



# PREPPED FOR SUCCESS?

SUPPORTING PREGNANT AND PARENTING TEENS  
IN CHICAGO SCHOOLS

**Helene M. Marcy**  
CENTER FOR IMPACT RESEARCH

JULY 2003

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## **Funding for this project was provided by:**

Fifth Third Bank  
Polk Bros. Foundation

## **Surveyors**

Chernell Battles  
Lucrezia Bellinger  
Deborah Bolum  
Mable Daniels  
Angel Goldman  
Damary Gonzalez  
Stacey Hill  
Tiffany Weisinger

## **Survey Collaborating Organizations**

Christopher House  
Marillac House  
YWCA Metropolitan Chicago, Harriet M. Harris Center

## **Education Working Group**

Brenda Baker, Voices for Illinois Children  
Julia DeLapp, Ounce of Prevention  
Leslie Dominguez-Santos, Heartland Alliance  
Wendy Fegenhols, Dupage County Health Department  
Maureen Halligan, Marillac House  
Lacinda Hummel, Illinois Caucus for Adolescent Health  
Maureen Kelleher, Catalyst  
Sara Manewith, Christopher House  
Marielle Mershart, Day Care Action Council  
Lise McKean, Center for Impact Research  
Pat Washington, YWCA Metropolitan Chicago, Harriet M. Harris Center

The Center for Impact Research also gratefully acknowledges intern Sibora Gjecovi for her assistance with this project.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	1
INTRODUCTION .....	3
ACCESS AND PERCEPTIONS.....	6
BARRIERS AND ATMOSPHERE.....	8
REFERRALS AND SERVICES.....	14
RETURNING TO SCHOOL.....	19
CONCLUSION.....	22

# 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.

# INTRODUCTION

In 2000, there were 8,153 births to mothers under the age of 20 in the city of Chicago.<sup>1</sup> Forty-one percent of those births (3321) were to teenagers 17 or younger. Research has demonstrated that teen mothers are more likely than other teens to drop out of school and become dependent on welfare.<sup>2</sup> When a teen mother does not finish high school, she is more likely to become trapped in poverty than her better-educated peers. With so many potential negative effects of poverty on the teen and on her child, it is critically important to help the teen mother finish her education while she is still young and more likely to finish.

During the course of its work on issues around pregnant and parenting teens, the Center for Impact Research (CIR) has heard from several advocates and service providers about the barriers teen parents face in furthering their education.<sup>3</sup> In addition to helping pregnant and parenting teens prepare for their new parental roles, many teen service providers help young parents navigate through various institutional systems. Some of these service providers reported negative impressions about how various educational systems in Chicago deal with pregnant and parenting teens. Service providers believed that some Chicago Public Schools teachers and administrators were not addressing the needs of pregnant and parenting teens and were inappropriately pushing them out of CPS schools and referring them elsewhere.

## Methodology

To determine how pregnant and parenting teens are faring within the various educational systems in Chicago, CIR formed a working group of service providers and advocates to direct research on the issue. In collaboration with several organizations that serve pregnant and parenting teens, CIR then hired and trained eight teen mothers to conduct a survey of pregnant and parenting teens in April and May 2003. Using a standardized survey instrument, the teen surveyors interviewed 13- to 19-year-old female pregnant and parenting teens who were in a number of different educational situations about their experiences at their present and past institutions. A total of 181 pregnant and parenting teens were interviewed.

---

<sup>1</sup> "Facts at a Glance 2002." Child Trends, 2002. Available online at [www.childtrends.org](http://www.childtrends.org). Chicago data for 2001 are not yet available.

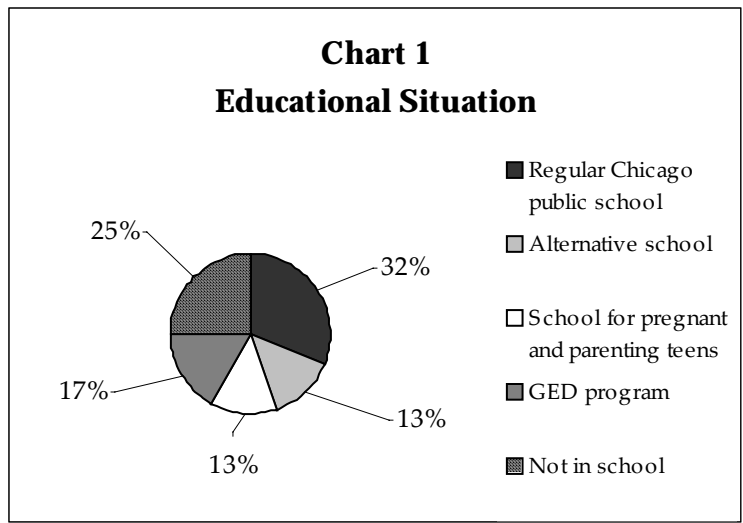
<sup>2</sup> "Not Just Another Single Issue: Teen Pregnancy Prevention's Link to Other Critical Social Issues." The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 2002. Available online at [www.teenpregnancy.org](http://www.teenpregnancy.org).

