



Expand Access to Programs that have been Proven to Help Pregnant and Parenting Teens Finish High School

The Colorado Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy, Parenting, and Prevention (COAPPP) estimates that every four hours a baby is born in Colorado to a mother aged 15 to 17 years old.¹ Moreover, advocates who work to strengthen support systems for teen parents contend that pregnant teens face negative bias within their communities. That exacerbates the hurdles teen parents face in acquiring the skills, support, and resources they need to graduate from high school, increase the likelihood that their children will graduate from high school, and lay the foundation to establish economic self-sufficiency. In fact, national research shows only one-half of high-school dropouts aged 35 to 64 are employed.² Programs that equip pregnant and parenting teens with the support structures and skills necessary to complete high school not only can decrease drop-out rates, but also can delay secondary pregnancies and help ensure those youths have access to information that empowers them to make responsible reproductive health decisions throughout their lives. As a result, Prevention First Colorado recommends expanding access to programs that have been proven to help pregnant and parenting teens finish high school.

THE NEED TO EXPAND ACCESS TO PROGRAMS THAT SUPPORT PREGNANT OR PARENTING TEENS

According to research conducted for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, teen mothers and fathers “tend to have incomplete education and few career and parenting skills.”³ When asked, one-quarter to one-third of female dropouts said that pregnancy or becoming a parent played a role in their decision to drop out.⁴

These data are consistent with Prevention First Colorado research findings, which revealed that 24 percent of teens with children who participated in survey research were not in school, compared to just 9 percent of teens without children.⁵ In addition, nearly one-third (29 percent) of teens who already had children had some doubt as to whether they would complete high school – compared to just 6 percent of non-parenting teens.⁶ Lack of education creates teen parents who are ill-equipped to contribute to society by having completed higher education or entering and staying in the labor market. The Gates Foundation research found that, more than any other group of dropouts, those who left school because they became a parent were “most likely to say they would have worked harder if their schools had demanded more of them and provided the necessary support.”⁷

Moreover, female dropouts who are employed can be burdened by chronically low incomes, sometimes compelling those women to seek and accept government assistance. Figures published by The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy found that in Colorado in 2004, estimated annual taxpayer costs associated with children born to teen mothers included \$15 million for public health care, \$45 million for child welfare, \$32 million for incarceration,

and \$48 million in lost tax revenue due to decreased earnings over the children’s careers.⁸

A considerable gap exists between the demonstrated need for programs to support pregnant and parenting teens as they complete their education and the availability of such programs throughout the state. With an estimated 12,130 teen pregnancies each year, Colorado has the 22nd-highest teen pregnancy rate in the nation.⁹ Yet programs that provide assistance to that population are only able to support a fraction of the totals. To bridge the gap, current programs should be expanded or new programs should be established, particularly in communities with rates of teen pregnancy that exceed the state or national average or in areas that do not currently have programs available.

While Colorado does have some data about teen pregnancy and how it affects high school drop-out rates, that information is limited. It is imperative, therefore, to record and correlate data related to pregnancy and drop-out rates to illustrate the need for programs that facilitate teen parents’ completion of high school to policymakers, communities and funding institutions. Without an adequate tracking system, numerous teens will continue to fall through the cracks and communities will not fully understand the true scale of the relationship between parenting, pregnancy-related dropouts, and educational attainment.

OTHER STATES AND NATIONWIDE

According to research carried out by the National Women’s Law Center, reducing female drop-out rates could produce significant savings in taxpayer-funded support programs. Females who do graduate from high school are 68 percent

less likely to use any government assistance program.¹⁰ However, females who have not graduated from high school are more likely to qualify for government assistance programs such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), food stamps, and housing assistance.¹¹ By ensuring teen parents have the skills and education that they need to complete secondary and post-secondary education, it is probable to reduce the need for publicly funded safety-net programs as economic viability and self-sufficiency increases, breaking cycles of teen pregnancy and poverty.

