



## Healthy Teen Network

# POSITION STATEMENT ON EDUCATIONAL EQUITY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE PREGNANT & PARENTING

*Adopted by the Healthy Teen Network Board of Directors on June 9, 2017*



### Position

Healthy Teen Networks supports educational equity and systems of support that aid young people who are pregnant and parenting to complete high school. When pregnant and parenting youth graduate from high school, they have an increased chance of seeking post-secondary education and being workforce prepared, and they have a reduced chance of living in poverty and/or needing public assistance. Young parents with a high school diploma can better contribute to the developmental health of their children. Further, schools that provide improved supports for these students demonstrate critical efforts to reduce their dropout rates.

Healthy Teen Network supports Title IX of the Education Amendment of 1972 (“Title IX”), a law that prohibits educational discrimination in schools that receive federal funds, including discrimination based on pregnancy or parenting status. Healthy Teen Network calls on schools and their administrators, policymakers, advocates, philanthropists, and youth-supporting service organizations to develop policies, support programs, and allocate resources that offer equitable educational opportunities for students who are pregnant and parenting. Schools can and must ensure their compliance with Title IX by instituting equitable policies, informing the school community about the rights of students who are pregnant and parenting, and establishing supporting structures that help young parents—both mothers and fathers—stay in and succeed in school.

## Issue

While there are successful efforts across the nation to lower the teen pregnancy rate, high rates of teen pregnancy and its potential consequences persist. Overwhelmingly, youth who are parents want to be good parents and provide financially for their children. Young parents, particularly young mothers, who are students and had previously become disengaged in school, often find the responsibilities of parenthood motivate them to seek high school completion. Yet even with the protection offered by Title IX, young parents frequently face educational policies that segregate them, exclude them from class or extra-curricular activities, punish them for excused medical absences, or push them into less equitable educational alternative programs where they may lose face-to-face interaction and become isolated from peers and caring adults. These policies and practices violate Title IX and fail to allow pregnant and parenting students the ability to achieve their educational goals.

Many studies demonstrate the consequences of inequitable education for youth who are pregnant and parenting. Thirty percent of teen girls who have dropped out of high school report pregnancy or parenthood as a significant reason for leaving school before graduation.<sup>1</sup> Another national study found that one in four high school students dropped out because of their parenting responsibilities. Young parents feel challenged in managing their schoolwork with their parenting responsibilities, and some lack a supportive family or partner who encourages high school completion. Often, young parents find access to affordable, quality childcare, transportation, housing, and other critical services are hampered due to local and state policies, while others face discrimination from teachers, coaches, or school administrators and the policies and practices that prevent them from succeeding.<sup>2</sup>

Many young parents who are unable to complete high school pursue a High School Equivalency Diploma (HSED) or General Equivalency Diploma (GED). However, these young parents often find that obtaining either is also a challenge. Almost one-half of former young mothers who completed an alternative diploma were over the age of 18 years when it was completed. Moreover, one in three (34%) young women who had been young mothers did not earn any type of diploma, compared with only six percent (6%) of young women who had not had a teen birth, which limits their ability to go to college or receive some type of post-secondary educational training<sup>3</sup>. Further, the educational interruption for the young father not only prevents him from receiving any college or career training, but it may also increase his chance in becoming involved with the criminal justice system because of his financial and employment challenges.<sup>4</sup>

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1 Unpublished tabulations by The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. Data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002/2004, The National Center for Education Statistics: Washington, DC. Available from <http://nces.ed.gov/edat/>

2 Bridgeland, John M., Dilulio, John J., and Morison, Karen Burke. (2006). The Silent epidemic: Perspectives of high school dropouts. Civic Enterprises for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Available from <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/united-states/Documents/TheSilentEpidemic3-06FINAL.pdf>

3 Perper, K., Peterson, K., and Manlove, J. (2010). Diploma attachment among teen mothers, 2010. Child Trends, Fact Sheet: Washington, DC. Available from [http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child\\_Trends-2010\\_01\\_22\\_FS\\_DiplomaAttainment.pdf](http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child_Trends-2010_01_22_FS_DiplomaAttainment.pdf)

4 Spann Roddy, Wanda (2016). Supporting expectant and parenting high school students. WFYI American Graduate Blog. Available from <http://amgrad.wfyi.org/blogs/wfyi-blog/2016/11/30/supporting-expectant-and-parenting-high-school-students/>

## Supporting Information

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 guarantees access to equal educational opportunities in all publicly funded educational institutions for all students regardless of sex. The Office for Civil Rights of the U.S. Department of Education is the primary federal agency that enforces Title IX.<sup>5, 6</sup>

Under Title IX, schools are prohibited from discriminating against a student because of childbirth, false pregnancy, abortion, or recovery from these conditions, as well as based on marital status. Title IX contains basic nondiscrimination principles, including the fundamental requirement that schools treat pregnancy and all related conditions like any other temporary disability. Title IX regulations<sup>6, 7</sup> also identify some specific applications of these principles, including the following examples:

### Access to School, Classes, & Extracurricular Activities

- A school may not exclude students from classes or school because they are pregnant, have had a child, have had an abortion, or are recovering from any of these conditions.
- A school may not exclude students from extracurricular activities because they are pregnant, have given birth, have had an abortion, or are recovering from any of these conditions.
- If pregnant or parenting students enter an alternative school or program, the choice must be voluntary, and the school or program must be of comparable quality to that offered at a comprehensive high school.
- A school may ask pregnant students to obtain a doctor's note stating that they are able to take part in school activities or physical education classes only if the school requires a doctor's note from all students who have conditions that require medical care.

### Absences

- If students have to miss school for reasons related to pregnancy or childbirth, the time missed must be considered an excused leave of absence for as long as is deemed medically necessary by the student's doctor. When the student returns to school, they must be reinstated to the status they held when the leave began.

### Specialized Support

- If a school provides special services, such as at-home tutoring, for other students who must miss school because of a temporary disability, it must do the same for students who miss school because of pregnancy.
- Recipients of federal education funding are required to designate Title IX coordinators to ensure that schools comply with the law. If a student suspects they have experienced treatment in violation of Title IX, they may want to contact their Title IX coordinator to determine how to proceed.

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<sup>5</sup> Healthy Teen Network. (2008) Keeping pregnant and parenting students from dropping out: A guide for policymakers and schools. Author: Baltimore. Available from <http://www.healthyteennetwork.org/resources/keeping-pregnant-and-parenting-students-dropping-out-guide-policymakers-and-schools/>

<sup>6</sup> National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education. (2002). Title IX at 30: Report card on gender equity. Available from <http://www.feminist.org/education/TitleIXat30.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 106.40