<sup>3</sup> See CIR reports "Domestic Violence and Birth Control Sabotage: a Report from the Teen Parent Project," 2000; "Knocking on the Door: Barriers to Welfare and Other Assistance for Teen Parents. A Three-City Research Study," 2002; and "No Place to Grow: the Unsafe and Unstable Housing Conditions of Illinois Pregnant and Parenting Youth and Their Children," 2003. Available online at [www.impactresearch.org](http://www.impactresearch.org).

CIR supplemented the survey by interviewing 42 teen service providers at seven organizations in different parts of Chicago (from January through June 2003). The service organizations provide case management and referrals to pregnant and parenting teens, often making home visits and conducting parenting classes for the teens. The interviews were conducted on both an individual and group basis in order to obtain qualitative data and insight about the issues. In addition, CIR interviewed staff at 21 alternative schools. (CIR attempted to interview staff at 28 alternative schools, but was unable to reach six schools. One school administrator refused to be interviewed).

When pregnant and parenting teens leave a regular Chicago public school they typically move into one of four situations. They may move into what is known as an “alternative school,” a school that is geared toward “at-risk” students who need help with academics or other services; a General Educational Development (GED) program where students can seek a GED credential; a school for pregnant and parenting teens; or they may not be in any school. The teen surveyors in this project were asked to interview teens in all of these situations (including those in a regular school). The breakdown by educational situation is not meant to be representative of pregnant and parenting teens in general (nor do we know what breakdown is representative as we discuss later in the report).

Of the 181 pregnant and parenting teens interviewed, 32% were in a regular school, 13% were in an alternative school, 13% were in a school for pregnant and parenting teens, 17% were in a GED program, and 25% were not in school (see Chart 1).

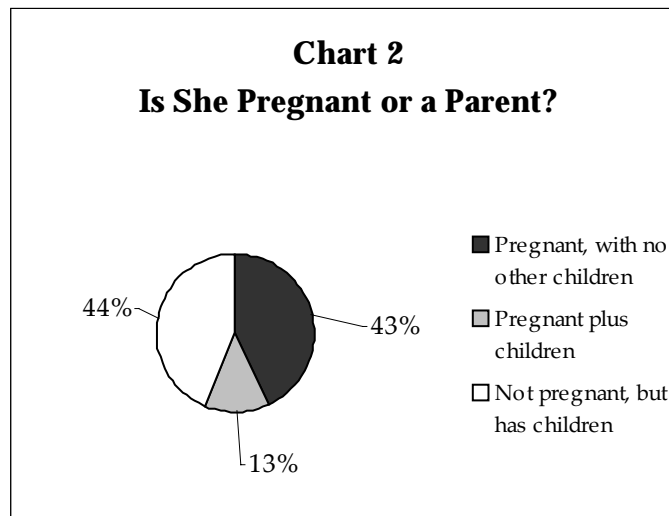


## Demographics

The mean age of the sample was 16.9. Their mean age upon becoming pregnant with their first child was 15.6. Although the surveyors were trained on the west, north and south sides of Chicago, most of the sample (63%) was living on the south side at the time of the

interview (CIR had a greater number of surveyors on the south side). Sixteen percent were living on the west side and 21% were living on the north side. Sixty-eight percent of the sample were Black (non-Hispanic); 16% were Hispanic; 8% were White (non-Hispanic); 6% were multiracial; and 2% were of Asian descent.

Chart 2 demonstrates the parenting status of the teens. Most of those who were already parents had only one child (78%), another 18% had two children, and 4% had three.



Eighty-one percent were attending school when they became pregnant with their first child. The mean grade that they were in at the time they became pregnant was 9.7. Of this group, 16% were in eighth grade or a lower grade when they became pregnant with their first child. Of the 29% who were not in school when they became pregnant, 26% had completed only eighth grade or a lower grade.

Table 1 demonstrates the mean grade for those currently in school.

**Table 1: Average Grade by School Type**

Type of School	Mean Grade
Regular Chicago Public School	10.9
School for Pregnant and Parenting Girls	10.4
Alternative School	10.3

Of those not in school, the average last grade completed was 9.6.



# ACCESS AND PERCEPTIONS

## Travel Times

Those teens who were already parents were asked how long it took them to get to school, including the time it took parents to drop off their children at daycare. 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. Table 2 shows the average transportation times for the teen parents to get to the different schools.

