

<p>Pregnant and Parenting Teens in the School District of Philadelphia Social and Academic Outcomes</p>

As part of Project U-Turn, the citywide collaborative addressing out of school youth, and drawing on our Early Warning Indicators research that identified academic and behavioral risk factors for dropping out of school, we partnered with researchers at the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Delaware to explore the relationship between teen pregnancy and parenting and dropping out of school. Our sample, girls aged 13-19, was drawn from the Philadelphia Educational Longitudinal Study (PELS) dataset,¹ a stratified random sample of eighth grade students originally collected in 1996 and followed through 2004.

Differences Between Philadelphia’s Pregnant-Parenting Population and all other Students

While we found no significant racial or ethnicity differences between pregnant and parenting teens and the rest of the student population, we did find obvious engagement and performance differences for students who gave birth early on (in the 8th or 9th grade), and differences in family background.² One-quarter of our pregnant and parenting population gave birth in the 9th grade, but just 8% deliver those babies in their “rightful ninth grade year.” While some of these girls were repeating the ninth grade when they became pregnant, others were on track to graduate, became pregnant, left school to have their babies and—surprisingly—came back. While two-thirds of our sample gave birth to a single child, one-third had multiple children before exiting high school. Some of our key findings include:

Pregnant and Parenting Teens could benefit from more Health Education/Information.

- 90% of girls sampled say that their school has a sex education course
- While 61% of girls say that their school has a health resource center (HRC), less than half (45%) have ever visited the center
- While we cannot assess the quality of health and sex ed information these girls receive, we do know that they’re more likely to discuss birth control at school (53%) than at home (37%)
- Girls are knowledgeable about certain birth control methods (condom, pill) and less familiar with others (Norplant, withdrawal, rhythm, Depo-Provera, foam/jelly/cream, diaphragm)
- Although birth control is hardly taboo—91% of girls have talked with someone at home and 83% have talked with their friends—29% are “embarrassed to buy it at a store”

¹ Designed by Frank Furstenberg, University of Pennsylvania.

² Including number of siblings, parent(s) living at home, and educational level of mother/father.

Parenting Teens Fall Behind Early On in High School.

- They are more likely to have an F or D on their report card by the end of their 8th grade year
- They are more likely to have fewer credits (required for promotion to the next grade)
- They are more likely to have already repeated a grade by the time they enter high school

Parenting Teens Have Low Academic Expectations and Diminished Self-Perception.

Parenting teens, compared with non-parenting teens, have a set of academic and social expectations that is different from non-parenting teens:

- Don't think that teachers believe in them
- Don't rely on teachers to help with homework
- Have lower educational aspirations and expectations
- Are less likely to participate in extracurricular activities
- Find it harder to make friends
- Do not feel as smart
- Get in trouble more often
- Feel like nobody cares for them
- Feel as if they will not graduate from college

Parenting Teens are Liberal-Minded with Regard to Sexual Practice. Parenting teens have a set of beliefs around sexual practices that differ from those of their non-parenting peers.

Parenting teens:

- Believe it is okay much earlier than non-parenting teens to leave school, drink, and have sex (by age 14), become pregnant (age 17), and get married (age 19)
- Receive more information—at home and in school—on sex and pregnancy
- Believe they have better knowledge regarding birth control
- Are more likely to have had a sexual relationship

Parents of Teen Parents View High School as a Behavioral and Academic Challenge, and as a Job Pipeline rather than a College Pipeline. We found markers of home life for parenting teens to be different from those of non-parenting teens. Parents and guardians of parenting teens:

- Are *more likely* to talk to teachers about their teen's grades and behavior
- Think of high school as an avenue to prepare their teen for the job market

- Believe that their teen will skip class and/or get suspended at least once during the 9th grade
- Do not believe that their teen will pass classes, graduate from college, and get a well-paying job

Teen Parents Take a Circuitous Path to Graduation/Dropout. Pregnant and parenting teens float in and out of school, with no clear “educational trajectory.” What is clearer is that when teen parents do exit the school system, they are 30% less likely to graduate and 30% more likely to drop out than their non-parenting counterparts. While our sample was small, white students had a harder time staying in school than did African American and Hispanic students. Fertility is postponed for white students; they have children later, and are more likely than African American or Hispanic students to have children after they exit high school. This suggests that white students are dropping out and then having children – demanding a different policy response than that which addresses the needs of students who have children and then need resources to progress through school.

Far/Under-Credited Students are more likely than Near/Under-Credited students to earn Credits toward Graduation. The earlier in her high school years that a young woman gives birth to a child, the more likely she is to earn credits toward graduation. Likewise, the later in the “educational lifespan” of a student that she becomes pregnant and gives birth to a child, the less likely she is to earn additional academic credits. More eye-opening was that the overall credit attainment for teen parents who drop out was very similar to that of non-parenting dropouts – thus, teen parenthood may not be tightly tied to the dropout/credit relationship.

School Attendance drops off as Teen’s Delivery Date approaches. As a young woman’s delivery date approaches, attendance declines, indicating disengagement with school. However, among those young women who return to school after giving birth, attendance picks back up but remains low (averaging 65-80%), indicating they are still not participating in school to the level of their peers.

