

How Does Access to Childcare Affect High School Completion

in Philadelphia's Multiple
Pathways to Graduation
Programs?

A Report on the Experiences of
Parenting Students

May 2014



This report was commissioned by the Project U-Turn Coalition and Philadelphia Youth Network.

Prepared by:

Della Jenkins, Childcare and Early Education, PCCY

PCCY would like to thank the following individuals and organizations for their contributions to this report:

Elizabeth Cain, Philadelphia Youth Network

Majeedah Scott, Office of Multiple Pathways, School District of Philadelphia

Jenna Monley, Office of Early Childhood Development's ELECT Program, School District of Philadelphia

Norma Finkelstein, Director, Child Care Information Services of NE Philadelphia

Shawn Towey, Roxy Woloszyn, Kira White, and Steven Fynes. PCCY

4 Introduction

6 Background

Project U-Turn and Philadelphia's Drop-Out Crisis

Multiple Pathways to Graduation

8 Methodology

9 Accessing Childcare Supports

Childcare Information Services (CCIS)

County Assistance Offices (CAOs)

10 Elements of Student Support

What the Research Says

The ELECT Program

Other Models

12 What we Learned from Parenting Students

Perspectives on Existing Childcare Supports

Onsite Childcare

Applying for CCIS

Dropping Out and Starting Over

16 What we Learned from Program Administrators

Informal vs. Center-based Childcare

Transitioning Back to School

17 What we Learned from Program Support Staff

The Waiting List

Paperwork and Service Interruptions

Mental Health Challenges

19 What we Learned from Childcare Information Services

Availability vs. Demand

Eligibility Requirements

20 Recommendations

Improving Practices Among MPG Providers

Revising School District Policies

State Actions to Improve CCIS Policies

Improving Interactions Between Students and County Assistance Offices

22 Suggested Further Research

23 References

Contents

Introduction

Project U-Turn And Philadelphia's Drop-Out Crisis

Each year, thousands of Philadelphia's youth leave school without a high school diploma. Research shows that if we can do a better job getting them back into educational programs and into the workforce, we can help lift families out of poverty and improve our city's economy.

Project U-Turn is Philadelphia's cross-sector, collaborative approach to dropout prevention and re-engagement lead by the Philadelphia Youth Network (PYN). Since launching in 2006, Project U-Turn's collective impact method has produced steady declines in high school dropout rates and corresponding increases in the rates at which students graduate high school, positioning Philadelphia as a national model for addressing the dropout crisis.

In the years since the creation of Project U-Turn, Philadelphia has seen its four-year, high-school-graduation rate increase by 12%—from 52% in 2006 to 64% in 2012. However, there is still much work to be done. Even in the face of increases in its own on-time graduation rates, Philadelphia still lags significantly behind state and national averages, which are 83% and 86%, respectively. According to the American Community Survey, 2009–11, Youth Employment and School Enrollment, there are 14,354 16–24 year-old Philadelphians without a secondary credential who are not enrolled in school, employed or in the labor force. Too many young Philadelphians still lack the education they need to have long-term economic success, and are forced to rely heavily on public benefits or engage in dangerous behaviors.

“Each high school dropout in Philadelphia is estimated to impose a lifetime cost (net fiscal impact) of \$319,000 due to their smaller tax payments, higher government transfers and institutionalization costs, while each high school graduate (without any college education) is expected to make a net positive fiscal contribution of \$261,000 over their working lives.” Those who drop out are also more likely to raise their own children in poverty.



Since its inception, Project U-Turn has commissioned several research initiatives designed to deepen our understanding of the issues that lead students to drop out of school, and to guide evidence-based policy solutions to these issues. In 2013-2014, Project U-Turn is especially interested in ways to increase the participation and retention of pregnant and parenting students in Philadelphia's alternative public education options.

Key Findings:

- + Lack of program-wide data on parenting status of students makes it difficult to enact evidence-based policy
- + Parenting students using unreliable relative neighbor care often have more difficulty maintaining full participation in school than those who use center-based care
- + Lag time between students entering a Multiple Pathways program and accessing childcare subsidy makes the transition back to school more difficult
- + Interruption of child care subsidy due to redetermination issues for students on TANF causes unnecessary service disruption for both parent and child

Recommendations:

- + The teen set aside for childcare subsidy should be centralized so that it can be allocated to each Child Care Information Services (CCIS) location by need
- + Paperwork requirements from CCIS and County Assistance Offices (CAOs) should be simplified to increase teen parent success in obtaining timely access to child care
- + ELECT's respite care system should be expanded to serve all Multiple Pathways to Graduation (MPG) students during the waiting period for childcare subsidy, and the state should ensure that temporary care provided to students does not affect reimbursement rates for childcare providers
- + Multiple Pathways programs should include custodial parenthood as a field in their student data, and the School District should analyze existing data to determine if there are particular MPG models showing promise in engaging parenting students

Multiple Pathways to Graduation

Project U-Turn is built on the belief that young people need to have multiple pathways to return to school and earn a high school diploma or comparable credential, as well as the power to choose the program that best fits their needs, schedule, and learning style. Many of these programs are coordinated through the School District of Philadelphia's Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation. Multiple Pathways, or MPG, options include: accelerated high schools, E3 Centers, Educational Option Programs, the Crossroads Academy, Gateway to College, GED to College, Job Placement, and Occupational Skills Programs.

MPGs serve a particularly at-risk population. Students come from impoverished neighborhoods and broken families, and many struggle with food insecurity and homelessness. Roughly one in three female students in these programs are mothers. For those students who are also parents, school often comes second to caring and providing for their families. In order to better support their learning, most MPGs offer individualized case management and social service referrals, but they are often under financial restraints that limit their ability to address the needs of every student.

This report looks specifically at the barriers that parenting students in the MPG programs face relating to childcare. PCCY listened to what school administrators, counseling staff, and parenting students had to say. What follows is a report of what we heard and an evaluation of the social service systems involved. We outline the state of childcare supports, highlight some promising ways that MPG programs are working to address the needs of parenting students, and offer policy recommendations for the School District and state and local agencies.

Methodology

Our conclusions and recommendations are based on student and program experiences. In order to ensure that our recommendations were as sound as possible, PCCY conducted in-depth interviews at 16 Multiple Pathways programs with 35 students and 24 program administrators and staff. However, it's important to point out that at most MPGS, student data on attendance and performance does not identify which students are parents. Without robust data systems in place, it is difficult to verify if the experiences of the individuals we interviewed are reflective of the norms in these programs. Therefore, the absence of solid data may be one of the first and most important systemic barriers to student success that should be addressed. We will describe our recommendations for data system improvements later in this report.

To begin our research, PCCY took an inventory of current practices relating to supports for parenting students at each of the MPG programs. We interviewed 14 administrators or principals to understand their internal organization, staffing, and referral processes. We also asked administrators to share their thoughts about the effects of parenting on attendance and retention.

The second phase of our research consisted of interviews with 10 program staff responsible for counseling, case management, or social service referrals. This process answered many questions we had about how things were working on the ground, but also raised other questions about systematic barriers and inconsistencies.

Therefore, we conducted interviews with staff at the social service agencies that serve parents in these educational programs, most notably, Child Care Information Services (CCIS) and the DPW's County Assistance Offices (CAOs). We spoke with representatives from 3 of the 4 local CCIS offices in order to establish current practices and system limitations, but were unable to reach anyone from the CAOs.

Finally, we worked with alternative education programs to organize six student focus groups and administer short written surveys to participants. We spoke with a total of 35 parenting students at five accelerated high schools and one E3 Center, and collected survey responses from 28 students. Of the 28 students who filled out our survey, 22 were female and 6 were male. Although the sample was relatively small (roughly 5–10% of all parenting students in the MPG programs), it was representative of the larger population with regard to age and race.

At right (Figure 1) is a list of the programs that we spoke with. Those locations where we held student focus groups are marked with an asterisk.



In order to ensure that our recommendations were as sound as possible, PCCY conducted in-depth interviews at 16 Multiple Pathways programs with 35 students and 24 program administrators and staff.



FIGURE 1: 16 MPG PROGRAMS SURVEYED

MPG Programs	
Accelerated Schools	E 3 Centers
El Centro de Estudiantes*	E3 North—Congreso*
Excel Academy North*	E3 Southwest—CIS
Excel Academy South *	E3 West—PHMC
OIC CADI	
OIC CLA	
Ombudsman NW	
Ombudsman S	
One Bright Ray—Fairhill*	
One Bright Ray—Simpson	
Performance Learning SW	
Phase 4 SW	
Youth Build Philadelphia	
Youth Empowerment Services (YES Philly)*	

Accessing Child Care Supports: The Basics

Before we delve deeper into what we learned by talking to program administrators, support staff, and parenting students themselves, let’s review the process by which students apply for help with childcare expenses. Two key state programs oversee and enable access to childcare for teen parents, the Child Care Information Services and the County Assistance Offices.