**Table 2: How Long Does it Take You to Get to School?**  
(only answered by parents)

<b>What kind of school are you in?</b>	<b>Average time to get there (in minutes)</b>
Regular Chicago public school	37
Alternative high school	60
School for pregnant or parenting teens	78
GED program	61
All school types	56

## Student Perceptions of Schools

CIR asked all those in school if they felt that they were learning and making progress in their current school or GED program. As demonstrated by Table 3, a large percentage of the students in regular high schools believed they were learning and making progress as compared to those in other schools or programs.

**Table 3:**  
**Do You Feel Like You Are Learning and Making Progress at Your Current School?**

<b>Type of School</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Total</b>
Regular Chicago Public School	95%	5%	100%
Alternative High School	88%	12%	100%
School for Pregnant or Parenting Teens	71%	29%	100%
GED Program	90%	10%	100%
All School Types	88%	12%	100%

## **Encouraged to Leave?**

CIR asked those in regular school if they had been encouraged to leave their current school by a school staff member. Twenty-six percent of the students currently enrolled at regular schools said they had been encouraged to leave. Of those who had been pregnant or parenting at a regular school previously (regardless of their school status at the time of the interview), 15% said they had been encouraged to leave. Of those who were currently in alternative schools, only 11 had been pregnant or parenting at a previous regular school (this information was missing for 8 students). Of those 11 students, only 1 student said that she had been encouraged to leave by school staff. The data does not allow us to determine how many of the teens that had been encouraged to leave were inappropriately pushed out of their schools.

## **Service Provider Perceptions of Schools**

Despite some problems with particular staff members, most of the teen service providers to whom CIR spoke thought highly of the schools for pregnant and parenting teens. However, some teen service providers believed that the schools were not as strong as regular schools and reported that students returning to their regular schools after having attended schools for pregnant and parenting teens were ill prepared academically. In addition, service providers pointed out the problems that teens faced in getting to the schools and the schools' limited enrollment capacity. Chicago Public Schools closings mean that only one of the three schools for pregnant and parenting teens, Simpson Academy for Young Women, will remain open in the fall of 2003. Simpson has a capacity for only 400 students. According to administrators there, it typically does not take in students who are already parents since it has no onsite daycare.

According to the school administrators at alternative schools, this limited enrollment capacity also applies to their situations. Sixteen of the 21 alternative schools to whom CIR spoke had waiting lists (four of the schools did not have waiting lists and CIR did not obtain information about waiting lists from a fifth). School administrators estimated that the alternative schools had approximately 477 to 488 students who were pregnant or who were mothers at their schools at the time of the interviews (out of a total of approximately 1933 students). Two of the 21 alternative schools to whom CIR spoke provided onsite childcare.

Teen service providers overwhelmingly believed that GED programs were not appropriate for teens—especially those who had lower educational levels (the mean last grade completed for those in a GED program was 9.6). Although CIR did not survey any teens at the elementary school level, service providers reported that that elementary schools were ill equipped to handle pregnant and parenting teens in their schools, and school administrators did not want the teens there for fear that they would set a bad example for other students.

# BARRIERS AND SCHOOL ATMOSPHERE

Pregnant and parenting teens are faced with enormous pressures and responsibilities. Teens who are pregnant are susceptible to morning sickness and the need for consistent food and water intake, as well as frequent bathroom breaks. It also can take those who are in the later stages of pregnancy more time to travel from place to place. Teen parents must obtain reliable childcare for their children as well as adequate health care. Because children born to teen parents are more likely to have low birth-weights, they are more susceptible to frequent illness and subsequently must make more trips to visit doctor's offices.<sup>4</sup> Pregnant and parenting teens are also more likely to live in poverty and often must miss school to visit welfare and other social service offices.<sup>5</sup>

These added burdens often result in pregnant and parenting teens missing school or being late for class. For this reason, CIR asked the respondents about their daycare arrangements and school policies.

## Daycare

CIR asked the teens who were already parents how long it would take them to travel to school if they did not have to drop their child off at daycare and compared this to how long it actually took them to get to school. Of those who did not have onsite daycare, it took them an average of 16 minutes longer to bring their children to daycare. However, for 22% of the teen parents, bringing children to daycare took them 30 minutes or longer in addition to their own commute to school.

CIR also asked a series of questions about the teen parents' daycare arrangements. Table 4 demonstrates that the majority of teen parents were pleased with their childcare arrangements. However, it is important to note that over half of them stated that they did not have a backup plan.

