



NEWSLETTER

Pregnant and Parenting Students: Expecting Success

IMAGINE THESE SCENARIOS: A SCHOOL DISTRICT SENDS ITS PREGNANT STUDENTS TO AN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL WHERE THEY LEARN ABOUT PARENTING, BUT QUILTING SUBSTITUTES FOR GEOMETRY CLASS; A SCHOOL DOES NOT ALLOW STUDENTS WHO HAVE BEEN PREGNANT TO RUN FOR HOMECOMING COURT OR OTHER CLASS HONORS; A PRINCIPAL TELLS PREGNANT STUDENTS THEY WOULD BE BETTER OFF DROPPING OUT AND GETTING A GED; A SCHOOL REFUSES TO EXCUSE ABSENCES FOR STUDENTS RECOVERING FROM CHILDBIRTH OR TREAT PREGNANCY-RELATED CONDITIONS AS ELIGIBLE FOR HOMEBOUND INSTRUCTION; A SCHOOL WILL NOT SEND MISSED WORK TO A NEW MOTHER RECOVERING AT HOME SO SHE CAN STAY ON TRACK—SHE ENDS UP FAILING AND HAVING TO RETAKE SEVERAL COURSES THE FOLLOWING SCHOOL YEAR, IF SHE COMES BACK.

Does that sound like the 1960s? Unfortunately, those are real examples from the last five years of ways pregnant and parenting students are marginalized and pushed out of school. And all are violations of federal law. In 1972, Congress passed Title IX, which prohibits sex discrimination in education, including discrimination based on pregnancy or parental status. Schools must prevent and address such discrimination, which exacerbates the other barriers—such as the lack of stable, affordable child care and transportation—that many pregnant and parenting students experience in meeting their educational goals. According to a 2010 study by *Child Trends*, only about 50% of teen mothers get a high school diploma by age 22, compared with 89% of women who did not have a child during their teen years, and one-third of teen mothers never get a diploma or GED. This is a problem not only for them and their children, but also for their communities and our nation: Women who do not finish high school are particularly likely to be unemployed, to earn low wages if they do get jobs, and to have to rely on public support as a result.

This outcome is far from inevitable. A study of young mothers revealed that most—even those who were disengaged from school when they got pregnant—find a renewed sense of motivation when they have children. When schools make pregnant and parenting students feel welcome and serve as the hub for comprehensive, coordinated services, it is more likely that such students will continue attending school. And these modest investments are likely to pay off; according to a Gates Foundation survey, students who left school to care for a family member or because they became a parent, more than any other group of dropouts, were “most likely to say they would have worked harder if their schools had demanded more of them and provided the necessary support.”

In this newsletter, you will learn about ways for schools to support pregnant and parenting students and keep them on track for success, and you will see that this does not have to be done in a separate school setting. First is my interview of a former district superintendent from Corpus Christi, Texas, who started a program for pregnant and parenting students in the district’s high school. Next is



the profile of a program in Chelsea, Massachusetts, with an “expectant and parenting student liaison” who had a tremendous impact last year on both graduation rates and subsequent pregnancy rates. Then comes a review of the National Women’s Law Center’s report *A Pregnancy Test for Schools: The Impact of Education Laws on Pregnant and Parenting Students*, and an article by U.S. Congressman Jared Polis, former school superintendent and chair of the Colorado State Board of Education, on his efforts to target interventions to pregnant and parenting students and on dropout prevention and recovery more broadly. On the last page, you will find an opinion piece by Wanda Pillow, Associate Professor at the University of Utah School of Education and noted author of the book *Unfit Subjects: Educational Policy and the Teen Mother*.

I truly appreciate the knowledge and expertise of all who contributed to this newsletter, and hope that these pages inspire schools and communities to let go of outdated stereotypes and invest in the future of teen parents and their children.

—Lara S. Kaufmann, Guest Editor
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2012 NDPN Crystal Star Winners

Five National Dropout Prevention Network (NDPN) Crystal Star Awards of Excellence in Dropout Recovery, Intervention, and Prevention winners were announced at the 24th Annual National Dropout Prevention Network Conference held in October 2012. These awards identify and bring national recognition to outstanding individuals who have made significant contributions to the advancement of the mission of the NDPN. Please join the NDPN in applauding the work of this year's winners who were selected from numerous outstanding nominees.