Child Care Information Services (CCIS)

Child Care Information Services (CCIS) enables low-income parents who are working or in school full-time to access higher quality childcare than they could otherwise afford. This state-sponsored program uses federal matching dollars and allows families to choose a caregiver. Parents under 22 who attend high school full-time are eligible regardless of income and pay a weekly co-payment on a sliding scale.

- + **Step 1:** Students fill out a CCIS application, either on paper or through COMPASS (DPW’s online benefit application). Students must attach paperwork verifying full-time school enrollment.
- + **Step 2:** Once the application is processed, students deemed eligible meet with CCIS in person to select a childcare provider.
- + **Step 3:** Students may be enrolled immediately, or may be added to the CCIS teen waiting list until funding becomes available.

County Assistance Offices (CAOs)

County Assistance Offices (CAOs) are staffed by case managers who determine eligibility for and coordinate the delivery of various government benefits such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

Teen recipients of TANF benefits must go through their CAO to apply for subsidy, and must prove that there is no other adult available in the household to care for the child.

- + **Step 1:** Students request an AMR meeting with their County Assistance Office case worker and bring documentation that they are in school. If the student is under 18 and receives TANF through their own parent or guardian, that person must also attend the meeting and prove that they work or are in school as well.
- + **Step 2:** After the CAO determines eligibility, students who are approved meet with CCIS in person and will be enrolled immediately.

Whether or not they receive TANF, all students who access CCIS must also complete redetermination paperwork every six months verifying that their enrollment status and childcare needs have not changed.

Elements of Support for Parenting Students

It makes sense that high school students, also balancing their role as parents, often need help navigating this complex process. But that's not all they need. Research suggests that elements of student support such as intensive case management, parenting classes, and on-site childcare improve the participation of parenting students in education. The table below (Figure 2) summarizes seven key components of support that MPG program administrators identified as important in their approach to parenting students.

FIGURE 2: PROGRAMS VARY IN SUPPORT SERVICES OFFERED

Supports for Students	Number of Programs Offering Support
Staff Trained In Social Service Referrals	13
Intensive Case Management	12
Parenting Support Workshops Or Classes	10
Home Visits	6
Counseling With Mental Health Professionals	5
Discretionary Fund For Temporary Needs Such As Short-Term Childcare	1
On-Site Childcare	1

There was great variation in the number and quality of support services offered by the programs that we surveyed. Several incorporate only 1 of the supports outlined above in their program model, many incorporate several supports in combination, and 2 of the 16 programs incorporate 6 out of 7 possible support components. While we lacked adequate data to evaluate the success of individual programs, our anecdotal findings support the conclusion that programs with more components of support better serve and retain their parenting students.

The ELECT Program

Education Leading to Employment and Career Training (ELECT) is a statewide initiative of the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare and Education, which is operated locally through the School District and three provider organizations. ELECT is designed to address the needs of pregnant and parenting students and offers several of the elements of support outlined above, including social service referrals, case management, parenting classes, and occasional home visits, as well as “baby bucks” to help pay for diapers and other essentials. In 2013-2014, one of ELECT’s providers, Communities in Schools (CIS), served parenting students at 8 of the 16 Multiple Pathways to Graduation programs.

How MPG programs which have been selected to participate in ELECT are staffed by ELECT coordinators depends on the number of pregnant and parenting students they serve. Programs with more than 20 pregnant and parenting students are assigned a full-time ELECT coordinator, while those with fewer pregnant and parenting students generally have an ELECT coordinator on-site 1–2 days a week.

Unfortunately, 8 MPG programs we surveyed were not served by ELECT in 2013-2014.

FIGURE 3: HALF OF MPG PROGRAMS SURVEYED ARE CURRENTLY SERVED BY ELECT

Programs served by ELECT	Programs not served by ELECT
E3 Southwest—CIS	E3 North—Congreso
Excel Academy North	E3 West—PHMC
Excel Academy South	El Centro de Estudiantes
OIC CADI	One Bright Ray—Fairhill
OIC CLA	One Bright Ray—Simpson
Phase 4 SW	Ombudsman NW*
Ombudsman S	Youth Build Philadelphia
Performance Learning SW	Youth Empowerment Services (YES Philly)

*As of fall of 2013, Ombudsman NW had been selected to participate in ELECT but had not yet started to implement the program



ELECT is designed to address the needs of pregnant and parenting students and offers several of the elements of support outlined above, including social service referrals, case management, parenting classes, and occasional home visits.



