

## Public Education: Reducing the Drop Out Rate by Improving Outcomes for Teen Parents and Their Children

### Position Statement Approved by One Voice: November 14, 2008

**Issue/Concern:** Becoming a parent while still in school is a significant factor in dropping out for both male and female students. Texas has the highest teen birth rate in the nation. Teen pregnancy is associated with poverty, high school drop out, welfare dependence and poor outcomes for both the parent and his/her children. Texas school districts receive funding for Pregnancy Related Services (PRS) that provides for counseling, transportation, education services, and case management during pregnancy. PRS ends shortly after delivery—just at the time these supports are crucial to keeping the teen parent in school.

### Specific Policy Recommendation(s):

- ★ Extend funding to school districts for Pregnancy Related Services (**PRS**) to teen parents until graduation.
- ★ Require districts to coordinate Life Skills grants for parenting students with **PRS** services for seamless continuum of service.

**How does this issue/recommendation relate to prevention and early intervention or maximizing federal funds for health and human services?** Houston has a 50% graduation rate, and more than one third of Texas public school students do not graduate. The 2007 class of high school dropouts in Texas will cost taxpayers \$377 million this year and every year after, over the course of their lifetimes. Nationally, four in ten Black and Hispanic girls fail to graduate. In Texas 29% of girls leave school without a diploma. Becoming pregnant or being a parent while school age significantly contributes to dropping out for both the teen mother and teen father. Additionally, the children of teen parents are more at risk for low birth-weight, becoming victims of abuse and neglect, poor language and behavior development and lower levels of school readiness. The lack of child-care is a major obstacle to school completion. Teen parents are unable to afford licensed care and access to subsidized care requires navigating multiple systems (The Attorney General's Office; Department of Human Services and The Workforce Commission).

Texas public schools have access to funds through the state legislature for **PRS**, a program that allows a district to receive 2.41 weighted funding for providing support services to pregnant students. The services must include Compensatory Education Home Instruction and may include other critical services such as, parenting education, transportation support and case management until shortly after delivery. Extending PRS until the parent completes schooling would significantly reduce the drop out rate and improve outcomes for teen parents and their child.

The Life Skills grants from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to applying school districts provide resources for child care, transportation assistance, parenting education, counseling and support for both male and female student parents. Evaluations show that participating in these programs significantly increases the likelihood of graduation and significantly reduces the incidence of repeat pregnancies. Most importantly, research shows that infants' cognitive, physical and emotional development improved leading to future success in school which further reduces the cycle of poverty.

Currently, PRS and Life Skills grants are administered independently. Requiring districts to coordinate these programs would reduce duplication of effort and improve accountability and service delivery. Emphasis and required outcomes should focus on reducing the high incidence of a second pregnancy while in school. Additionally rules developed by TEA for the use of these funds should offer incentives to districts that include prevention of both first and repeat pregnancies. Many school districts participate in PRS but not in the Life Skills program - as a consequence, teens are kept in school until delivery but are not offered supportive services to help them remain in school after they have become parents.

### Supporting Facts/Research/Resources:

- ★ Texas has the highest teen birth rate in the nation.
- ★ Houston ranked 4<sup>th</sup> among US cities for teen births.

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- ★ Houston, Dallas and San Antonio are in the top ten cities with highest rate of repeat teen birth rate.
- ★ 68% of teen mothers fail to get a high school diploma.
- ★ 51% of Latina teens are pregnant at least one time before their 20<sup>th</sup> birthday.

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