National efforts to support pregnant and parenting teens, as well as locally and/or state-based programs throughout the country, have followed a number of paths to meet the needs of this vulnerable population. For example, some advocates for teens are increasingly turning to non-discrimination laws to demand equity in the provision of services to ensure that pregnant and parenting teens' needs are met.

Although commonly associated with ensuring gender equity in athletics, Title IX of the federal Education Amendments of 1972¹² bars discrimination in public schools on the basis of pregnancy and parental status. Despite the law, many teen parents continue to experience barriers to equitable educational experiences. As a result, pregnant and parenting teens simply endure biases against them from peers, school personnel, and school policies, unaware of either their rights or how to use the law to change their circumstances.¹³ Educating young adults and educators about pregnancy and parenting non-discrimination requirements under Title IX could help solve disparities between parenting teens and non-parenting teens.

In California, which leads the nation in the number of pregnancies among adolescents,¹⁴ there have been concerted efforts among policy leaders to promote educational programs for teen mothers. The state has recognized the difficulties associated with being a teen parent and the need for fair and equal treatment in an effort to help those teens graduate. The state, through several departments, has set up programs aimed at providing parenting teens with educational options, resources, and access to the support they need to achieve educational success. Two such programs are The Adolescent Family Life Program (AFLP), which is run by the California Department of Health and The Cal-Learn Program, which is run by the California Department of Social Services. Both programs operate outside of the public school system and aim to enhance parenting skills, foster healthy relationships and living situations, provide referrals to health care, and delay second births. In 1996, there were an estimated 125 pregnancies per 1,000 California teens; by 2007, the California teen pregnancy rate declined to 96 per 1,000 teens.¹⁵

AFLP serves approximately 17,000 students a year in over 40 counties in California.¹⁶ The program provides case management services and development of individualized service

Table 1: Comparison of National Teen Fertility Rate vs. Colorado Teen Fertility Rates

National Teen Fertility Rate ^{†17}	Colorado Teen Fertility Rate ^{†18}		
40.5	23.7		
Counties with Teen Fertility Rates That Exceed National Rate ^{†19}			
County	Rate		
Alamosa	53.9		
Baca	48.4		
Bent	41.7		
Denver	42.7		
Kit Carson	41.2		
Phillips	42.6		
Counties with Teen Fertility Rates That Exceed Colorado Rate ^{‡20}			
County	Rate	County	Rate
Adams	39.5	Moffat	32.3
Alamosa	53.9	Montezuma	33.8
Baca	48.4	Montrose	33.8
Bent	41.7	Morgan	37.4
Crowley	35.3	Otero	27.9
Denver	42.7	Phillips	42.6
Fremont	29.7	Prowers	28.1
Garfield	25.3	Pueblo	36.6
Huerfano	27.2	Rio Blanco	38.5
Kit Carson	41.2	Rio Grande	38.5
Lake	33.5	Saguache	37.3
Las Animas	40.4	Washington	40.0
Lincoln	38.1	Weld	32.8
Logan	30.0	Yuma	31.8
Mesa	30.5		
† Total number of live births per 1,000 women aged 15 to 17.			
‡ Where data is available, not all counties have data available.			

plans; monthly contacts that include home visits; promotion of health and safety practices; and assistance gaining access to the appropriate public services participants may need. The program works collaboratively with state and local agencies to develop community awareness of the problem of adolescent pregnancy, and to improve services for teen parents. State funds, federal Title V Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Block Grant funds, and federal Title XIX (Medicaid) funds subsidize the operation of AFLP, while the Maternal, Child and Adolescent Health (MCAH) Program administers AFLP.²¹

The Cal-Learn program was designed to assist teen parents

receiving California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs), a welfare program that gives monetary aid and services to eligible needy California families in all 58 counties.²² It consists of three coordinated services designed to help teens become self-sufficient adults and responsible parents:

1. Intensive case management that assists teen parents in obtaining education, health and social services.
2. Payments for necessary child care, transportation and educational expenses enabling pregnant/parenting teens to attend school.
3. Bonuses and sanctions that encourage school attendance and good grades. Four \$100 bonuses/sanctions per year may be earned/applied based on report card results, plus a one-time \$500 bonus for graduating or attaining an equivalent high school diploma.²³

Cal-Learn is funded by state welfare programs and is administered by local welfare offices.