Program Award Winners

Berkeley County School District's STAR Academy, Moncks Corner, South Carolina, offers off grade-level students the ability to catch up with their peers and to graduate on time. Students complete 8th and 9th grade in one year, continue as a

cohort through the 10th grade, then qualify for Berkeley Middle College in their junior and senior years. STAR provides a rigorous course of study that embraces hands-on learning, individualized instruction, team instruction, and personal development. STAR also gives parents the opportunity to reengage in the education of their children and build a support group with the staff.

Fred C. Beyer High School—AdvancePath Academy, Modesto, California, uses research-based instructional and behavioral strategies to bring about remarkable results for at-risk students. Key factors in their outstanding success include a strong commitment to increasing attendance as well as a focus on academic success and improvements in behavior. The Academy reports an attendance rate of 87%, with only three discipline referrals accumulated during the past school year, compared to a record of 250 referrals from among 10 students just prior to their coming to AdvancePath

Distinguished Leadership and Service Winner

Linda Harrill joined Communities In Schools of North Carolina in 1989 as its first state director. Since then, she has worked with the governor's office to establish the North Carolina Mentoring Partnership and North Carolina Promise Summit. She received the "Long Leaf Pine," the highest civilian honor in North Carolina, for her contributions to education, the 2007 North Carolina State Alumni of the Year for Education and the UNC-W Razor-Walker Award. In 2012, she received the Triangle Business Journal Women in Business honor, was named the NC Business Leader Woman Extraordinaire, and received MENTOR's Manza Excellence in Leadership Award. She has also been a driving partner in the implementation of the National Dropout Prevention Network's Annual At-Risk Youth National Forum, held each February in South Carolina.

Nominations for 2013 Crystal Star Awards

NDPN will be accepting nominations for the 2013 Crystal Star Awards of Excellence in Dropout Recovery, Intervention, and Prevention beginning in February when forms will be available at www.dropoutprevention.org. The deadline for nominations will be July 1, 2013.

The award categories are Excellence in Dropout Recovery, Intervention, and Prevention for Individuals and Programs; Excellence in Dropout Recovery, Intervention, and Prevention for Individuals and Programs for Students with Disabilities; and Distinguished Leadership and Service to the National Dropout Prevention Network.

All award winners will be honored at the 25th Annual National Dropout Prevention Network Conference in Atlanta, GA, November 3-6, 2013. Winners receive an engraved Crystal Star Award, a waiver of registration fees for the conference, and a one-night complimentary room at the Crowne Plaza Ravinia.

Individual Award Winners

Elaine Fahrner, Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools, Nashville, Tennessee, has nearly 30 years of experience in the field of education. Most recently, Fahrner has served as principal of The Academy at Old Cockrill, a high school that gives at-risk students and dropouts a new beginning. Elaine is the recipient of the 2012 "Key to Success in Educational Excellence Award" from the National Alternative Education Association (NAEA). Elaine has also been a consistent presenter at NDPC/N conferences.

Jon Heymann leads Communities In Schools of Jacksonville, an organization that serves almost 7,000 at-risk students in Duval County, Florida. In this capacity, and through his service on a variety of boards, Heymann has an impressive and proven record of helping youth throughout the nation. The Stanford University Social Innovation Review called Heymann one of America's "transformational leaders."



National
Dropout Prevention
Center/Network

NEWSLETTER

The *National Dropout Prevention Newsletter* is published quarterly by the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network. Your comments are always welcome. Please address mail to:

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Network Notes



Meet Our Guest Editor

■ Lara S. Kaufmann is Senior Counsel and Director of Education Policy for At-Risk Students at the National Women's Law Center. Ms. Kaufmann engages in litigation, advocacy, and public education to advance women and girls at school and in the workplace, with a particular focus on improving educational outcomes for at-risk girls, including pregnant and parenting students. Ms. Kaufmann co-authored the Law Center's 2012 report, *A Pregnancy Test for Schools: The Impact of Education Laws on Pregnant and Parenting Students*, as well as its 2009 report, *Listening to Latinas: Barriers to High School Graduation*. Before joining the Law Center, Ms. Kaufmann was a Staff Attorney with the Federal Trade Commission's Bureau of Consumer Protection, and prior to that she was an Assistant United States Attorney in Chicago. She also worked with the law firm of McDermott, Will & Emery, and was law clerk to then-Chief Judge Marvin Aspen of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois. Ms. Kaufmann is a graduate of the University of Michigan and Northwestern University School of Law.