**Table 4: Teens' Answers About Childcare**

	Yes	No	Total
Do you like your childcare situation overall?	85%	15%	100%
Is your childcare convenient?	93%	7%	100%
Is your childcare reliable?	88%	12%	100%
Do you feel like your child(ren) is in good hands?	96%	4%	100%
Do you have a backup plan?	45%	55%	100%

---

<sup>4</sup> "Not Just Another Single Issue: Teen Pregnancy Prevention's Link to Other Critical Social Issues." The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 2002. Available online at [www.teenpregnancy.org](http://www.teenpregnancy.org).

<sup>5</sup> "Not Just Another Single Issue."

## Perceptions of School Policies

CIR asked the teens attending regular schools several questions about what they understood their schools' policies to be with regard to pregnant and parenting teens. However, it is difficult to determine how various school policies affect pregnant and parenting teens because the teens might not have identified themselves as pregnant or parenting to school staff. Although those teens who do not identify as such face the same barriers as other pregnant and parenting teens, schools who do not know that they are pregnant or parenting are not in a position to provide them with special assistance. Because CIR does not know whether or not the schools knew that the teens were pregnant or parenting, the following information represents the teens' perceptions of school policies as they apply to them.

According to the Chicago Public Schools Communications Office, any student absence can be excused with a note from a parent (in this case the teen mother's parent) and approval from the principal. However, Table 5 demonstrates that the teens' perceptions about school policies on pregnancy and parent-related problems at regular schools vary widely.

**Table 5: Those in Regular School, Policies**

	Yes	No	Total
If pregnant, does your school allow you extra time to get to class because you are pregnant?	59%	41%	100%
If pregnant, does your school excuse absences when you are sick because of pregnancy?	66%	34%	100%
If pregnant, does your school excuse absences when you are at a doctor's appointment because of your pregnancy?	83%	17%	100%
If pregnant, are you allowed to eat snacks or drink water in class?	63%	37%	100%
If a parent, does your school excuse an absence when your child is sick?	78%	22%	100%

There were similar inconsistencies when CIR asked those who had previously been in a regular school the same questions, although considerably fewer respondents reported that their previous schools had made such allowances (see Table 6).

**Table 6: In Last Regular School, Policies**

	Yes	No	Total
If pregnant, does your school allow you extra time to get to class because you are pregnant?	34%	66%	100%
If pregnant, does your school excuse absences when you are sick because of pregnancy?	51%	49%	100%
If pregnant, does your school excuse absences when you are at a doctor's appointment because of your pregnancy?	64%	36%	100%
If pregnant, are you allowed to eat snacks or drink water in class?	45%	55%	100%
If a parent, does your school excuse an absence when your child is sick?	50%	50%	100%

Some teens told the surveyors that whether or not they were excused in certain instances depended entirely upon the teacher. Teen service providers reported that the parents of teen mothers are often unwilling to write notes on their children's behalf because they are angry at the teen for becoming pregnant.

CIR also asked teens whether they had ever requested special accommodations and been turned down. Only a few teens currently attending regular schools responded that they had been turned down. Those requests included asking to eat snacks in class, having a garbage can next to her in class to deal with morning sickness, and asking to wear jogging pants. A greater number of teens who had previously attended regular schools had requests turned down (8 teens). They included eating and drinking in class (3), passes to go to the bathroom (3), wearing a coat in class (1) and going home early (1).

In addition to the burdens already mentioned, pregnant and parenting teens also face the negative social stigmas associated with teen pregnancy. CIR asked teens if they had heard negative comments at their current school about being pregnant or a parent. Thirty-three percent of those currently attending regular school had heard such comments compared to 17% at alternative schools, 7% at GED programs, and no such comments at the schools for pregnant and parenting teens. Of those who had previously attended a regular high school, 31% had heard such comments at that school. Almost all of those negative comments were made by peers, not by high school staff. Ninety percent of the teens currently in regular school who had heard negative comments had heard negative comments from students, 26% had heard them from teachers, and 5% (one teen) had heard them from a principal. Eighty-nine percent of the teens who had previously attended a regular high school who had heard negative comments at that school had heard negative comments from students and 22% had heard them from teachers, and none had heard them from a principal.

## Attendance/Tardiness

To determine how these barriers might affect their ability to attend school, the CIR survey asked teens if any school staff had talked to them about their attendance within the last semester. 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.<sup>6</sup> The survey also asked the students if they had been talked to about their tardiness within the last semester. Thirty-six percent of those in regular schools had been talked to about their tardiness. On average, those that had been spoken to had been late 7.5 times. The survey asked the teens why they had missed days of school or had been late for class. Table 7 shows their reasons.

**Table 7: Why Did You Miss School/Why Were You Late?<sup>7</sup>**

	<b>Why she missed school</b>	<b>Why she was late</b>
Doctor's appointment	54%	15%
My child was sick	38%	20%
Sick due to pregnancy	38%	30%
Was up all night with baby	33%	15%
Didn't have childcare	17%	10%
Didn't have way to get to school	8%	5%

Other individual reasons for missing school included having a sprained ankle, being sick, and the death of a mother. Other reasons for being late included car trouble, not liking the class for which she was late, not feeling well, and the bus being late.