In Pennsylvania, the state's Department of Education initiated a groundbreaking program in 1985 called the Pregnant and Parenting Teen Initiative (PPT). PPT funds programs operated in schools to advocate for teen parents' success in school. PPT has created programs for academic support, assistance with child care, health care, nutrition, and vocational and career education. The programs are open to any pregnant or parenting teen mother or father. In 2007, 73 percent of participating seniors graduated, 99 percent of children in the program were current on their immunizations, and 98 percent of children in the program had health insurance. The PPT Initiative had the capacity to serve 5,275 students between 2006 and 2007.²⁴ The PPT Initiative has reached 26 school districts, 14 intermediate units, regional education service agencies, and one career and technology school. The program is funded by the state and is administered by the state Department of Education.²⁵

In addition to programs to support pregnant and parenting teens while they are in high school, some states have programs to support pregnant and parenting students during their pursuit of a post-secondary degree. The Keys to Degrees Program at Endicott College in Beverly, Mass., just outside Boston, has been very successful in creating a program to support single men and women, aged 18 to 24, who are the parents of young children. These young parents can complete an undergraduate degree in an environment that supports their parenting needs and the needs of their children. Program benefits include campus housing and the full array of support services offered by Endicott. The primary goals of the Keys to Degrees Program are to empower each parent to be "well adjusted in school with peers [and to be] economically self-sufficient." The program is "an education model for other students about single parenthood."²⁶ Students in the program pay \$2,000 to \$3,000, with additional funding from state and federal financial aid and

scholarships from Endicott.²⁷

CURRENTLY IN COLORADO

Currently, there are an estimated 7,550 pregnant or parenting teens statewide, based on data available from 2000. (See Table 2 on page 55, "Number of Births among Women Aged 15 to 19.") While some programs have been established to provide direct services to increase the likelihood that pregnant or parenting teens continue their education, limited funding, geographic challenges, and other factors prevent those programs from reaching all pregnant or parenting teens throughout the state.

Parent Pathways is a Denver-based nonprofit organization that empowers struggling teen families to be productive members of the community through several programs. Parent Pathways uses holistic and progressive approaches in the areas of education, early childhood education and supportive services that encompass the entire teen family. Teen mothers in grades nine through 12 receive a high school education through the Florence Crittenton School in Denver. The school provides the Denver Public Schools curriculum, an Early Learning Center for their children, and additional courses that focus on parenting, career readiness, child development and technology.²⁸

Parent Pathways also has a young fathers program that has two components: one for fathers still in school, in which they learn job readiness, parenting and relationship skills while attending school, and another for fathers that are no longer in school who receive fatherhood development and pre-employment training, peer support, information about how to establish paternity and become involved parents.²⁹ In the 2007-2008 school year, 89 percent of seniors at the Florence Crittenton School graduated.³⁰ Parent Pathways programmatic initiatives are funded from a variety of sources, including Mile High United Way, Denver Public Schools, program fees and private donations from individuals, foundations and corporations.³¹

Yampah Mountain High School (YMHS) in Glenwood Springs serves the students of the Roaring Fork, Garfield RE2, Garfield R16 and Aspen school districts and offers two programs for teen parents: the Teen Parent Program and the Childcare Center. All students enrolled in the Teen Parent Program participate in four educational components: curriculum towards a high school diploma, PACT (intergenerational literacy time), parenting, and early childhood education.³² The Childcare Center program was set up to provide a nurturing environment for the children of students enrolled in the Yampah Teen Parent Program. It is also an educational resource for teen parents and for other students at the school and in the community.³³ All YMHS programs are funded by the member school districts through a pay-per-service model. Additional funding for programs is provided by local departments of human services and a variety of local and state nonprofit organizations.