Solutions to the Dropout Crisis

■ Our featured expert for the January 23 *Solutions to the Dropout Crisis* will be Raymond J. McNulty, Chief Learning Officer at Penn Foster and a Senior Fellow to the International Center for Leadership in Education. Ray is a former Senior Fellow at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation where he worked with leading educators on improving



our nation's high schools. Ray is a past president of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) and author of *It's Not Us Against Them—Creating the Schools We Need*. He has served in education since 1973 as a teacher, vice principal, principal, superintendent, and Vermont's Education Commissioner.

Ray's topic will be "Creating the Schools and Learning We Need—in Class and Online." Tune in at 3:30 pm EST on January 23 to hear and participate in this informative program. Link to www.dropoutprevention.org/webcast for access to the live program as well as any archived programs.

Thanks to Dr. Cash

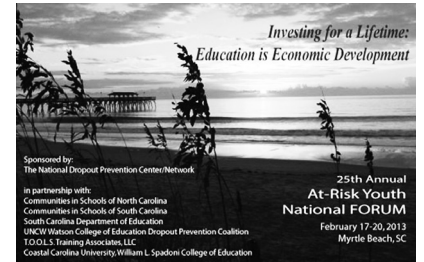
■ Dr. Terry Cash, Assistant Director of the National Dropout Prevention Center since 2001, has announced his retirement effective January 2, 2013, after decades of service not only to NDPC, but to the State of South Carolina. He has served in a variety of roles, as teacher, principal, administrator in the South Carolina Department of Education, and as a researcher and evaluator for NDPC for more than 10 years—always with his heart and his lifelong commitment to students at risk.



In his role at the NDPC, Dr. Cash has traveled throughout the country, leading teams conducting Program Assessment Reviews for schools and districts from Alaska to New York, from Georgia to Washington State, from New Hampshire to Mississippi. The recommendations of his teams have fostered improvements in countless schools and communities. In addition, he has authored a variety of grant opportunities for the Center and was a co-author of a monograph on alternative education, *Alternative Schools: Best Practices for Development and Evaluation*; and another on truancy programs, *Planning,*

Collaboration, and Implementation Strategies for Truancy Programs. Dr. Cash is also nationally regarded as an expert on mentoring, and represented the NDPC at the annual National Mentoring Summit.

The National Dropout Prevention Center and Network has much for which to thank Dr. Cash, and we wish him well in the future.



25th Annual At-Risk Youth National FORUM

■ The 25th Annual At-Risk Youth National FORUM, *Investing for a Lifetime: Education Is Economic Development*, will be held February 17-20, 2013, at the Kingston Plantation in Myrtle Beach, SC. This year's FORUM is designed to enhance the leadership skills of those seeking to strengthen interventions among schools, communities, and families, especially to assist students in at-risk situations. Innovative, skilled presenters who have excellent ideas, proven programs, and evidence-based research will share in the areas of dropout prevention, family and community engagement, curriculum and instruction, career readiness and technical education, changing school culture, specific populations, school and program safety, and economic development through education. Keynote speakers for the event will be Mr. Raymond J. McNulty, Chief Learning Officer at Penn Foster; Mr. Roger Canaff, Child Protection and Anti-Violence Against Women Advocate, Legal Expert, Author, and Public Speaker; and Rev. Dr. Clifford D. Barnett, Sr., Pastor, Warner Temple A.M.E. Zion Church. We look forward to seeing you at the FORUM. Link to www.dropoutprevention.org/conferences/25th-annual-at-risk-youth-national-forum for more information and to register.

Program Profile

A Promising Program in West Oso, Texas

by Lara Kaufmann

In December, I interviewed Dr. Mary Jane Garza, former Assistant Superintendent of the West Oso ISD, about a program she helped to initiate to serve school-age parents.