Other Models

Some MPG programs that are not served by ELECT have developed their own system for supporting students with academic and out-of-school issues. For example, Youth Build, a non-profit charter school serving roughly 220 former high school dropouts ages 18–21, provides each student with both a staff mentor for emotional support and a case manager specializing in social service referrals. Youth Build is also the only MPG program with a designated “discretionary fund” which can be used in special cases to remove any barrier to educational success, including temporary issues with childcare. Each year they provide “need-based grants” to parenting students who have applied for CCIS but cannot afford to pay for center-based childcare while their applications are processed. Youth Build raises money for the fund from private donors.

Youth Build is also one of two MPG programs not served by ELECT that offers parenting skills classes through Educating Communities for Parenting (ECP), an organization that facilitates workshops for young parents in schools, programs for adjudicated youth, and other community settings.

Unfortunately, not all MPG programs offer such comprehensive support. Several other programs that are not served by ELECT or ECP do not appear to have the systems or staff in place to handle the complex needs of parenting students. They have no case managers, counselors, or staff trained specifically in navigating social services like Child Care Information Services (CCIS). These programs frequently reported high rates of absence for parenting students and low rates of graduation for parenting students unable to obtain stable child care. However, systems are not in place to capture the data needed to verify these experiences and guide policy change.

What follows is an in-depth review of what we learned from speaking with parenting students, program administrators, and program support staff through interviews, surveys, and focus groups.

What we learned from...*parenting students*

Speaking directly with parenting students in six of the Multiple Pathways to Graduation programs helped us to better understand the role of childcare in their complicated lives. Students provided insight into the choice between relative/neighbor and center-based childcare, the role of their school in accessing childcare services, and the process of applying for CCIS.

Parents have several choices when choosing a childcare arrangement. Parents receiving subsidy through CCIS can select a licensed childcare center, licensed family daycare, or a licensed exempt relative or neighbor provider, as long as they do not share a residence. Parents not receiving subsidy are unrestricted by regulations, but are often severely limited by inability to afford high-quality care. Therefore, low-income parents who do not receive subsidy frequently rely on unlicensed facilities or informal arrangements with relatives or neighbors.



Parents not receiving subsidy are unrestricted by regulations, but are often severely limited by inability to afford high-quality care. Therefore, low-income parents who do not receive subsidy frequently rely on unlicensed facilities or informal arrangements with relatives or neighbors.



Most teen parents rely on center-based care but many use informal options that are less reliable.

Of the students we surveyed, 43% used a relative or neighbor as their primary childcare arrangement, while 57% used a licensed childcare center. Issues surrounding childcare availability and school attendance were significantly more common for those parents who used relative/neighbor care.

Of those students who used center-based childcare, 17% of respondents said that they have to miss school very or somewhat often because their childcare arrangement is closed or unable to provide care. Twenty five percent said that they have to miss a portion of school somewhat or very often because their childcare arrangement is not open early or late enough.

Meanwhile, respondents who used relative/neighbor childcare were three times more likely to say that they have to miss school very or somewhat often because their childcare arrangement is closed or unable to provide care (58%) and more than twice as likely to say that they have to miss a portion of school somewhat or very often because their childcare arrangement is not open early or late enough (also 58%).

In focus group discussions, students frequently reported problems with the reliability of their relative/neighbor care. Caregivers are generally those who are home during the day, and may be elderly, disabled, or simply unemployed. While some students reported being satisfied with their arrangement, many thought of it as less than ideal.

Teen parent use of informal care contributes to absences.

So why are so many young parents using relative/neighbor care? In many cases, students felt their children were too small for center-based care and disliked the idea of trusting a stranger with their safety and wellbeing. However, other students had resorted to using an informal care arrangement after being denied for childcare subsidy through TANF. These experiences echoed what we also heard from school staff and CCIS, that TANF students who have been deemed ineligible for subsidy because another adult in the household should be able to care for the child are often forced to rely on family members for childcare, even if they are unwilling, unable, or a bad choice for the child.

Student Perspectives on Childcare Supports

Student responses varied widely by program, but overall students seemed satisfied with the support they received from MPG staff in accessing childcare services. Over 80% of student respondents said that the staff at their school had been “very helpful” in securing childcare.



TANF students who have been deemed ineligible for subsidy because another adult in the household should be able to care for the child are often forced to rely on family members for childcare, even if they are unwilling, unable, or a bad choice for the child.



Parenting MPG students find ELECT to be very helpful.

At Excel Academy North and Excel Academy South, both of which use ELECT, 93% of students said that their ELECT coordinator had been “very helpful” in securing childcare. Students at the Excel Academies reported that their ELECT coordinator not only guided them through the CCIS application process, but also served as a trusted adult they could talk to. Interestingly, several students mentioned that, while their old neighborhood schools had a part-time ELECT coordinator, they had not utilized the program until coming to Excel. When asked what more Excel or ELECT could do to support parenting students, the groups’ only suggestion was on-site childcare.