In order to see how the added responsibilities of being pregnant or parenting affected attendance, teens were also asked if they had been at their current school before they became pregnant. Table 8 shows a considerable increase in the percentage of teens who were talked to about their attendance and tardiness in the most recent semester compared to the time before they became pregnant (for both those who are currently in school and those who were previously in regular school). This difference demonstrates their increased difficulties in maintaining regular attendance once they become pregnant. It is interesting to note, however, that a greater percentage of those who had previously attended a regular high school as compared to those currently in a regular high school had been talked to about their attendance or tardiness before they were pregnant.

---

<sup>6</sup> The survey was conducted in late April and early May of 2003. According to CPS policy, a student with unexcused absences for more than 10% of the days in a school year (9 days in a 90-day semester) is defined as a chronic truant. If a student has 20 unexcused absences he or she might not be promoted to the next grade.

<sup>7</sup> Respondents could have answered more than one reason so percentages do not add up to 100%.

**Table 8: Percentage of Those Who Were Talked to About Attendance and Tardiness Before and After Pregnancy**

	<b>Current Regular School</b>		<b>Previous Regular School</b>	
	Before Pregnancy	After Pregnancy	Before Pregnancy	After Pregnancy
Attendance	7%	46%	20%	40%
Tardiness	11%	33%	19%	32%

Although these teens seemed to have been warned that their attendance or tardiness was a problem, it seems that they were unprepared to face the potential consequences. CIR asked students whether they thought they were likely to be “kicked out” or drop out of school. Only 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.

CIR asked those who previously attended a regular high school and dropped out (regardless of their current school status) why they did so. As exemplified by Table 9, in addition to the burdens already discussed, pregnant and parenting teens often face financial and family pressures. The reasons cited are indicative of how overwhelmed pregnant and parenting teens can be once they become pregnant or parents.

**Table 9: Reasons She Had Dropped out of Regular School**

It was too much to handle	84%
I was missing too much school and my grades were slipping	26%
I didn't like how I was treated because of my pregnancy/my having kids	16%
I had to work to support myself	13%
I didn't have childcare	13%
My family told me to drop out	8%

In addition to the reasons listed in Table 9, other individual reasons cited by the teens were: I had to be there for my child; I was hurting and lazy; I was encouraged to leave by school staff; depression; I moved out of state for a while; embarrassment; I was tired and my feet were swollen; and I wanted to find a school that met my needs.

## Recommendations

To ensure that school staff members are educated about the barriers that pregnant and parenting teens face to remaining in school and that schools address the needs of pregnant and parenting teens, Chicago Public Schools should:

**1. Incorporate ongoing trainings around the needs of pregnant and parenting teens as part of the standard diversity trainings.**

These trainings should be geared to both staff and students and take place on both the grammar and high school levels and should include training in federal and state laws which prohibit discrimination due to pregnancy or parental status.<sup>8</sup>

**2. 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.**

These should include excusing absences when teens face pregnancy-related illness and when their child is ill and exploring the reasons why students might be unable to obtain parental notes. Although it is unclear why some teens reported that their schools did not excuse these absences, creating and implementing such policies at the local school level will help staff to ensure that the needs of pregnant and parenting teens are taken into account. This excusing of absences when the teen's child is sick should apply equally to teen fathers. School policies should also allow pregnant teens extra time to get to class, to take frequent bathroom breaks, and to eat and drink in class (or to be excused to do so).

To ensure that schools are treating pregnant and parenting teens fairly, individual schools should also create school policies that stipulate that they are not allowed to discriminate against pregnant and parenting teens (in compliance with Title IX of the 1972 Education Act and Illinois Sex Equity Rules). Chicago Public Schools should require new charter schools to implement these policies.

---

<sup>8</sup> See Title IX of the 1972 Education Act and Illinois Sex Equity Rules (Illinois Administrative Code, Title 23, Chapter 1, Section 200.50.e).



# REFERRALS AND SERVICES

Understanding and becoming knowledgeable about the issues that pregnant and parenting teens face is also important to structuring appropriate programs and referring them to needed services. CIR asked teens and service providers about various programs that Chicago Public Schools already has in place.

## **Cradle to Classroom**

Chicago Public Schools currently funds a voluntary program for pregnant and parenting teens called Cradle to Classroom (CTC). During the 2002-3 school year, CTC operated in 52 schools (including the schools for pregnant and parenting teens and several alternative high schools).<sup>9</sup> All of the programs are onsite.

