



## Issue Brief

### Pregnant and Parenting Youth: Policy Recommendations for Chicago Public Schools March 2004

**In 2002 in Illinois, young women under the age of 20 gave birth to 18,546 babies; 6,906 in Chicago alone. Births to teen mothers account for 10% of births statewide and 14% in Chicago.<sup>i</sup>**

**Pregnant and parenting youth are at a particularly high risk for not completing their high school education, which is followed by risk of poverty. Facts:**

- Ninety-four percent of teens believe that they would stay in school if pregnant or a parent, while in reality, only 70% of teen mothers eventually complete high school.<sup>ii</sup>
- 1999 U.S. Census data show women without a high school diploma earn an average of \$11,000 annually. Finishing high school can increase earnings by 55%, and earning an associate's degree brings earnings to \$24,000, more than twice as much as those without a high school degree.<sup>iii</sup>
- Almost half of older mothers receiving welfare assistance began their child bearing as teens.<sup>iv</sup>
- Young parents who received assistance from the Cradle to Classroom program in Chicago had higher attendance and graduation rates than the general population of students.<sup>v</sup>

#### What Chicago Public Schools can do:

##### **1. Honor pregnant and parenting youth's right to public education, and encourage them to stay in school.**

###### **Current Status**

- In a recent survey of pregnant and parenting youth currently enrolled in high school in Chicago, 26% said they had been encouraged to leave by a school staff member.<sup>vi</sup>
- Social service providers in Chicago have reported that elementary school administrators did not want pregnant and parenting youth in their school because they feared they would set a bad example for other students,<sup>vii</sup> yet there is no data showing that the presence of pregnant and parenting youth in schools increases the chance that other students will become pregnant.

###### **Recommendations**

- a) Add measures to the current accountability system specific to pregnant and parenting youth, including tracking and accountability for attendance, dropout rates, and educational outcomes.
- b) Incorporate ongoing training on the rights, responsibilities and needs of pregnant and parenting teens as part of standard diversity training for all school staff. Training should take place on both the grammar and high school levels and include compliance with federal and state laws that prohibit discrimination due to pregnancy or parental status.<sup>viii</sup>
- c) Support the development of state legislation that would make it illegal to deny enrollment or reenrollment for absences accrued due to circumstances related to the student's pregnancy or parenting status.

##### **2. Make reasonable accommodations in the school environment related to pregnancy or parenting responsibilities, as required by sex equity laws.**

###### **Current Status**

- In addition to attending school, pregnant and parenting youth are responsible for medical care and reliable child care for their children. They must also find a source of income support for their children and care for sick children. Although these issues disproportionately affect young women,<sup>ix,x</sup> both male and female parenting students are protected by Illinois sex equity regulations<sup>xi</sup> that require educational systems to eliminate barriers to school attendance and completion by pregnant and parenting students.

- School policies making reasonable accommodations for pregnant and parenting students appear to be inconsistent, not followed, or unknown to students. Many young parents in Chicago Public Schools (CPS) perceive a lack of supportive policies, for example:
  - ✓ 34% reported that their school did not excuse absences for students who are ill due to pregnancy, and 17% reported that their school did not excuse absences to go to pregnancy-related doctors' appointments.
  - ✓ 22% reported that their school did not excuse an absence for a student to care for their sick child.
  - ✓ 37% reported that their school did not allow pregnant students to eat snacks or drink water in class.<sup>xii</sup>
- There has been significant disinvestment in programs to support pregnant and parenting youth in school completion.
  - ✓ The Cradle to Classroom (CTC) program, which has successfully supported pregnant and parenting youth in staying in school since 1997, is available in only 52 of 89 high schools and has undergone significant budget cuts in the last two years. Capacity declined from 5,000 youth and their children combined in fiscal year 2002, to 3,450 in January 2003.<sup>xiii</sup> In January 2004, CPS retained only two-thirds of CTC staff due to budget cuts.<sup>xiv</sup> In addition to a shortfall in the number of staff available to work with young parents, another effect of the cuts may be a loss of state or federal funding, since a large portion of CTC expenses has been reimbursed with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds.<sup>xv</sup> Since CTC staff also use a research-based program to teach young parents early childhood learning activities, the reduction in CTC staff is affecting the next generation of CPS students as well.
  - ✓ Two of the three specialized schools for pregnant and parenting youth closed in 2003, leaving only the Theolene Simpson Academy for Young Women. It has a capacity to serve only 200 students. CPS has been unable to confirm whether all of the young parents in the closed schools, Arts of Living and Tesla, were successfully able to transfer to another school.
- Pregnant and parenting youth's access to home-based instruction is inadequate. CPS has a Home/Hospital Services, or "Homebound" program available for students who, for medical reasons, cannot attend school for a period of time.
  - ✓ 83% of pregnant and parenting youth surveyed in regular CPS schools had heard of homebound services.
  - ✓ Less than one-third of those that had heard of homebound services reported that they had used them.
  - ✓ Most youth who had used the services reported that they were helpful, although some social services providers said that it was difficult for youth to access the program.<sup>xvi</sup>

## Recommendations

### Build In Accountability

- d) Add measures to the current accountability system specific to pregnant and parenting youth, including tracking and accountability for attendance, dropout rates, and educational outcomes, while keeping pregnancy and parenting status confidential.<sup>xvii</sup>
- e) Ensure that all young women who left the closed schools, Tesla and Arts of Living, have graduated or enrolled in another school. Share information on the tracking process with external stakeholders.
- f) Share clear information on the Cradle to Classroom budget, expenditures, and revenues with external stakeholders. Also share information on staffing levels and the number of pregnant and parenting youth served to allow a comparison of available resources to community needs.