Meanwhile, the six students we spoke with at One Bright Ray Community High School’s Fairhill campus all access the on-site childcare available through the “Baby Room” there. They also meet weekly for a parenting support group facilitated by an experienced mentor from Educating Communities for Parenting (ECP). Students reported feeling extremely close with their ECP mentor and agreed that the support group taught them valuable tools for parenting and provided an emotional outlet during the tense school week.

Parenting students at One Bright Ray find on-site childcare to be an indispensable support.

The group felt that on-site care was exceptionally convenient and helped to put their minds at ease during the school day. One student, who was living in a homeless shelter with her two-year-old daughter and was pregnant with a second child, considered the availability of on-site care the only reason she could attend school. Her story illustrates the immense impact that the Baby Room can have on students’ lives. However, two other students mentioned that they were considering applying for CCIS and transitioning their children into center-based care elsewhere because of the limited hours provided by the Baby Room, which only operates during the school day.

Because the Baby Room is not a licensed childcare center they only offer childcare while parents are in the building and attending classes. The students said they occasionally heard complaints from their peers of poor quality in the Baby Room, but they seemed to feel that these complaints were unfounded. They all appreciated that they receive reports on their child’s daily activities, and reported feeling confident in their children’s safety.

Students at El Centro de Estudiantes had heard about the Baby Room at One Bright Ray, and expressed interest in having on-site childcare in their school. They also suggested that their program designate a meeting room where parenting students could talk to each other about their kids, home lives, or relationships. The students agreed that the counselors at El Centro were helpful in filling out the CCIS application, but several struggled to find reliable care during the application process and had taken brief leaves of absence from school until their subsidy was in place.

ON-SITE CHILDCARE

Research shows that on-site childcare can have a positive impact on the participation of parenting students. One Bright Ray’s Fairhill campus is currently the only MPG program in Philadelphia to offer on-site childcare. Students use the drop-in “Baby Room” as needed during school hours, completely free of charge. The facility is not a licensed childcare center, but is staffed by certified early childhood professionals.

Students in Youth Empowerment Services or YES Philly's new accelerated high school acknowledged that the program remained understaffed and was still ironing out the kinks. They felt more individualized support with referrals, a parenting support group, and on-site childcare would all be useful but seemed skeptical that changes would be made soon enough to benefit them. The two fathers in the group had not been involved in applying for CCIS or selecting childcare, but they did routinely pick their kids up from childcare.

Finally, students at Congreso's E3 Power Center gushed over their case managers and reported receiving helpful support throughout the application process. Congreso used to conduct parenting workshops, which one student had utilized and found to be very informative, but cut the program due to funding.

Applying for CCIS

Students at all six focus group locations reported several barriers to accessing subsidy related to the application process, most commonly, finding childcare while applying for CCIS, the waiting list, and the complexity of the application itself.

Finding temporary childcare while applying for CCIS can be difficult.

Students repeatedly recounted difficulty finding reliable childcare in the first weeks of school or during the time they were applying for CCIS and waiting for the application to be processed. While processing times appeared reasonable- generally less than 2 weeks- students often spent weeks pulling together the paperwork needed for their application. As school support staff also mentioned, the various loose items required by CCIS were not always easy to locate, especially for students with unstable living situations.

Paperwork can be a challenge.

Students reported issues with TANF and CCIS redetermination paperwork. Several students had not received notifications reminding them to submit the necessary documents because of changes in residence. Others had simply forgotten or mistakenly left off a required item. Unfortunately, many students had experienced service disruption as a result, and had therefore missed school and fallen behind.

Despite these issues, of those students that received subsidy, only 7% reported that their CCIS staff contact was "not at all helpful," 57% said that they were "somewhat helpful", and 36% said that they were "very helpful" in securing childcare. However, one in three students surveyed had waited one month or more after they were approved for CCIS and before they were able to enroll their child in care. While students wait they often struggle to find stable child care and are forced to miss school which can lead to frustration, disengagement, and occasionally cause students to abandon the MPG program altogether.



Students reported difficulty working with their County Assistance Offices.