CTC hires community residents as family advocates who visit each teen participant on a weekly basis at home to work through a parenting curriculum with the teens. In order to participate in the program, the teens must also visit their family advocate every day in the CTC office at their school. The advocates help the teens come to school by providing them with referrals to needed services and by advocating on behalf of the teens with other school staff. Cradle to Classroom administrators say that attendance officers have learned to call the family advocate if there is a problem with a teen missing classes or school.

In addition to having family advocates onsite at the schools, CTC runs onsite daycare facilities at four schools. CTC staff have also recently established some connections to several junior high schools. According to staff, when they presented the program at one particular junior high school, they received over 60 referrals from counselors for pregnant teens at the school.

CIR surveyors asked the pregnant and parenting teens about their knowledge of and experience with the Cradle to Classroom program. Sixty-seven percent of those in regular high schools had heard of CTC. Of those that had heard of it, 66% said that they had it at their high school. Of those that had it at their high school, 52% were enrolled (12 teens). Those that were enrolled were asked what their experience with the program had been and were given the following options: very positive; somewhat positive; it's been okay; somewhat negative; and very negative.

Eight of the teens (67%) said that their experience had been very positive. Two teens said that their experience had been somewhat positive and two said that their experience had been okay. When asked if the program had helped them to stay in school, 9 teens (75%)

---

<sup>9</sup> According to CTC staff there are 89 high schools and 22 alternative schools; however the CPS website reports that there are 67 high schools and 41 alternative schools.

responded yes. (At least one of the teens who said no, however, explained to the surveyor that she would have stayed in high school anyway.) Of the teens who had CTC at their school but who were not enrolled (ten teens), only one had tried to enroll (she was on a waiting list). The other nine said that they did not need the program.

Of those who had previously attended a regular high school, 24% said that they had CTC at that school. Of those who said that their previous school had the program, four people (29%) said that they had been enrolled in the program. One teen said that her experience had been very positive (and that it had helped her to stay in school), one said that her experience had been okay and two teens reported that their experience had been very negative. Of the teens who had CTC at their previous school but were not enrolled (ten teens), three had tried to enroll. Of the seven who had not tried to enroll, two said that they had not needed the program, one said that the program involved too much work, and another said that she did not apply because the program had a waiting list (information about this question was missing for the remaining three teens).

When CIR asked teen service providers about their opinion of the Cradle to Classroom program, reaction was mixed. Some knew very little about the program but had the perception that it wasn't comprehensive enough. The few teen service providers that did interact with CTC on a regular basis thought highly of it and believed that it should be mandatory.

## **Homebound Services**

Chicago Public Schools also makes a Home Hospital Services program available to students who have a medical reason they cannot attend school for a period of time. This program offers "homebound instruction," in which a student's school sends a teacher to the student's home to provide help. The services are available to pregnant teens who have been put on bed rest or to teen parents who have just had their child and have a medical referral for the program.

CIR surveyors again asked the pregnant and parenting teens about their knowledge of and experience with the homebound services program. Eighty-three percent of those in regular high schools had heard of the program. Of those that had heard of it, 32% (or 15 people) reported that they were using or had used homebound services at their current school. Nine of the teens (60%) said that their experience had been very positive. Two teens said that their experience had been somewhat positive and four said that their experience had been okay. When asked if the program had helped them to stay in school, 13 teens (93%) responded yes. CIR also asked the teens if someone had helped them to get the homebound services. Eleven of the 14 said yes. Most often it was a counselor who had helped the teen get the services.

Of the 11 teens who had use homebound services at a previous regular high school, three reported very positive experiences; three reported somewhat positive experiences; three reported that it was okay; and two reported very negative experiences. When asked why their experiences were negative, one teen reported that the teacher had not always come when she was supposed to and the other said that the work was not well explained.

When CIR asked teen service providers for their opinion about homebound services, the providers reported that they had heard various stories from the teens with whom they worked. Some providers believed that it was difficult for teens to get the services and that the appointment times were inflexible. A few providers said that they knew teens who had had positive experiences with the program.

### **Referrals to Outside Services**

CIR asked those teens who were parents if their current schools gave them “information about services like daycare and other programs that help teen parents” (see Table 10). Fewer teens at the regular schools and GED programs received such information than at alternative school or schools for pregnant and parenting teens.

**Table 10: Does School Give Information About Programs That Help Teen Parents?**

	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Total</b>
Regular Chicago public school	42%	58%	100%
Alternative high school	36%	64%	100%
School for pregnant/parenting teens	0%	100%	100%
GED program	43%	57%	100%

### **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 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.**

According to CTC administrators, the program generates a considerable amount of revenue for Chicago Public Schools through reimbursements for home visits and for childcare placements. However this revenue goes into the general Chicago Public Schools fund and CTC receives only a portion of the money that it generates. After CTC’s budget

was cut for fiscal year 2003, CTC was only given \$3.3 million (down from \$5.5 million in fiscal year 2002). According to CTC administrators, in fiscal year 2002 the program served almost 5,000 teens and their children combined. Because of budget cuts, during fiscal year 2003 the program's capacity was at 3450 teens and children as of the time of an interview in January 2003 (1750 teens and 1700 children). In January 2003 the program had a waiting list of 1200 pregnant or parenting girls.

