.

Over the next year we hope to provide assistance in a number of ways. In addition to this publication there will be others that will highlight promising and innovative strategies state education agencies and their partners are adopting. We also will be working with our organizational partners to develop interagency technical assistance capacity. We will keep our members informed as plans are finalized.

For More Information

The following resources can be helpful to those interested in teen pregnancy prevention and state education agencies:

Council of Chief State School Officers: HIV/School Health Project
(www.ccsso.org) Contact: Nora Howley, 202-336-7033

National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy
(www.teenpregnancy.org) Contact: Tamara Kreinin 202-261-5655

***Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/
Division of Adolescent and School Health***
(www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash) Contact: Mary Vernon 770-488-3819

American Association of School Administrators
(www.aasa.org) Contact: Sharon Adams-Taylor 703-875-0720

American School Health Association
(www.ashaweb.org) Contact: Marcia Rubin 330-678-1601

Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs
(www.amchp.org) Contact: Sarah Pfau 202-775-0436

Association of State and Territorial Health Officials
(www.astho.org) Contact: Darcy Steinberg 202-371-9090

National Association of State Boards of Education
(www.nasbe.org) Contact: Carlos Vega-Matos 703-684-4000

National Conference of State Legislatures
(www.ncsl.org) Contact: Louise Bauer 303-830-2200

National Education Association/Health Information Network
(www.nea.org/hin) Contact: Paul Sathrum 202-822-7787

National School Boards Association
(www.nsba.org) Contact: Brenda Z. Greene 703-838-6756

Endnotes

1. Council of Chief State School Officers, *What Every Educator Needs to Know...* (Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers, 1998).
2. Ibid, p. 3
3. National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, *Whatever Happened to Childhood? The Problem of Teen Pregnancy in the United States* (Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 1997).
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6. R. Maynard, *Kids Having Kids: A Robin Hood Foundation Special Report on the Costs of Adolescent Childbearing* (New York: Robin Hood Foundation, 1988).
7. K. Luker, "Dubious Conceptions: The controversy over teen pregnancy," *The American Prospect* 7, (1991) 73-83.
8. G. Berlin and A. Sum, *Toward a More Perfect Union: Basic Skills, Poor Families and Our Economic Future* (New York: Ford Foundation, 1988).
9. D. Kirby, *No Easy Answers: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy*, 1997 (Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy).
10. National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, *Whatever Happened to Childhood?*
11. Kaiser Family Foundation Survey on Teens and Sex, June 1996.
12. R. Blum and P. Rinehart, *Reducing the Risk: Connections That Make a Difference in the Lives of Youth* (Minneapolis: Division of General Pediatrics and Adolescent Health, University of Minnesota, 1998), 21-22.
13. Ibid. Also see, J. Allen, S. Philliber, S. Herrling, and G. Kuperminc, "Preventing Teen Pregnancy and Academic Failure: Experimental Evaluation of a Developmentally Based Approach," *Child Development* 64 (1997):729-742.
14. Kirby, *No Easy Answers: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy*, 1997 (Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy).
15. The 1999-2000 members of the Joint Work Group on School-Based Teen Pregnancy Prevention are: The American School Health Association, The Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs, The Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, The Council of Chief State School Officers, The National Association of State Boards of Education, The National Conference of State Legislatures, The National Education Association, and The National School Boards Association.