Students who receive TANF must attend an in-person AMR meeting at their CAO even before meeting with a staff person at CCIS. This can cause longer lag times between applications for childcare subsidy and enrollment in care. A number of students also reported difficulty contacting their CAO caseworker by phone and excessive wait-times at County Assistance Offices. Several students even complained that they frequently felt disrespected by CAO staff. Of those students who reported receiving TANF, more than a quarter of students (27%) reported that their CAO case worker was “not at all helpful” in securing childcare. While these reports in no way tell the whole story, they suggest that there may be room for improvement in terms of communication between CAOs and parenting students.

Student Perspectives on Dropping Out and Starting Over:

While we focused our conversations with parenting students on their childcare needs, preferences, and concerns, we also gained valuable insight on factors that contributed to teens leaving school, and on what elements of their current programs make it possible for them to attend school.

Students prefer their MPG programs to neighborhood schools.

Students unanimously agreed that, while their MPG programs were challenging because of accelerated credit-accumulation, they felt significantly more supported than they had in their neighborhood schools. Students reported that the atmosphere in their MPG was more conducive to learning and that they had at least one trusted adult on the staff who they could talk to about academic and out-of-school problems.

Students dropped out of school for a wide variety of reasons.

When asked about their experiences in their old schools, students explained the primary factors that lead to their dropping out. Fifty seven percent of respondents said that getting pregnant or becoming a father was a factor in their dropping out of school. The most common other factors that respondents said contributed were that school was boring (and that they weren’t learning anything), that their teachers didn’t care, and that their grades were too low. Several students also cited social problems, such as feeling judged by their peers, being bullied, or not being able to fit into their school uniforms. These responses are in line with the 2011 YUC Report “Pushed Out: Youth Voices on the Dropout Crisis in Philadelphia” which found that 4 major themes contributed: boredom and engagement, teaching and classroom learning, school discipline, and out-of-school issues (including pregnancy).

Of the students who had their children while attending a neighborhood school, roughly 40% said that trouble finding childcare was a factor in their initial decision to drop out. What’s more, childcare was almost unanimously a serious concern when students decided to go back to school and enrolled in a MPG program.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO DROP OUT:

57% of students we surveyed reported that getting pregnant or become a parent contributed to their decision to drop out of school.

The 3 other most important factors that students reported were:

- + That they felt as though their teachers didn’t care about them
- + That school was boring or not relevant to their lives
- + That their grades were too low and they felt catching up would be impossible

What we learned from... *program administrators:*

Informal care arrangements are not reliable enough.

MPG program administrators reported that, on average, 20–50% of their students were parents. Of the 14 principals or program directors that we interviewed, all but one considered access to consistent childcare a critical issue for their student population, and one that frequently contributed to absences. Many administrators noted that their students who utilized informal relative or neighbor childcare arrangements were more likely to have frequent absences throughout the school year.

Consistent access to childcare improves attendance.

When asked what support they would most like to be able to offer parenting students, the most common response from administrators was on-site childcare. Many administrators had read the research on the potential positive effects of on-site childcare for parenting students. They also reported that students sometimes brought their young children to school



when they could not find childcare, and that last-minute inability to find care was a common reason for student absences. While several principals worried that their parenting students might be distracted by having their child so close-by, the majority felt that the convenience out-weighed any concerns. There is a lack of hard data on the impact of One Bright Ray's

on-site facility on retention rates, but staff and administrators there reported that it enables students to attend who would not otherwise be able to.

Subsidy approval processes don't begin until students enroll.

Administrators expressed frustration that they were unable to help students begin the process of applying for CCIS until after the school year was already underway. CCIS requires verification of full-time enrollment, and this paperwork is generally filled out during the first week of school, although it can be completed up to one month beforehand. It can also take several weeks for students to get the necessary paperwork submitted and processed, so even if they don't end up on a waitlist, students are often forced to rely on unstable, temporary childcare arrangements for the first weeks of school. This catch 22 causes frequent absences early on and sometimes delays students from becoming reengaged in their education.

Some programs need more mental and behavioral health supports.

Several administrators also reported that funding restraints limited their ability to provide counseling and behavioral health services that could greatly benefit students. Many programs have 1 or 2 caseworkers managing a case load of up to 200 students, and are overworked and ill equipped to deal with serious mental health issues.

What we learned from...program support staff:

Speaking to the case managers, counselors, and teachers at MPG programs helped us to identify more specific, systematic barriers that students face relating to childcare. The most commonly reported barriers to childcare access were eligibility requirements and waitlists.

The state makes the false assumption that adults in the home will watch children.

Support staff at several MPG programs reiterated the concern that TANF students were sometimes deemed ineligible for subsidy by their CAO because another adult in their household was home during the hours they attended school. Students were therefore advised to use that adult as a caregiver, and denied subsidy to help pay for care. Counselors reported that these caregivers were sometimes unwilling or unable to provide reliable childcare, forcing students to miss school.