Cradle to Classroom staff within each school should be responsible for forming more links with community-based organizations that serve pregnant and parenting teens and inviting those organizations to speak to the teens at school about their services. Full funding would enable Cradle to Classroom staff to provide necessary community outreach to those students who are no longer in school as well as teen fathers. It would also allow more schools to offer onsite daycare centers. One of the stated goals of the Cradle to Classroom is "to assist pregnant and parenting teens in completing high school;" however, retention of pregnant and parenting teens within school should also be a stated goal.

## **2. Designate and train staff members as pregnant and parenting teen liaisons.**

Until additional funding for the Cradle to Classroom program is secured, each school without a Cradle to Classroom program should designate and train a counselor, teacher, or nurse as a pregnant and parenting teen liaison. This person should be responsible for publicizing him or herself as a "pregnant and parenting teen-friendly" staff member so that pregnant and parenting teens will be encouraged to reveal their status and seek needed assistance. The designated staff member will be responsible for providing pregnant and parenting teens with information about local services such as daycare and medical services. Considering the total dependency of the pregnant and parenting teens on their current childcare arrangements, these referrals are important for ensuring that she does not miss school. These liaisons should also work with the homebound services program to ensure that appointment times and schoolwork are appropriate for the teens' needs.

The designation and training of the pregnant and parenting teen liaison should also take place at the grammar school level. Although CIR's sample is not representative of all pregnant and parenting teens, the fact that 16% were in eighth grade or a lower grade when they became pregnant with their first child suggests that elementary schools should be prepared for this occurrence.

## **3. Identify the number of pregnant and parenting teens in their schools by conducting an anonymous survey of students.**

Referring eligible teens to the Cradle to Classroom program, homebound services and other outside services becomes difficult if pregnant and parenting teens are not identified

and/or do not want it known at school that they are pregnant or parenting. Through the course of CIR's research into what schools were doing for pregnant and parenting teens, it became clear that Chicago Public Schools does not keep track of how many pregnant and parenting teens are in its own schools. The school-based health clinics do not keep track of how many patients visit them on a pregnancy-related matter nor does the Home Hospital Services program (which served 2,700 students from September 1, 2002 to May 1, 2003) keep track of how many students request their services for pregnancy-related reasons. Teen service providers and Cradle to Classroom staff report that oftentimes staff at individual schools are unaware of how many pregnant and parenting teens are in their own schools.

When CIR asked teen service providers about their views on this phenomenon, many thought that school nurses or gym teachers were the most likely to know about a teen's pregnancy or parenting status. They believed that alternative schools were much more likely to have identified pregnant and parenting teens, either because teens had explained their situation upon enrollment or because there was less of a stigma at those schools.

Conducting an anonymous survey will enable CPS to better determine whether or not its programs are encouraging teens to seek help and are reaching pregnant and parenting teens within its system. Determining the number of pregnant and parenting teens will also allow CPS to allocate resources appropriately to schools with higher numbers of pregnant and parenting teens and establish onsite daycare at schools with large pregnant and parenting teen populations. This survey should take place at least once every three years.

In addition, CPS should track the number of teens who drop out of school due to pregnancy or parenting status. Once this number is determined, CPS can track school performance in helping pregnant and parenting teens.

**4. Direct each high school to provide a referral bulletin board for pregnant and parenting teens so that they may seek help anonymously.**

A bulletin board that offers services for teens in general would enable those teens who choose not to disclose their pregnancy or parenting status to seek needed help. The bulletin board could include information about many health and well-being resources (including information about services for pregnant and parenting teens, the Day Care Action Council's Teen Parent information and referral hotline, family planning services, mental health and substance abuse counseling, domestic violence services, and STD testing). Each school should determine a location where teens could seek help anonymously (such as bathrooms or locker rooms). In addition to outside services, this bulletin board should provide information about the Cradle to Classroom and Hospital Home Services programs.

# RETURNING TO SCHOOL

CIR interviewed pregnant and parenting teens who were not in school in order to determine what they would need to return.

Forty-seven percent of those who were not in school at the time of the survey reported that they were working. Only one teen was in a job training or certificate program and she was also working. The average educational attainment for those not in school was between ninth and tenth grade (9.6); however, 21% had only finished eighth grade or less. The mean age of those not in school was 17.3.

