



PREPPED FOR SUCCESS?

SUPPORTING PREGNANT AND PARENTING TEENS
IN CHICAGO SCHOOLS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To determine how pregnant and parenting teens are faring within the various educational systems in Chicago, CIR hired and trained eight teen mothers to conduct a survey of pregnant and parenting teens in April and May 2003. A total of 181 pregnant and parenting teens were interviewed. CIR supplemented the survey by interviewing 42 teen service providers at seven organizations in different parts of Chicago as well as staff at 21 alternative schools.

Findings

Of those who were in school when they became pregnant with their first child, 16% were in eighth grade or a lower grade when they first became pregnant. Of the 29% who were not in school when they became pregnant, 26% had completed only eighth grade or a lower grade.

Access and Perceptions

The time that it took students to get to school or GED program was quite long for those students who were not in regular schools. A large percentage of the students in regular high schools believed they were learning and making progress. Twenty-six percent of the students currently enrolled at regular schools said they had been encouraged to leave.

Barriers and School Atmosphere

It took teen parents who did not have onsite childcare an average of 16 minutes to bring their children to daycare. However, for 22% of the teen parents, bringing their children to daycare took them 30 minutes or longer in addition to their own commute to school. Over half of the teen parents stated that they did not have a backup childcare plan.

The teens' perceptions about school policies on pregnancy and parent-related problems at regular schools varied widely. Thirty-three percent of those currently attending regular school had heard negative comments about being pregnant or a parent. Almost all of those negative comments were made by peers, not by high school staff.

Forty-two percent of those in regular schools had been talked to about their attendance. On average, those teens who had been spoken to about their attendance had missed 8.9 days. A greater percentage of teens were talked to about their attendance and tardiness compared to the period of time before they became pregnant.

Twelve percent of those in regular school thought that they were likely to be kicked out and 7% thought that they were likely to drop out. Of those who had previously attended a regular high school, 7% had been kicked out and 63% had dropped out. Eighty-two percent of those who had dropped out of school said that it had been "too much to handle."

Referrals and Services

Most of the teens enrolled in the Cradle to Classroom program or who had used the CPS homebound services had positive experiences. Few teens at the regular schools received information about services that help teen parents.

Returning to School

Seventy-six percent of those who were not in school said that they wanted to return to school. The most frequent reason that prevented them from going back to school was a need for childcare.

Summary of Recommendations

To ensure that pregnant and parenting teens are supported in their efforts to remain in their regular, local schools, and that school staff can help the teens via referrals and other assistance, Chicago Public Schools should:

1. Expand the Cradle to Classroom program (CTC) so that it is offered to teens in every school and allocate all of the revenue generated by the program to the continuation and development of the program. The stated goal of CTC should be the retention of pregnant and parenting teens within Chicago Public Schools.
2. Designate and train staff members at schools without CTC as pregnant and parenting teen liaisons.
3. Direct each high school to provide a referral bulletin board for pregnant and parenting teens so that they may seek help anonymously.
4. Incorporate ongoing trainings around the needs of pregnant and parenting teens as part of the standard diversity trainings.
5. Construct systemwide policies that take the needs of pregnant and parenting teens into account and ensure that the policies are consistently applied as required by federal and state law.
6. Develop a packet of information that describes what a student needs to re-enroll and give it to “at-risk” students as soon as they are identified.
7. Designate a transitional program within each local high school to enable those without an eighth grade diploma to transition into high school.
8. Identify the number of pregnant and parenting teens in their schools by conducting an anonymous survey of students.
9. Offer more night and weekend classes at local schools to accommodate working teens.