As assistant district superintendent in Corpus Christi, Texas, you started an initiative for pregnant and parenting students?

Yes, we named it PEP, which stands for Parent Education Program. We started it in 2006, and it serves both teen mothers and fathers who attend our school. It is housed in our district high school, and students who choose to participate have a regular class schedule—the main difference is that they also take a parenting and life skills class and have supportive services available.

How many students are in the program, and what is the demographic makeup of the high school?

On average, about 15 students participate in PEP each year, approximately 5-6 of whom are pregnant. During my tenure, the school had a total of about 520 students, 67% of whom were classified as “at risk.” The student population was about 84% Hispanic and 14% African American. The district is classified as a low-income district.

What supportive services does the program make available?

We do everything we can to ensure that being a parent is not an obstacle to graduation. Communities In Schools (CIS) provides case management in the building; participating students have to check in with them each day, so we can monitor and make sure they are coming to school while also reminding them that we care about their success. Participating students

also get free child care at one of two nearby centers (if they are in school), transportation for parent and child on a bus with car seats, and homebound instruction if they cannot attend school for pregnancy-related reasons. We provide referrals to community resources and help them pay for doctor visits. We also are flexible—you have to be—about adjusting schedules for students who have morning sickness and need to come to school later. In addition to the CIS case manager, we make a nurse available to them, and a counselor—it’s a cross-team support system.

What kinds of “life skills” do students learn in the PEP parenting class?

It’s not your typical parenting class. In addition to learning about childbirth and being a parent, students learn about budgeting and finances, time management, balancing parenting and studying, subsequent pregnancy prevention, and career planning. Outside speakers come once a month to interact with the students. The focus is on immediate needs as well as planning for the future; the goal is to address what a teen parent needs to know to be successful in the 21st century.

Why did you decide to house the program in your traditional high school and not in an alternative school or at a separate site?

If we separate people, and isolate them because of their choices, what are we saying to them? I wanted to show them that we are here for them. And I wanted to dispel the myth that it will make other girls want to get pregnant. It hasn’t. It’s a very cost-effective program, and our pregnant and parenting students are not stigmatized or sent somewhere else because of who they are.

What kinds of results has the program had?

We have graduated every single student who has become pregnant. It is great to see them walk across the stage, some very pregnant or even holding their child, so proud and standing tall. And the school’s teen pregnancy rates went *down*; seeing the parenting students

struggling to make it all work made other male and female students think more about their choices. Another positive outcome has been the involvement of the students’ parents in their lives; parents see the school embracing their pregnant/parenting child, so why shouldn’t they?

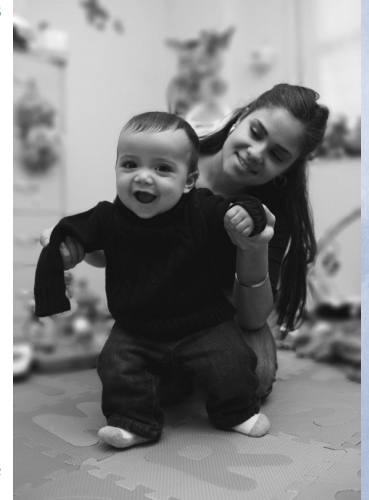
Where did you get the funding to make this happen?

Funding comes from a variety of sources, including some Title I funds because this is a key part of our efforts to improve graduation rates, and some private grants.

Any parting words for our readers?

To make this work, you have to address everything—the physical, social, emotional, and academic needs of pregnant and parenting students. You cannot leave any aspect out. It’s not as expensive as people think, and it has a tremendous impact on these students and their children. Our greatest investments are our students!

(Dr. Garza recently left the West Oso ISD and is now a United States Navy Military School Liaison Officer for the Department of Defense.)



Program Profile

An Encouraging Intervention: The Expectant and Parenting Student Liaison

by Elizabeth Peck

When we support parenting students with effective dropout prevention interventions, we save money. More importantly, when we do not provide supports for students who need them, we fail our young people and reject their basic civil right to access a quality education. The stigma, low expectations, inflexibility, and occasionally outright discrimination that expectant and parenting students face challenge this right head on. Disproportionately higher teen birth and dropout rates for expectant and parenting African American and Latino youth heighten the urgency for stakeholders to take action to ensure equitable access to education.

