

### **Success Over Two Generations: School-Based Programs for Teen Parents and Children**

*A Policy Brief from Public Citizens for Children and Youth*

High quality early childhood education provides benefits that last a lifetime. Educators tell us that children who participate in it less special education and remediation, perform better on standardized tests, are more likely to graduate from high school and to attend college than their peers.<sup>1</sup> Economists note that once these children become adults, they are more likely to be employed and earn higher incomes, and less likely to engage in crime or rely on public benefits.<sup>2</sup> Of those who participate in good early childhood education programs, low-income children derive the greatest benefit from them.

Early childhood education could have a potentially far-reaching impact on children born to teens. There are approximately 12,000 children of teen parents in Philadelphia. These young children are at especially high risk of poverty and school failure, as their parents have lower graduation rates and less earning power than those who postponed childbirth until graduating from high school.<sup>3</sup> Early childhood education programs make it possible for teen parents to complete their educations and pursue jobs while their children gain skills that are crucial to school success.



Quality early education programs ensure that children receive a full range of physical and mental health screenings and referrals to appropriate follow-up care and helps parents undertake their new roles.

An essential component of early childhood education is parent engagement. Quality programs model good parenting skills and link participants to a full range of social supports designed to strengthen families and reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect.<sup>4</sup>

There are various ways to provide early childhood education to the children of teen parents. One is to offer early childhood education in the schools that parents attend.

In surveying programs around the country, PCCY found a number of district-wide initiatives and others that were affiliated with a single high school. In this paper we draw on examples of both to provide a view of what highly successful educational programs for teen parents and their children could look like in Philadelphia.

### ***Teaching Children and Parents at School***

Offering early childhood education at the same site that teen parents attend school can encourage parent-child bonding, aid breast feeding and provide opportunities for interactive learning by parents and children.

Quality child care offered within a school results in high learning standards for young children as well as their parents. Parents have a better chance of participating in other school activities and graduating from high school when offered on-site child care.<sup>5</sup> For example, the Adolescent Parents and Children Center at Boston's English High School (<http://www.englishhs.org/index.jsp?rn=431397>) offers accredited on-site child care for parents so they can participate in a full day of school.

### ***Focusing on Graduation***

A major emphasis of any school-based early childhood education program should be on encouraging teen parents to complete

high school. Some programs, such as Fort Worth's Project Reach, put graduation at the forefront of their missions. Programs that support parents' educational achievement through academic counseling, tutoring assistance and coordination with the school administration, combined with offering a teen parent advocate and flexible scheduling, increase the likelihood of graduation.

Individualized plans targeting each teen parent's specific educational needs, such as

the ones used by Project Reach (<http://schools.fortworthisd.net/Pages/Default.aspx>) assist young parents in obtaining their high school diplomas.

### ***Coordinating Family Services***

Coordinating services to young families through their children's early childhood education program benefits both parents and children with increased coordination, communication and support. This gives parents who are seeking health care, financial planning, income support, housing and other forms of assistance a single point of entry to learn about and apply for public services.

The New York City Department of Education's teen parent centers (<http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/District79/SchoolsProgramsServices/LYFE.htm>) link young families to an extensive health and social service referral network when they access school-based early childhood education.

The New York City Department of Education (NYDOE) operates 38 LYFE program centers in five boroughs. Any NYCDOE student can access referral services and/or enroll a child in early childhood education at any center if space is available. A student does not need to attend the high school where the center is located to access the services.

Social service resources accessible through New York's program address a range of issues and children can receive a full spectrum of health and developmental screenings and follow-up care to ensure they get off to a healthy and stable start.

### ***Providing Parenting Support***

Common to all effective programs for children and teen parents are structured opportunities to engage young parents in active parenting education. These programs are fostered by safe and supportive environments that early childhood education programs offer. Parenting classes explore children's physical and emotional health and well-being. In addition they address family planning, social relationships, and resources to reinforce self-sufficiency and family stability. For example, parents who use the child care center at New Haven's Wilbur Cross High School (<http://schools.nhps.net/wcross/>) also attend daily parenting classes where they learn about relationships, birth control, money management and employment – all intended to enrich their parenting knowledge and practice.

### ***Keeping Schools Open Year-Round***

Some schools provide early childhood education throughout the year, even when school is closed. A child's ability to participate in a program without interruption builds confidence and trust as children sustain bonds with caregivers. The full-day, year-round care at Boston's English High School Adolescent Parents and Children Center (<http://www.englishhs.org/index.jsp?rn=431397>) enables both children and parents to maintain contact with the center's caregivers throughout the year. By developing effective relationships with parents

over time, child care practitioners serve as stable role models and teach soft skills such as effective communication, conflict resolution, motivation and self-discipline through interaction with teen parents.

### ***Supporting Fatherhood***

Unexpected pregnancies thrust all parents, including teen fathers, into new roles. Young fathers are often inexperienced in the skills



needed to build strong family relationships. Strategies such as employing male staff members, conducting specific outreach to fathers, providing peer support and offering courses in parent skill development encourage whole family involvement and self-assurance in young fathers.