Teen parents are waiting too long for childcare subsidy.

Waiting times for students already deemed eligible for subsidy were also an issue. While the state requires that each CCIS sets aside some portion of their low income allocation to prioritize teen parents, this set-aside has not been sufficient to meet the need in recent years. Support staff at several programs reported long waits of up to 6 months and difficulty with keeping students engaged in school during this time. Some also expressed a desire for greater communication with CCIS and to learn more about CCIS policies. Program support staff also pointed out that their students struggle with paperwork and deadlines. Although many felt that the CCIS application process was reasonably manageable, they emphasized that students need help keeping track of requirements and staying up-to-date with redetermination.

Immediate access to childcare improves attendance and retention.

We also elicited feedback from ELECT coordinators on the barriers their students face relating to childcare. While ELECT staff agreed that long wait times for CCIS were an on-going problem, they had found some success mitigating the negative effects of the waitlist through a system of “respite” or emergency childcare. Through a partnership with OMART, a childcare management and training organization, ELECT has identified 25 early childhood providers who are willing to offer temporary care to teen parents free of charge while they are on the CCIS waitlist. This partnership is new, and has so far served less than 30 parenting students citywide, but it represents an exciting innovation that could be expanded upon in the future. However, if the program is scaled up it is important that the state exclude these temporary, free services provided to students when they calculate reimbursement rates for childcare providers.



ELECT staff also expressed fewer concerns than staff at MPGs about communication with CCIS, and seemed to be benefiting greatly from trainings offered each summer on the agency’s policies and processes.

However, they reported having little to no communication with CAO, and mentioned that students who are on TANF and applying for CCIS through their CAO often have difficulty reaching their caseworkers.

Paperwork requirements need to be streamlined.

ELECT staff concurred that many MPG students lack the organizational skills to manage their own paperwork. Unfortunately, this leads to frequent interruption of services when students fail to return redetermination paperwork in a timely manner. They reported that the CCIS application requires that students attach a variety of loose items (which are easily forgotten and often slow down the process). They suggested a clear checklist be built into the application, or that a modified student application be created with fewer loose items. Finally, ELECT staff reported frustration with lack of student follow-through and acknowledged occasional misuse of the system, when students obtain CCIS but fail to report to school.

More mental health support could improve program success.

Counselors at several programs expressed frustration that so many students are coming from backgrounds of abuse, neglect, and other adverse childhood experiences, problems that need to be identified and dealt with earlier. Without more early intervention, mental health support, and trauma-informed education in the lower grades, high school students will continue to come to the MPG programs with severe behavior and mental health problems.

What we learned from...*Child Care Information Services:*

Availability of childcare subsidy is not aligned to demand.

We interviewed teen liaisons and eligibility specialists at several of Philadelphia's CCIS locations to better understand their policies and practices. Staff explained that each office puts aside a portion of their low income allocation specifically for teen parents at the beginning of each school year. Once this money runs out, they will only be able to serve more teen parents when the state increases their low income allocation. Since Multiple Pathways programs accept rolling admissions, students who enter school part-way through the year often find that the teen set aside is gone and are forced to wait months for childcare subsidy.

At the time of this report's writing, no CCIS office in Philadelphia had a waitlist longer than two weeks. However, at CCIS Northeast, the average wait time in the past year was between 3 and 6 months. Demand for childcare subsidy, and specifically teen set-aside, is greatest in the Northeast, but the funding for this CCIS office does not seem to reflect the greater need.



CCIS staff also confirmed that for TANF students, policy requires that if there is an adult present in the home who does not work during the hours that childcare is needed, they are expected to provide care. Therefore, many young parents who live with an unemployed or underemployed relative are deemed ineligible for subsidy.



Eligibility requirements aren't always based on the best interests of the child.

CCIS staff also confirmed that for TANF students, policy requires that if there is an adult present in the home who does not work during the hours that childcare is needed, they are expected to provide care. Therefore, many young parents who live with an unemployed or underemployed relative are deemed ineligible for subsidy. CCIS acknowledged that some adults who are home are not ideal or even capable of being reliable childcare providers, but unfortunately that falls outside the scope of what they can currently consider in terms of eligibility.

Overall, CCIS staff reported positive experiences working with ELECT and welcomed increased collaboration with MPG programs in the future. Unfortunately, their ability to conduct trainings at each program may be limited by lack of staff resulting from budget cuts over the last five years.