### Reduce Dropout Rates

- g) Modify CPS policies on excused absences to specifically list absences related to pregnancy and parenting responsibilities, including but not limited to arranging child care, caring for the student's sick child, and attending prenatal or well child medical appointments.
- h) Support the development of legislation to change the Illinois school code (105 ILCS 5/26-2a) on excused absences to specifically include absences related to pregnancy and parenting responsibilities.

- i) As part of district efforts to reduce dropout rates and reenroll school age youth, develop a packet of information that describes what a student needs in order to reenroll and give it to “at-risk” students as soon as they are identified; include information on the rights of pregnant and parenting youth.

#### Enhance Community Schools and Community Connections

- j) Seek out and utilize sources for increased Cradle to Classroom funding, including any revenue generated by that program.
- k) Replicate and expand effective community schools components that support young parents, including school linked day care and health centers (e.g. Roosevelt High School’s school based health center, Orr Infant and Family Development Center).

#### Clarify and Protect the Rights of Pregnant and Parenting Youth

- l) Modify school policies to make needed exceptions for pregnant and parenting teens, including policies on eating food in class and excusing absences.<sup>xviii</sup>
- m) Direct each school to provide a bulletin board for pregnant and parenting teens so that they know their rights in the school system and may seek referrals to community resources anonymously. The bulletin board should also include information about rights to public assistance.
- n) Add information on the rights of pregnant and parenting youth as an attachment to the “Request for Emergency Information” form.
- o) Designate a staff person to serve as an ombudsman for pregnant and parenting youth.

Pregnant and parenting youth also face high levels of domestic and dating violence. Please refer to the companion issue brief, **“Pregnant and Parenting Youth Facing Domestic and Dating Violence: Policy Recommendations for Chicago Public Schools,”** for additional recommendations.

<sup>i</sup> “Illinois Teen Births by County, 2002.” Illinois Department of Public Health. [www.idph.state.il.us](http://www.idph.state.il.us)

<sup>ii</sup> “Teens on Sex: What They Say Teens Today Need to Know, and Who They Listen To.” The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation: 1996. [www.kff.org](http://www.kff.org)

<sup>iii</sup> Martinson, K. and Strawn, J. “Built to Last: Why Skills Matter for Long-Run Success in Welfare Reform.” Center for Law and Social Policy, National Institute for Literacy, and National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium: April 2003. [Data is for women between ages 25 and 64, with earnings, in 1999.] [www.clasp.org](http://www.clasp.org)

<sup>iv</sup> AFDC Women Who Gave Birth as Teenagers. U.S. General Accounting Office/HHS 94-115. Washington, DC: May 31, 1994. [www.gao.gov](http://www.gao.gov)

<sup>v</sup> Chicago Public Schools presentation materials from “Understanding and Connecting: Responding to the Needs of Pregnant and Parenting Teens.” the Night Ministry conference on pregnant and parenting youth. Chicago, Illinois: Oct. 22, 2003.

<sup>vi</sup> Marcy, H. “Prepped for Success? Supporting Pregnant and Parenting Teens in Chicago Schools.” Center for Impact Research: July 2003. [www.impactresearch.org](http://www.impactresearch.org)

<sup>vii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>viii</sup> See references ix, x, and xi.

<sup>ix</sup> 20 U.S.C. §§ 1681 et seq. “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.” Regulations adopted by the U.S. Department of Education implementing the law prohibit schools that receive federal funds from “apply[ing] any rule concerning a student’s actual or potential parental, family, or marital status that treats students differently on the basis of sex.” 31 C.F.R. § 28.445(a). The regulations also expressly prohibit discrimination against students for pregnancy and pregnancy-related conditions. 31 C.F.R. § 28.445(b).

<sup>x</sup> 105 ILCS § 5/27-1 “No student shall be refused admission into or be excluded from any course of instruction offered in the common schools by reason of that person’s sex. No student shall, solely by reason of that person’s sex, be denied access to physical education and interscholastic athletic programs or comparable programs supported from school district funds.”

<sup>xi</sup> Illinois Administrative Code, Title 23, Chapter 1, Section 200.50(e). “No student shall be discriminated against because of his or her actual or potential marital or parental status.” Also, 200.50(e)(4) specifically states, “Systems shall eliminate administrative and programmatic barriers to school attendance and school completion by pregnant students or students who are parents.”

<sup>xii</sup> Marcy, H. “Prepped for Success? Supporting Pregnant and Parenting Teens in Chicago Schools.” Center for Impact Research: July 2003.

<sup>xiii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xiv</sup> According to the CPS Communications Department

<sup>xv</sup> Chicago Public Schools presentation materials from “Understanding and Connecting: Responding to the Needs of Pregnant and Parenting Teens.” the Night Ministry conference on pregnant and parenting youth. Chicago, Illinois: Oct. 22, 2003.

<sup>xvi</sup> Marcy, H. “Prepped for Success? Supporting Pregnant and Parenting Teens in Chicago Schools.” Center for Impact Research: July 2003.

<sup>xvii</sup> Confidentiality about pregnancy and parenting status and absences should be maintained for pregnant and parenting youth, except when school personnel are mandated to report child abuse by federal or state law (325 ILCS Stat. 5 et seq.). The majority of young parents have been sexually abused or are current victims of dating violence, and disclosure may put them in danger. School personnel should make a good faith effort to obtain the student’s consent to inform their parents, but must not tell parents unless they get the student’s consent.

<sup>xviii</sup> All written materials geared to parents and students should be accessible to students and parents with low literacy levels or disabilities and should be translated into several languages. For model policies, see the website of the California Women’s Law Center, [www.cwlc.org](http://www.cwlc.org).