The Majority of Teen Parents Who Leave School, Return. The good news is more than half of teen mothers come back to school—with the vast majority returning within one year. Of those, less than 20% are absent from school for more than one full marking period. That said, of the 83% of young women who continued through school “uninterrupted,” almost one-third (30%) gave birth over the summer. For the non-summer births, teen mothers miss an average of 50 days of school in the marking periods during and after birth. While these marking periods may or may not be consecutive, this indicates that girls are missing a significant amount of school and could use guidance in maintaining progress in school.

Some pregnant and parenting teens do graduate with their peers, or shortly thereafter. What sets these students (those who ‘made it’) apart from non-graduates?

In What Ways do Parenting Teens Who Graduate from High School Differ from Parenting Teens who Drop Out?

Parenting teens who make it to graduation tend to hold strong beliefs and expectations, inculcated by their parents, around academic behaviors. Specifically, they:

- Believe their teachers care if they get bad grades
- Have families that believe school is important
- Have parents with paying jobs
- Have significantly higher 8th and 9th grade attendance
- Earn more credits in 9th grade (4.3 v. 2.3)
- Have a higher 9th grade GPA (1.3 v. .8)
- Be promoted to 10th grade
- Have earned greater numbers of credits at time of birth (14.4 v. 5.7)

Conversely, parenting teens who drop out have lower expectations and norms around academic behaviors. They also partake in freer sexual practices and seem to have a lesser understanding health and sexual education:

- Repeat a grade prior to 8th grade
- Have parents who believe they have low likelihood of graduating from college
- Have sex in the 9th grade and earlier
- Perceive lower access to school health care centers
- Have less knowledge of contraceptives and STDs

We found no significant differences between eighth grade standardized test performance or parental education levels for parenting teens and parenting dropouts.

In conclusion,

- Parenting teens who drop out of school often experience low expectations from teachers, family, and selves
- There is a gap between *what parenting teens know* and *how they act* with regard to sexual practice
- Parenting teens exhibit evidence of disengagement from school (e.g., repeat grades, low attendance, low credit attainment) early on in high school
- Parenting teens are behind in credits at the time of first birth and are increasingly less likely to earn credits as they move through school

- For students who return to school after giving birth, they are absent from school the equivalent of an entire marking period

Following up on this work, we set out to find, among students who are pregnant and/or give birth and stay in school, what services are they receiving/not receiving? How do pregnant and parenting teens define their middle and high school experiences? What are the demographic, family, community, and health characteristics for parenting teens who stay in school?

In the spring of 2009, we partnered with Communities in Schools to survey pregnant and parenting teens currently enrolled in the ELECT/Cradle-to-Classroom Program. At that time, there were about 650 students enrolled in ELECT. We sampled 145 of them, in grades 9-12, ages 14-19, enrolled in nineteen neighborhood high schools.

Our major findings are as follows:

The Vast Majority of Pregnant and Parenting Teens in the ELECT Program feel a Connection to at least One Adult at School.

Ninety-one percent of pregnant and parenting teens feel that they have an adult to talk to at school. While one-third identified that adult as a teacher, two-thirds acknowledged that adult as an ELECT program person. Less than one-third (29%) of ELECT participants reported that they have a favorite teacher.

More Often than Not, Pregnant and Parenting Teens in the ELECT Program are Getting Homework Help Offsite (at Home, from Family Members).

Fifty-four percent (54%) of ELECT participants get homework help from family members at home, while forty-two percent (42%) seek help from teachers and other adults at school. Few students (just 4%) look to adults in the community for help with homework.

Going on Attendance Alone, One-Third of Pregnant and Parenting Teens are at Risk of Dropping Out

Research by the Ed Fund and Johns Hopkins University found that students with low attendance (in Philadelphia, 80% or less) have a 10-20% chance of graduating with their peers. A full one-third of pregnant and parenting teens surveyed reported that they miss at least one day of school per week, meaning they attend 80% or less of the time. Of these students, forty percent (40%) miss *two or more* days per week. The good news is that two-thirds of the students surveyed reported that they miss school once every two weeks at most.

When Pregnant and Parenting Teens in the ELECT Program Miss School, Most Often it is for Health-Related Reasons.

The most common reason that pregnant and parenting teens gave for missing school was health-related (doctor's appointment, sick, child is sick). Teen parents who use community health resources (hospital, clinic, doctor) are less likely to miss school for a health reason than those who do not take advantage of these health resources. Frequency of use matters, too: the more they use community health resources, the less likely it is that they miss school for a health-related reason.

Less than Half of Pregnant and Parenting Teens in the ELECT Program Understand the District's Teen Leave Policy.

Teen leave policy is not well understood among pregnant and parenting teens: just forty-six percent (46%) of ELECT program participants knew anything about the District's teen leave policy; those who did often knew little and/or had inaccurate information. When asked about the District's homework policy while on leave, just one-quarter of pregnant and parenting teens we surveyed attempted to explain it.

The Ed Fund and Drexel have partnered to do an extension of this research that asks the following questions:

- Are there strong predictors of becoming a teen parent that we can observe from academic records (credit attainment, course marks, attendance, test scores) and from survey data?
- Among those young women who gave birth while still enrolled in school, are there observable (individual- and school-level) factors that distinguish those who earned their high school degrees from those who dropped out of school?