In *Not the Exception: Making Teen Parent Success the Rule*, the Massachusetts Alliance on Teen Pregnancy showcases an expectant and parenting student liaison intervention at Massachusetts's Chelsea High School (CHS). The liaison at CHS is not only an academic guide, but also a case manager, coach, and advocate. In this multifaceted role, the liaison has the opportunity to improve *both* the equality of opportunities students get *and* the efficient investment of resources to help students stay in school.

The following CHS data for last year help to illustrate the extent to which expectant and parenting students are at risk for dropping out:

- By April 2012, the general CHS student body had an average of 11 absences, while expectant and parenting students had an average of 21 absences.
- The annual dropout rate at CHS for males and females in 2011–2012 was 5.8%, as compared to 24% for the liaison's combined cohort of expectant and parenting males and females.

CHS' expectant and parenting student liaison, Christine Kidd, served 59 students last school year, working part time (20 hours/week including summers) for only \$25,000 per year. Her duties include:

- *Academic case management:* Christine intensively tracks and maps student progress towards graduation and, with pregnant teens, develops a maternity leave plan.
- *Linkages to social services:* She serves as a link to the community and has increased access to community-based supports for young parents.
- *Sustainability and advocacy:* Christine advocates for students around child-care and attendance issues and fosters in students an ability to navigate systems.
- *High expectations:* Christine sets high expectations for her students and because she is sited at the high school, parenting students receive constant encouragement. Christine has also helped to shift the school's culture towards one that sees teen pregnancy as a potential setback rather than an indicator of inevitable dropout.

Data from the liaison's first school year, although not statistically significant, are very promising. Based on these key indicators of success, further efforts to implement and

evaluate the expectant and parenting liaison are a worthwhile investment.

- In the first school year of implementation (2011–2012) the dropout rate for expectant and parenting females decreased by 27% as compared to the previous school year.
- The 27% reduction in the dropout rate means that in the 2011–2012 school year, approximately five more students stayed in school. If those additional five students go on to graduate, that could save Massachusetts \$2.3 million over the course of the graduates' lifetimes.
- Of the 10 males served in year one, only one left school, an astonishing retention rate of 90%.
- The statewide percentage of repeat teen births to females ages 15–19 years old is 13.4%, while the percentage of repeat teen births at CHS was only 2.1% during the 2011–2012 school year.

We must bring to bear the tools at our disposal to ensure that all of our young people have equal opportunities to access a quality education. When we provide the necessary supports for expectant and parenting students, we protect these students' civil rights, put more money in the pockets of taxpayers, and lay the groundwork for academic success for the children of parenting youth—our next generation of students.

Link to www.massteenpregnancy.org/policy/promise-project for more on the Massachusetts Alliance on Teen Pregnancy's work to address access to education.

—Elizabeth Peck
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Book Review

A Pregnancy Test for Schools: The Impact of Education Laws on Pregnant and Parenting Students (2012). National Women's Law Center. Available at http://www.nwlc.org/sites/default/files/final_nwlc_pregnantparenting_report.pdf

Anyone struggling to balance work with family will not be surprised to hear that young women who have children during their teenage years are significantly less likely to earn a high school diploma by age 22 than students without children. However, sometimes schools go out of their way to make it more difficult for these students to graduate, like the charter school that banned pregnant students, reserved the right to test its students for pregnancy, and abandoned its policy this year only after the ACLU brought it to national attention. The National Women's Law Center's recent report, *A Pregnancy Test for Schools*, explains the federal laws that protect these students from discrimination and unequal treatment, and analyzes and ranks each state's education laws and policies for how well they have the potential to promote pregnant and parenting students' success.

The heart of this report is its discussion of how the needs of pregnant and parenting students can be met with excused absence policies that take into account children's illnesses, flexible class scheduling, homebound schooling, and social supports such as day care, individualized case management, and infant-friendly transportation. While a good attendance policy can be relatively simple to implement at the school district level, the real challenge is to provide family-specific services while maintaining access to the academic curricula and activities that all students enjoy. Unfortunately, evidence-based measures of the success of these policies are difficult to find.

