



LET HER
LEARN

STOPPING SCHOOL PUSHOUT
for Girls Who Are Pregnant or Parenting

ABOUT THE NATIONAL WOMEN'S LAW CENTER

The National Women's Law Center is a non-profit organization that has worked for more than 40 years to expand opportunities for women and their families, with a major emphasis on education and employment opportunities, women's health and reproductive rights, and family economic security.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Authors: Kelli Garcia
Neena Chaudhry

Design and Production: Beth Stover

Requests for hard copies of the report can be made through LetHerLearn.org.

We gratefully acknowledge the following Center colleagues who provided leadership as well as editorial, research and communications assistance: Fatima Goss Graves, Anna Chu, Jasmine Tucker, Alexandra Brodsky, Loredana Valtierra, Karen Schneider, Maria Patrick, Hilary Woodward, Melanie Ross Levin, Olympia Feil, Sabrina Stevens, Erin Longbottom, Nia Evans, Selina Tran, and Faith Powell.

Special thanks to Heidi Gertner, William Ferreira and Lowell Zeta at Hogan Lovells US LLP for their help with the Institutional Review Board process.

Thanks also to Lake Research Partners for their work on the Let Her Learn Focus Groups and Survey.

This report would not have been possible without the generous support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The findings and conclusions of this report, however, are those of the authors alone, and do not necessarily reflect the views or positions of the funder.

DISCLAIMER

While text, citations, and data are, to the best of the authors' knowledge, current as of the date the report was prepared, there may well be subsequent developments, including legislative actions and court decisions, that could alter the information provided herein. This report does not constitute legal advice; individuals and organizations considering legal action should consult with their own counsel.





GIRLS WHO ARE PREGNANT OR PARENTING

Becoming pregnant or having a child should not be the end of anyone's education. In fact, becoming a parent can be a powerful motivator that encourages young women to focus on their and their children's futures. Studies have found that student mothers who had previously disengaged from school can find new reasons to return after the birth of a child.¹ Yet, despite the increased motivation of many young parents to succeed in school and the protection against discrimination provided by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 ("Title IX"), many girls who are pregnant or parenting continue to be pushed out of school. These girls often face discrimination, harassment, inflexible school policies, and other barriers, such as lack of child care and transportation, that make it harder for them to remain and succeed in school. According to a survey conducted by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, a third of young women who did not finish high school stated that becoming a parent played a major role in their decision to leave.² Only about half of young mothers will earn a high school diploma by the age of 22, compared with 89 percent of women who did not have a child during their teenage years,³ and one-third of young mothers will never get a G.E.D. or a diploma.⁴

This report utilizes new research and existing data to identify the educational barriers that girls who are pregnant or parenting face and provides recommendations for how policymakers, schools, and communities can support these girls and harness their motivation to improve their educational outcomes.

METHODOLOGY for Let Her Learn Survey and Focus Groups:

To better understand what healthy and safe schools look like for all girls, the National Women's Law Center collaborated with Lake Research Partners to conduct a study of girls from January 5-19, 2017. The study included an online survey of 1,003 girls ages 14-18 nationwide. Black, Latinas, Asian/Pacific Islander girls, Native American girls, and LGBTQ girls were oversampled. The data were weighted by age, race, and census region to reflect the actual proportions of the population. Oversamples were weighted down to reflect their proportions in the population. The study also included six focus groups on barriers facing girls who are survivors of sexual assault and girls who are either currently pregnant or those who are parenting children

The survey included 61 girls who were or had been pregnant, and/or had a child. The margin of error for this group is +/- 12.5%. Because of the small sample size for pregnant or parenting students, the data may not reflect the actual percentages in the population. However, all analyses presented are statistically significant and within the margin of error. Therefore, although the specific percentages reported may not reflect the percentages in the population of pregnant or parenting students, the overall trends are nevertheless informative.

The study also included six focus groups on barriers facing girls who are survivors of sexual assault and girls who are either currently pregnant or those who are parenting children. The focus groups were conducted in Washington, D.C., Chicago, IL, and Atlanta, GA. The focus group guide and nationwide survey were reviewed by Schulman Institutional Review Board to ensure they protected the well-being of all girls involved in the study.