For example, Portland Public Schools (<http://www.pps.k12.or.us/departments/education-options/745.htm>) coordinates with Portland State University's Center for Healthy Inclusive Parenting to provide support and services to young fathers, while New Haven's Elizabeth Celotto Child Care Center (<http://schools.nhps.net/wcross/>) employs a former teen father to engage new dads in family-strengthening activities.

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## *Providing Flexible Scheduling*

Designing early childhood education programs with flexible schedules that extend beyond the traditional school day can help meet the complex and changing needs of teen parent families. Accommodating for emergencies that arise, family adjustment, medical and social service appointments, as well as the learning curve that accompanies any new family encourages parents' and children's continual involvement in the program. In addition, flexible scheduling such as the kind found at Boston's English High School (<http://www.englishhs.org/index.jsp?rn=431397>) recognizes that many teen parents hold jobs in addition to raising children and attending school.

## *Getting There*

Some schools and some districts provide transportation for young families who participate in school-based child care programs, to ensure safe passage to and from these programs. Many teens do not attend school in their neighborhoods and rely on more than one mode of public transportation to travel to and from school each day. Transportation for teen parents and their children, such as the door-to-door transportation provided by New Haven's Board of Education (<http://schools.nhps.net/wcross/>), ensures safe passage to school and increases daily attendance, allowing children and parents to benefit from continuous early learning and secondary education.

Without transportation, teen parents can face struggles getting to school and the likelihood of having to change schools to accommodate their new roles.

## *Creating Special Schools*

Another educational model that succeeds with teen families consists of schools that exclusively serve this population. Designed to complement an academic curriculum with support services for young families, schools for teen parents and their children present a structured learning environment designed to address the unique needs of adolescent families.

The New Futures School in Albuquerque, New Mexico ([http://](http://www.newfutureshigh.org/)

[www.newfutureshigh.org/](http://www.newfutureshigh.org/)) is a degree-granting school that educates more than 500 middle and high school students each year.

Open to all pregnant and parenting students in the Albuquerque School District, the New Futures School offers small class size; comprehensive health and social services including prenatal health care on site; child development and parenting education; twelve child care classrooms; summer school classes; and work opportunities for teens. Some students prefer the flexibility, peer support and freedom from other distractions provided by schools that focus exclusively on families like theirs.

The New Futures School offers parents and their children comprehensive child care classes. These classes instruct parents in infant and toddler development and care through hands-on instruction, as well as coordination skills among health practitioners, therapists, child care providers and teachers.

## *Supporting Important Programs*

School-based early childhood education programs rely on multiple funding sources, including those of school districts; local, state and federal government; foundations and corporations. Santa Fe's Teen Parent Center (<http://www.sfps.info/index.aspx?NID=122>) coordinates funding from city government, public and private foundations, and individual donors. These sources are combined to provide a stable funding for the programs.

Sustainable funding is essential to assuring any program's commitment to improving the life chances of teen parents and their children over time.

High quality early childhood education can have a powerful impact not only on one, but on two generations of low-income families, reversing what is frequently a multi-generational cycle of poverty, low-educational attainment and teen parenting. Programs have the greatest chance to succeed if they are designed with the needs of both generations – teen parents and young children – in mind.

This policy brief is the third in a series that addresses the child care needs of pregnant and parenting teens. The others are: *A Closer Look at Teen Parents and Child Care*, (October 2008) and *Reconnecting Pregnant and Parenting Youth to Educational Opportunities* (February 2007). These can be accessed at <http://pccy.org/?page=PolicyBriefs> 115.



<sup>1</sup> Belfield, Clive R.; Nores, Milagros; Barnett, Steve; and Schweinhart, Lawrence, "The High/Scope Perry Preschool Program: Cost-benefit analysis using data from the age-40 followup," *Journal of Human Resources*, Volume 41, Issue 1, (2006) Pages 162-190.

<sup>2</sup> Lynch, Robert G., *Enriching Children, Enriching the Nation: Public Investment in High-Quality Pre-Kindergarten*. Economic Policy Institute: Washington DC, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Hoffman, Saul D. *By the Numbers: The Public Costs of Adolescent Childbearing*. The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy: Washington, DC, 2006; Bellfield, Clive R, "Intergenerational Effects of Early Childhood Education," Department of Economics, Queens College, City University of New York (unpublished paper)

<sup>4</sup> Philliber, Susan; Brooks, Linda; Phillips Lehrer, Linda; Oakley, Merry and Waggoner, Sharon, "Outcomes of Teen Parenting Programs in New Mexico," *Adolescence*, Volume 38, No 115 (2003) Pages 535-553.

<sup>5</sup> Crean, Hugh F.; Hightower, A. D.; and Allan, Marjorie J., "School-based child care for children of teen parents: evaluation of an urban program designed to keep young mothers in school," *Evaluation and Program Planning*. Volume 24, Issue 3, (2001) Pages 267-275

*We can do this.  
We can make the difference.*

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**About PCCY:** Founded in 1980, Public Citizens for Children and Youth (PCCY) serves as the region's leading child advocacy organization and works to improve the lives and life chances of its children. Through thoughtful and informed advocacy, community education, targeted service projects and budget analysis, PCCY seeks to watch out and speak out for children and families.

PCCY undertakes specific and focused projects in areas affecting the healthy growth and development of children, including child care, public education, child health, juvenile justice and child welfare.

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