Improving Practices among MPG Providers

Based on our interviews and focus groups, PCCY recommends a multi-faceted approach to improving the attendance of teen parents in MPG programs. Our recommendations begin with obvious and simple steps that the MPG programs can take to improve the chances of teen parent success.

Specifically we recommend that:

- + **Programs** should include custodial parenthood as a field in their student data system that tracks attendance and retention so that programs can better access trends and outcomes in the future.
- + **Programs** should strive to include an element of individualized case management or counseling for students to help deal with out-of-school issues, specifically parenting and childcare.
- + **Programs** should establish both maternity leave policies and policies to address the time lag between when students start applying for CCIS and are approved for subsidy. Some programs do this by providing home visits to keep students engaged.
- + **Partnerships** between MPG programs and quality childcare centers in their neighborhood should be formed to increase communication and provide teen parents with trusted referrals.

Revising School District Policies

PCCY also recommends that the School District of Philadelphia take several steps to improve their policies and the experiences of parenting students in MPG programs.



All MPG programs should be helped to develop the key components of support which research shows help parenting students maintain participation in school, such as parenting classes, home visits, social service referrals, and individual counseling.



Specifically we recommend that:

- + **The School District and ELECT** should work to expand the “respite care” system made possible through ELECT and OMART partnership to provide emergency daycare for parents on CCIS waiting list.
- + **The School District** should provide updated social service contact information to each MPG program every fall, including lists of teen contacts at each CCIS office.
- + **The District** should aggregate and analyze ELECT student data to determine if there are certain schools or MPG models showing promise in engaging parenting students and make this data available to MPG providers as well to the public.
- + **All MPG programs** should be helped to develop the key components of support which research shows help parenting students maintain participation in school, such as parenting classes, home visits, social service referrals, and individual counseling. These could be provided by an outside program, like ELECT, or built into program models.
- + **The District** should work to expand access to early intervention, behavioral and mental health supports, and trauma-informed education in the lower grades in order to address the needs of students coming from backgrounds of abuse, neglect, and other adverse childhood experiences before they drop out of school.

State Actions to Improve Subsidy Policies

The state of Pennsylvania should work to improve subsidy policies, especially as they affect parenting students.

Specifically we recommend that:

- + **The teen set aside** for childcare subsidy should be centralized so that it can be allocated to each Child Care Information Services (CCIS) location by need.
- + **Better lines of communication** should be built between MPG programs and the staff at CCIS offices. One way this could be accomplished is if CCIS offered annual trainings for MPG staff, as they already do for ELECT coordinators.
- + **Childcare subsidy** should continue through the redetermination process and should not be shut off until its clear the teen parent’s case is closed.
- + **The state** should revise the eligibility requirement dictating that for students on TANF, available adult members of the parent’s household be automatically named as caregivers so as to consider the best interests of the child.

Improving Interactions Between Students and County Assistance Offices

PCCY also recommends that local County Assistance Offices should join the discussion about how to improve outcomes for parenting students.

Specifically we recommend that:

- + **CAOs** should find a way to expedite the process for teen parents applying for subsidy. One method would be to staff a caseworker specifically assigned to be available to teen parents and to expedite their approval process.
- + **CCIS and CAO** should work together to compile a guide or manual on protocols surrounding teen parents and subsidy for school staff. Philadelphia Youth Network (PYN) and the Project U-Turn Coalition could facilitate this process.

Suggested Further Research:

PCCY suggests that further research should delve deeper into MPG promising practices and possible state-level policy changes.

Specifically, we recommend that:

- + **Further research** should look at ELECT's student outcome data and, if possible, use it to make the case for further investment in both ELECT and high quality accelerated schools.
- + **Further research** should consider the cost and feasibility of on-site childcare, as well as identify ways to ensure quality.
- + **Further research** should investigate the special needs and concerns of teen fathers, especially as they relate to participation in education.



SOURCES

¹ Fogg, Neeta P., Harrington, Paul E., & Khatiwada, Ishwar. (2009). The Tax and Transfer Fiscal Impacts of Dropping Out of High School in Philadelphia City and Suburbs, ii–x, 52.

Public Citizens for Children and Youth (PCCY) serves as the leading child advocacy organization working to improve the lives and life chances of children in the region.

Through thoughtful and informed advocacy, community education, targeted service projects and budget analysis, PCCY watches out and speaks 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.

Founded in 1980 as Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth, our name was changed in 2007 to better reflect our expanded work in the counties surrounding Philadelphia. PCCY remains a committed advocate and an independent watchdog for the well-being of all our children.

pccy.org
facebook.com/pccypage

twitter.com/pccyteam
instagram.com/pccyphotos