

Pregnant and Parenting Students Access to Education Act
Organization Sign-On Letter

To add your national, state, or local organization to this letter of support for the forthcoming Pregnant and Parenting Students Access to Education Act, please send your organization name and contact information to: bob@healthyteennetwork.org

Initial Deadline: April 26, 2013

[DATE]

The Honorable Tom Udall
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jared Polis
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Udall and Representative Polis:

The undersigned organizations, which share a strong interest in and commitment to equity in education, the college or career readiness of youth, and the health and well-being of children and families, offer our wholehearted support for the Pregnant and Parenting Students Access to Education Act. Your legislation will help states and local school districts across the nation to establish and fund policies and practices that are supportive of pregnant and parenting youth, so they can stay in school and graduate college or career ready.

Teen pregnancy and birth rates have declined by 42 percent and 49 percent respectively since the early 1990s and are now at record low levels. There has been universal progress in all states and among all ethnic and racial groups. However, it is still the case that nearly 3 in 10 girls in the U.S. become pregnant at least once by age 20 and the figure is even higher among Latinas (44 percent) and African Americans (48 percent). There are geographic variations as well—in general Southern/Southwest states have higher teen pregnancy and birth rates, and in rural counties the teen birth rate is nearly one-third higher compared to the rest of the country, regardless of age or race/ethnicity. Despite the dramatic progress, the United States has the highest rate of teen pregnancy in the developed world—750,000 teen pregnancies each year. Pregnancy and parenting responsibilities significantly increase a student's risk of dropping out of school: only about half (51 percent) of women who gave birth while a teen have a high school diploma compared to 89 percent of women who did not have a teen birth. In a nationwide survey of dropout youth, 33 percent of female dropouts and almost 20 percent of male dropouts said that becoming a parent was a *major* factor in their decision to leave school.

These alarming statistics stem from the many barriers that pregnant and parenting teens face in enrolling, attending, and succeeding in school, such as: discrimination by their schools in violation of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972; the failure of

states, school districts, and schools to excuse students for pregnancy- and childbirth-related absences or to assist them in maintaining academic progress; the challenge of juggling schoolwork with parenting responsibilities; and the lack of access to affordable, quality child care, transportation, and other critical services.

The dropout crisis experienced by this group of students has severe short- and long-term consequences for the economic success and well-being of their families and communities, as well as our nation. Female dropouts are especially likely to be unemployed, to earn low wages if they do get jobs, and – as a result – to have to rely on public support programs. Ensuring the success of pregnant and parenting students is critical, not only for them but also for their children, who will be more likely to eventually drop out if their parents have done so. Accordingly, providing pregnant and parenting students with the supports they need to stay in school is an essential component of any serious effort to reduce family poverty and will help to ensure that more infants and toddlers have strong early childhood experiences.

And with the proper resources, this can be done. A few school districts are undertaking effective efforts to engage and re-engage pregnant and parenting students by implementing voluntary programs that provide academic and support services, which result in students' academic success. Providing supports for pregnant and parenting students can go a long way toward improving high school graduation rates, especially because pregnant and parenting students often are highly motivated. In the same nationwide survey of dropout youth referenced above, those who left school to care for a family member or because they became a parent were more likely than any other group of dropouts to say they would have worked harder if their schools had demanded more of them and provided the necessary support.

The Pregnant and Parenting Students Access to Education Act will authorize the Secretary of Education to establish a formula grant program to State educational agencies, with competitive subgrants from States to local educational agencies (LEAs) to promote the educational success of pregnant and parenting students. States can use these funds for policy development and training and technical assistance to LEAs. LEAs can use their funds for policy development, training, strategic partnerships with public agencies and service providers, and direct services to pregnant and parenting students, such as academic counseling, case management, child care and transportation assistance, health and social service referrals, and parenting, life skills, and healthy relationships education. The Secretary of Education will collect and report data annually on pregnant and parenting students, including their graduation rates, and will conduct a rigorous evaluation of the programs funded by the Act.

Senator Udall and Representative Polis, thank you for your leadership in working to improve the educational outcomes and financial security of pregnant and parenting students – and, by extension, their children. We encourage other Members of Congress to join in this important effort.

We look forward to the enactment of the provisions of the Pregnant and Parenting Students Access to Education Act, and further urge Congress to include the bill's provisions as part of the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). It is critical that Congress take steps in the ESEA reauthorization to provide support for this particularly at-risk group of students.

Signed,

(List in Formation)

National Organizations

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American Association of University Women (AAUW)

American Sexual Health Association

Association of Reproductive Health Professionals

Equal Rights Advocates

Healthy Teen Network

Ms. Foundation for Women

National Crittenton Foundation

National Women's Law Center

NAACP

Our Bodies Ourselves

Physicians for Reproductive Health

RESULTS

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy

Women's Law Project

State Organizations

EyesOpenIowa

Georgia Women for a Change

Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center

SMART (Single Mother Academic Resource Team) (Oklahoma)

Local Organizations

Dependency Legal Group of San Diego (California)

San Francisco Court Appointed Special Advocates Program (California)

Inwood House (New York City, NY)

Division of Adolescent Medicine, Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC
(Pennsylvania)