CIR asked those who were not in school if they wanted to go back to school. Seventy-six percent said yes. CIR asked those who said that they did not want to go back to school why that was the case. Of the 11 who did not want to go back to school, five said that it would be too much to handle; five said that they needed to work to support themselves; one said that classes were too hard and one said that she needed to work to help the family.

CIR asked those who said that they wanted to go back to school if they were trying to go back to school. Seventy percent of those who wanted to go back reported that they were attempting to back to school. When asked what was preventing them from going back to school, the most frequent responses to this open-ended question were a need for childcare (35%) and either not knowing which school to go to or trying to find the right school (17%).

CIR asked those who said that they wanted to go back to school but were not trying (ten people) why they were not doing so. Two said that they were too old (one was 18 and the other was 19) and three said that they did not have enough credits. Another three reported that they needed to work or were trying to get a job, and another said that she wanted to wait until she had enough money. Finally, one reported that she was waiting until next year to try.

CIR asked all of those who were not in school what they would need to go back to school. Table 11 shows that childcare was once again the biggest issue for the teens. Eleven percent said that they needed financial support and 4% said that they needed a better part-time job. In addition, a substantial number of teens needed information about their various educational options (9%) or information from their previous school (about credits, contact information, or transcripts) (7%). Other individual responses included needing weekend classes, not knowing what she needed, and counseling.

**Table 11: What Would You Need to Go Back to School?**

Reliable childcare	27%
Financial support	11%
Information about options	9%
Car/transportation	9%
Information from previous school	7%
Better place to live	7%
Better part-time job	4%
Support and motivation	4%

When CIR spoke to teen service providers about those who were not in school, they cited similar obstacles and reported that once out of school, it was much harder for teens to return. In part, they believed that this was due to lack of information about going back, as well as problems with getting proper information from previous schools. One teen service provider reported that students had not been able to re-enroll because they owed outstanding fines.

### **Recommendations**

To prevent pregnant and parenting teens from dropping out of school and to facilitate re-enrollment for pregnant and parenting teens, Chicago Public Schools should:

- 1. 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.**

This packet should include an outline of the necessary procedures, as well as contact information about the steps needed to obtain transcripts and other school records. It should also include information about securing financial assistance to pay any outstanding fines, as well as information about the services for pregnant and parenting teens mentioned earlier. Information about pregnant and parenting teen liaisons should also be included in this packet, as well as information about the rights of pregnant and parenting teens under Title IX of the Education Act of 1972. This packet should also be distributed to teen service providers, community organizations, and posted on the CPS website.

Teen service providers reported that often the parents of a pregnant or parenting teen are unwilling to help her to enroll in school because they are upset with her for becoming pregnant. The service providers often found themselves in the position of advocating for the teen during the reenrollment process. If a teen states that her parent is unwilling to help with re-enrollment, she should be assigned a teen liaison to help her with that process.

**2. Designate a transitional program within each local high school to enable those without an eighth grade diploma to transition into high school.**

Although our sample is not representative of all pregnant and parenting Chicago teens, it is important to note again the low educational attainment of many of the respondents. Teen service providers reported that finding schools for those without an eighth grade diploma was a formidable task. Small transitional classes within each high school would enable students to catch up to their peers without sending them to specialized schools which may not be readily accessible to them.

**3. Offer more night and weekend classes at local schools to accommodate working teens.**

With many teen parents living in poverty and needing to work, high schools that provide more flexible schedules will allow some teens to work without sacrificing a high school education. If more teens can both work and go to school, they will be less likely to drop out and/or face the challenges involved with re-enrollment.



# CONCLUSION

Although not every pregnant and parenting teen will choose to remain in school, it is important to create an environment where she feels supported and motivated should she choose to stay. Encouraging pregnant and parenting teens to remain in their regular schools will not only increase their chances of completing their high school education, but will also enable their children to flourish.<sup>10</sup> CIR's data is by no means exhaustive and the survey results do not support or refute the initial hypothesis that pregnant and parenting teens are being pushed out by their regular schools. However, this survey demonstrates that pregnant and parenting teens face significant barriers when trying to finish their education. It will therefore be important to identify pregnant and parenting teens and attempt to determine where they are and what they need to finish their high school education. The success of current and future Chicago Public Schools students relies on the ability of CPS to provide them with crucial support.

---

<sup>10</sup> "Not Just Another Single Issue: Teen Pregnancy Prevention's Link to Other Critical Social Issues." The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 2002. Available online at [www.teenpregnancy.org](http://www.teenpregnancy.org).



## **CENTER FOR IMPACT RESEARCH**

---

926 N. Wolcott  
Chicago, IL 60622  
(773) 342-0630  
[www.impactresearch.org](http://www.impactresearch.org)