Table 2: Number of Births among Women Aged 15 to 19³⁴

National	Colorado
468,990	7,550

In addition to programs that provide direct services to support pregnant and parenting teens as they pursue their education, a growing number of organizations are engaging in policy-changing work to ensure access to such programs is not curtailed. The Colorado Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy, Parenting, and Prevention (COAPPP), for example, works with school districts and community organizations across the state to select, implement, evaluate and sustain science-based comprehensive sexuality programs that comply with House Bill 07-1292, Colorado’s law that establishes science-based standards for classroom instruction on human sexuality. (Refer to the companion recommendation, “Aggressively Implement Colorado House Bill 07-1292” on page 58.)

COAPPP also supports local communities in their advocacy efforts to garner support for policies and programs that promote the positive reproductive health of all teens in their communities. The organization launched its Access to Education Project in 2008 to raise awareness among policymakers and lawmakers about the requirements of Title IX and the growing achievement gap in the teen parent population. The project focuses on identifying policies that will remove barriers to and support access to quality education for teen parents. The goal is to improve high school graduation rates and advance the well-being and economic self-sufficiency of young families in Colorado.

BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTATION

Very little state-specific data exists about teen pregnancies, their impact on high school drop-out rates and the prolonged effect on taxpayers. While statistics show that teen pregnancy is on the rise nationwide,³⁵ to better understand what this means for Colorado and its residents, a statewide study should be conducted. The Colorado Dropout Initiative, a coalition established by Governor Bill Ritter to reduce drop-out rates, provides a unique opportunity to carry out such research in the state. Currently the initiative is comprised of five school districts, researchers from Johns Hopkins University, and local nonprofit organizations and foundations, including Colorado Children’s Campaign, Colorado Youth for Change, the Colorado Foundation for Families and Children, and the Donnell-Kay Foundation. Research is being conducted in the five districts participating in the study and is being used to construct profiles of students who drop out, with the purpose of providing data that districts can use to revise policies with the goal toward preventing future dropouts by identifying opportunities for intervention, re-engagement and reform.³⁶ Results are expected to be available in summer 2009.

Although the current research does not explicitly seek to gather information about teen pregnancy, gender-specific analysis of the findings related to absenteeism could provide an opportunity to identify links between absenteeism and teen pregnancy and parenthood, thereby ensuring comprehensive efforts to reduce high school drop-out rates reflect thorough consideration of teen pregnancy. A study of that scope is a positive a step, but research efforts must be expanded to provide comprehensive data that reflects the geographic, economic and cultural diversity of the state and the relevant populations.

Although programs like those at the Florence Crittenton School and those offered through COAPPP partner organizations have proven successful in the communities where they operate, there needs to be a renewed focus on those communities where rates of teen pregnancy exceed the state or national averages and areas that do not currently have programs available to them, such as most rural communities. Those areas have proven to have the highest rates of births to teen mothers, yet have the fewest programs available to support that population. In Pueblo County, for example, only one-third of teen mothers continue their education,³⁷ yet there are few support systems in place for teen parents. One significant barrier that rural and small-town communities face is the impact of having smaller populations. In those situations, resources may not be available to develop cost-effective programs to meet the needs of fewer individuals in ways that mirror programs used in larger communities that achieve economies of scale and reach higher numbers of pregnant or parenting teens.

Programs that support Colorado teen parents endeavoring to graduate from high school and continue on to college are limited by a lack of funding. Federal and local government programs support most programs in the state that concentrate on preventing teen pregnancy, although some programs are supported by private entities. However, there are few governmental agencies or private entities that provide funding to support pregnant and parenting teens. This funding gap limits the degree to which new programs can be established and extant programs can be maintained.