Overall, the Center's report found that while a handful of states have made important strides forward, no state has yet put the full range of major policies and programs in place that would help put pregnant and parenting students on track to graduate college and career ready, and most states have little or no laws, policies, or programs specifically designed to protect and support these students.

The report also contains a useful wallet-size card for students explaining their rights, and a sample letter requesting improvements in a school or district's excused absence policy. State policymakers and school administrators will want to take advantage of links to sample pregnant and parenting student policies in eleven states and school districts. *A Pregnancy Test for Schools* provides an excellent start on solving the structural aspects of this important problem.

—Christina Brandt-Young
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Also Recommended:

Fighting the female dropout phenomenon: Supports can help prevent pregnant and parenting youth from dropping out, by Laura Varlas, 2011, *Education Update*, 53:12. <http://www.ascd.org/publications/newsletters/education-update/dec11/vol53/num12/Fighting-the-Female-Dropout-Phenomenon.aspx>

Unfit subjects: Educational policy and the teen mother, 1972-2002, by Wanda S. Pillow, 2004, Taylor & Francis, Inc.

A series of recent reports by the Institute for Women's Policy Research on student parents in postsecondary schools: <http://www.iwpr.org/initiatives/student-parent-success-initiative/resources-publications>

Resources

National Women's Law Center
—Page on pregnant and parenting students

www.nwlc.org/

[pregnantandparentingstudents](http://www.nwlc.org/resource/parents-and-parenting-students)

—Webinar on pregnant and parenting students under Title IX

www.nwlc.org/resource/parents-and-parenting-students-under-title-ix-webinar

American Civil Liberties Union

www.aclu.org/womens-rights/pregnant-and-parenting-teens

Massachusetts Alliance on Teen Pregnancy—The Promise Project

www.massteenpregnancy.org/policy/promise-project

Los Angeles USD—Sample school district policy on pregnant and parenting students

[http://notebook.lausd.net/pls/ptl/docs/PAGE/CA_LAUSD/FLDR_ORGANIZATIONS/FLDR_GENERAL_COUNSEL/PREGNANT%20AND%20PARENTING%20BULLETIN%202060.0%20\(FINAL\).PDF](http://notebook.lausd.net/pls/ptl/docs/PAGE/CA_LAUSD/FLDR_ORGANIZATIONS/FLDR_GENERAL_COUNSEL/PREGNANT%20AND%20PARENTING%20BULLETIN%202060.0%20(FINAL).PDF)

The Brooklyn Young Mothers' Collective

www.bymcinc.org

The National Crittenton Foundation

www.nationalcrittenton.org

How to File a Discrimination Complaint with the Office for Civil Rights

www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/howto.html

Events

March 13-16, 2013 **Denver, CO**
24th Annual National Service-Learning Conference—Without Limits

<http://servicelearningconference.org/2013/>

April 14-17, 2013 **Kansas City, MO**
2013 Best Practices Forum on Dropout Prevention—Connecting in a High Speed World: Preparing for Graduation and Beyond

www.dropoutprevention.org

Tune In and Prevent Dropout

by Congressman Jared Polis

When a child drops out of high school, a bright future dims. When 1.2 million students drop out and three in ten don't graduate on time, it's a national crisis—and a massive failure on the parts of schools and policymakers.

One area of dropout prevention I've worked to address is the needs of pregnant and parenting students. Only half of teen mothers achieve a diploma by the age of 22 and large numbers of male and female dropouts cite parenting as a top reason for leaving school. My Pregnant and Parenting Students Access to Education Act would help schools support these students' academic needs and connect them with quality resources for health care, child care, housing, and nutrition. If we're going to address dropouts, we have to keep these young people on course to a high school diploma.

We also need a broader dropout prevention strategy that helps all kids at risk of leaving school, keeps them on track to graduation, and ensures that schools and districts bring dropouts back to the classroom. In short, we need to focus on three main concepts: prevention, retention, and recovery.

We need to identify students at risk of leaving school. Poor attendance, acting out, and failing to achieve are blinking red lights warning of a possible future dropout. An effective, research-based dropout early warning system should focus on these ABCs: attendance, behavior, and course credits. School administrators, teachers, counselors, and social workers are the first team in dropout prevention, but policy must reinforce their efforts to keep kids in the classroom and on track to a diploma.