One potential funding source for programs to support pregnant and parenting teens who pursue their education is the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. TANF was designed to help needy families achieve self-sufficiency. Programs that support educational attainment and provide career counseling, jobs training and other skills to achieve self-sufficiency are consistent with two of the goals of the TANF program, namely, to “provide assistance to needy families [and] to end dependence of needy parents by promoting job preparation, work and marriage.”³⁸

FIRST STEPS

While reducing teen pregnancy should be a state goal, providing resources for existing teen parents is also

important. Helping teen mothers and fathers continue their education leads to self-sufficiency and higher standards of living. It also helps to break the cycle of teen pregnancy in the future. Prevention First Colorado recognizes that there is a gap for this population and recommends the following:

1. Establish and compile background research on the number of girls dropping out of high school due to pregnancy and assess the economic, social, and other related impacts of those dropouts on the communities in which they occur. Resulting data should be used to understand communities' specific needs for programs that enable pregnant and parenting teens to complete high school.
2. Use drop-out data to develop comprehensive recommendations to expand and add publicly and privately funded programs to support pregnant and parenting teens' pursuit of their education. Refer to evidence-based analysis of programs that support pregnant and parenting teens to identify strategies to meet the needs of teens living in rural and small-town communities. Expanded programs should build on existing programs, strengthening them to expand areas of impact.
3. Ensure the state enforces the federal Title IX nondiscrimination statutes that require everyone enrolled in public schools receive equal educational opportunities regardless of pregnancy or parenting status. Expand education around Title IX non-discrimination requirements regarding pregnancy and parenting to adolescents, educators, parents and other community leaders. Teen parents have a right to stay in school or transfer to a program that supports them as parents.

As teen pregnancy numbers increase nationwide,³⁹ it is critical to recognize that empowering teen parents to complete their education and become self-sufficient has broader implications than improving individual lives. When teen parents do not graduate from high school, the consequences affect those teens, their children, and the community at large. Consistent and comprehensive action will assist teens with shaping their futures and their lives and improving the quality of life for all.

REFERENCES & NOTES

1. "The State of Adolescent Sexual Health in Colorado 2008," 2008, Colorado Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy, Parenting, and Prevention, accessed March 2009 at <http://www.coapp.org/images/08SASHreport.pdf>.
2. "By the Numbers: The Public Costs of Teen Childbearing," by Saul D. Hoffman, Ph.D., October 2006, The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, accessed August 2008 at http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/resources/pdf/pubs/BTN_Full.pdf.
3. "The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts," John M. Bridgeland, John J. Dilulio, Jr., & Karen Burke Morison, 2006, Civic Enterprises in association with Peter D. Hart Research Associates for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, accessed August 2008 at <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/united-states/Documents/TheSilentEpidemic3-06FINAL.pdf>.
4. "When Girls Don't Graduate We All Fail: A Call to Improve High School Graduation Rates for Girls," 2007, National Women's Law Center, accessed February 2009 at <http://www.nwlc.org/pdf/DropoutReport.pdf>.
5. "Attitudes, Knowledge, and Use of Birth Control Methods among Teenagers," by Laurie E. James-Hawkins, Prevention First Colorado, accessed May 2009 at <http://www.preventionfirstcolorado.org/uploads/Survey%20of%20Colorado%20Teenagers.pdf>.
6. Ibid.
7. "The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts."
8. Ibid.
9. "Contraception Counts: Colorado," 2006, the Guttmacher Institute, accessed March 2009 at http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/state_data/states/colorado.pdf.
10. "When Girls Don't Graduate We All Fail."
11. Ibid.
12. Title IX, Education Amendment of 1972 Section 1681(a) & Subpart C--Discrimination on the Basis of Sex in Admission and Recruitment Prohibited Section 2555.300(2)(3).
13. Based upon information received from the Colorado Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy, Parenting, and Prevention upon request in fall 2008.
14. "Teen Pregnancy and Parenting in California," January 2009, California Department of Education, accessed February 2009 at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/cg/pp/teenpregnancy.asp>.
15. "State Profiles: California," National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, accessed February 2009 at <http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/state-data/state-profile.aspx?state=california>.
16. "The Adolescent Family Program Fact Sheet," 2007, California Department of Public Health, accessed February 2009 at <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/healthyliving/childfamily/Pages/AFLP.aspx>.
17. "Rising U.S. Teen Fertility," Population Reference Bureau, accessed March 2009 at <http://www.prb.org/Articles/2009/teenagefertilityrate.aspx>.
18. Birth statistics data accessed fall 2008 via the Colorado Health Information Dataset maintained by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment at <http://www.cdph.state.co.us/cohid>; teen fertility rates published in "Reproductive Health in Colorado: A State Profile," 2008, NARAL Pro-Choice Colorado.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.

21. See note 16.
22. "California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) Fact Sheet," 2007, California Department of Social Services, accessed February 2009 at <http://www.dss.cahw.net.gov/CDSSWEB/PG85.htm>.
23. "Cal- Learn Program Fact Sheet," 2007, California Department of Social Services, accessed February 2009 at <http://www.dss.cahw.net.gov/CDSSWEB/PG84.htm>.
24. "Pennsylvania's Pregnant and Parenting Teen Initiative," Pennsylvania Department of Education, accessed February 2009 at http://ppt-elect.center-school.org/providers/304/PPT_brochure.pdf.
25. "Pregnant and Parenting Teen Program," Grants and Funding Information section of the Pennsylvania Department of Education Web site, accessed February 2009 at http://www.able.state.pa.us/svcs_students/cwp/view.asp?A=138&Q=61792.
26. "The Keys to Degrees Program," Endicott College, accessed March 2009 at <http://www.endicott.edu/servlet/RetrievePage?site=endicott&page=SingleParProg>.
27. "Program Helps Single Parents Go to College," September 2007, ABC News, accessed August 2008 at <http://abcnews.go.com/GMA/Story?id=3552745&page=1>.
28. "Who We Are," Florence Crittenton Web site, accessed March 2009 at [http://florencecrittenton.dpsk12.org/stories/storyReader\\$33](http://florencecrittenton.dpsk12.org/stories/storyReader$33).
29. "Young Fathers Program," Florence Crittenton Web site, accessed March 2009 at <http://florencecrittenton.dpsk12.org/YoungFathers>.
30. "History of Parent Pathways," Parent Pathways, accessed March 2009 at http://www.parentpathways.org/p_history.html.
31. Information provided upon request from Parent Pathways in spring 2009.
32. "Yampah Teen Parent Program," Yampah Mountain High School, accessed March 2009 at http://www.ymhs.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=52&Itemid=72.
33. "Yampah Childcare Center," Yampah Mountain High School, accessed March 2009 at http://www.ymhs.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=42&Itemid=67.
34. "U.S. Teenage Pregnancy Statistics Overall Trends, Trends by Race and Ethnicity And State-by-State Information," 2004, the Guttmacher Institute, accessed August 2008 at http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/state_pregnancy_trends.pdf.
35. "Teen Birth Rates Up in 26 States," January 7, 2009, *USA Today*, accessed March 2009 at http://www.usatoday.co/news/health/2009-01-07-teenbirths_N.htm.
36. "Colorado Districts Study," Center for Social Organization of Schools at Johns Hopkins University, accessed March 2009 at <http://www.every1graduates.org/Analytics/SizeCharacteristics.html#Current>.
37. "Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Program" page of the Pueblo City-County Health Department Web site, accessed May 2009 at http://www.co.pueblo.co.us/pcchd/family_health/pregnancy_prevention.aspx?id=513.
38. "TANF Dollars for School-Based Health Centers," *Todd's Tips*, vol. 1, September 2008, Colorado Association for School-Based Health Care, accessed March 2009 at <http://www.casbhc.org/publications/ToddsTips/TANF.pdf>. See also Colorado Senate Bill 08-177 Section 3. 26-2-705(a-d); Section 24. 26-2-721.7(I), (II), (A-D).
39. "Teen Birth Rates Up in 26 States."