To start with, schools should be funded based on how many students they keep in the classroom throughout the school year. One-quarter of states, including my home state of Colorado, currently fund their schools based on their number of students on a single date in the fall. That's like only

Inaction on dropout prevention is an acceptance of the immoral notion that public education is wasted on some children. It is an admission of ignorance about a global economy that requires all the talents Americans can offer.

taking attendance during first period. States should instead use a series of enrollment counts or an average of daily membership or attendance. Schools and districts should also be careful that disciplinary actions, such as out-of-school suspensions and expulsions, aren't overused and result in unnecessarily driving children from the classroom. They must also better track and intervene with chronically truant and undercredited students to keep them in school and engaged.

Even when students do drop out (or take leave to recover from childbirth), school districts must take the responsibility to reengage these students and get them back in the classroom. States should measure whether schools are recovering students, fund the enrollment of adult learners, and mandate coordination between GED testing centers and school districts so dropouts who fail or never complete the GED can be brought back to school. All school districts should also have effective alternative programs tailored to dropouts, including flexible hours and quality online classes.

A prevention, retention, and recovery approach forms a solid basis for addressing the dropout crisis, but is not all-inclusive. There are other steps that can and should be taken, including developing more dual enrollment programs for high school students to take college classes, lowering college tuition rates for undocumented students, adopting inclusive antibullying and antiharassment restrictions so all

students feel safe in school, increasing career and technical education, and including dropout reduction best practices in school turnaround policies. All are useful approaches to pursue depending on the needs of different states and school districts.

Inaction on dropout prevention is an acceptance of the immoral notion that public education is wasted on some children. It is an admission of ignorance about a global economy that requires all the talents Americans can offer. We need all young people, regardless of their circumstances, to complete their education, find good jobs, pay taxes, and contribute to the well-being of the country. Preventing and recovering dropouts must be an essential goal of educational and economic policy.

—Jared Polis
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Photograph by Liz Elkind. Used with permission.



NEWSLETTER

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Viewpoint

Forty years after the passage of Title IX and waves of education reform, a vexing question remains: What is the role of schools in addressing teen pregnancy?

Responses beginning with conversation about school policy soon become mired in values about teen sexuality, pregnancy, and the teen mother. High profile cases and abstinence-only debates consume attention while the teen mother as an educational subject is ignored. Discussions focused on meeting multiple needs of young mothers place schools in positions of wondering where to draw lines between school, family, social welfare, and health agency roles. Many schools function under a code of silence. As one school principal recently confided: "If I don't talk about teen pregnancy then they [teen mothers] don't exist as a problem in my school."

Current evidence indicates that this stance is not uncommon. Most school districts continue to operate under a policy of "no policy," resulting

in educational options for young mothers shockingly similar to those of the 1970s. Teen mothers remain part of an entrenched dropout rate, yet we know that high school completion positively impacts young mothers' economic and health outcomes.

What if we change the above question from "what is the role" to "what is the responsibility of schools to address teen pregnancy?" What are the responsibilities of teachers, administrators, researchers, and scholars to respond to the *educational* needs of the pregnant/mothering student? What would it look like to work from the baseline language of Title IX and prioritize educational access and quality for the young mother?

Educators play a vital role in young mothers' lives. Research indicates that for some young women pregnancy is an impetus to focus on educational attainment. While school attendance does not remove the difficulties pregnant teens confront, and educators cannot solve the variety of situations

young mothers face, we can be proactively involved in the area we have expertise and ability to impact: access to schools and educational success.

Educators have the power to shift the focus from prevailing attitudes about teen pregnancy to the value of access to education for all students, including the young mother, thus situating services that young mothers need, from pregnancy to childbirth, as necessary to access and equal treatment.

Debates about contraceptive availability and sex education will continue and whether teen birth rates are up or down, schools are front-line service providers for the young mother. It is surely time for educators to become leaders in the pursuit of initiatives, research, policies, and practices that support the success of pregnant/mothering students in school.

—Wanda Pillow, Ph.D.
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