WHAT GIRLS SAY:

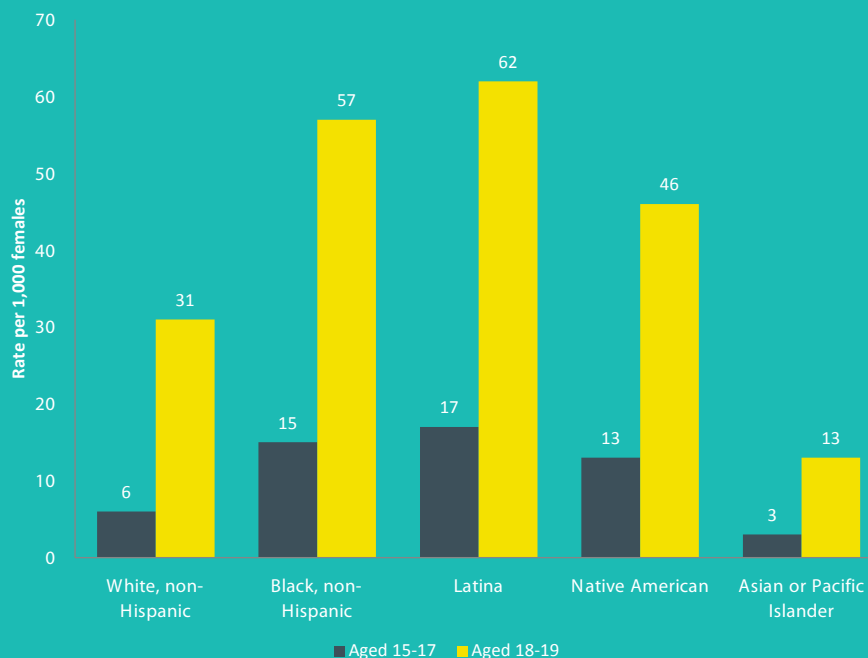
“Having a child don't stop your dreams . . . Actually a child might motivate you . . . to follow your dreams even more. – Let Her Learn Focus Group Participant

Background on Girls and Pregnancy

In recent years, the pregnancy rate for girls aged 15-19 in the United States has declined to historic lows.⁵ Overall, the birth rate in 2015 was 22.3 births per 1,000 females aged 15-19.⁶ The birth rate for younger teenagers, aged 15-17, was 9.9 births per 1,000 females.⁷ This is a 54 percent decline from 2007 and a 74 percent decline from 1991, respectively.⁸

Although the pregnancy rate has declined for all groups and the differences in the birth rate for teenagers have narrowed from 1991 to 2015, the rate varies considerably by race and ethnicity.⁹ Asian and Pacific Islander females have the lowest birth rates among teenagers at 2.7 birth per 1,000 females for girls aged 15-17 and 12.8 births per 1,000 females for girls aged 18-19.¹⁰ Latina females have the highest pregnancy rate among teenagers with 17.4 births per 1,000 females for girls aged 15-17 and 61.9 for girls aged 18-19 (**Figure 1**).¹¹

Figure 1. Girls Who are Pregnant by Age and Race



Source: Brady E. Hamilton and T.J. Mathews, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, *NCHS Data Brief, Continued Declines in Teen Births in the United States* (2015).

Barriers to Success in School for Girls Who Are Pregnant or Parenting

Environment of Discouragement

Girls who are pregnant or parenting often face an environment of discouragement that pushes them out of school—from some teachers' and administrators' low expectations and unwelcoming policies to outright hostility, discrimination, and direct and indirect pressure to leave school.

- According to the Let Her Learn Survey, girls who are pregnant or parenting (61 percent) were less likely than girls overall (81 percent) to say that they had someone at their school who cared about them and wanted them to succeed.¹²

In fact, many of the girls in the Let Her Learn Focus Groups described a shift in how their teachers and peers perceived them once their pregnancy was known. They felt that teachers and administrators seemed to write them off and that the stigma of being a “teen parent” made it harder to go to school.¹³ Even well-meaning teachers and administrators may encourage pregnant and parenting girls to take less rigorous courses, believing that it will be too hard for a young parent to succeed in school while raising a child.¹⁴ One girl in the Let Her Learn Focus Groups felt that both her teachers and other students did not respect her because she was pregnant.¹⁵ Another student felt that the discrimination she faced because of her pregnancy made it harder for her to succeed in school.¹⁶

These experiences are consistent with those of other pregnant or parenting girls who have been shamed and discriminated against by teachers and administrators. For example, pregnant girls have been barred from displaying their pregnant bellies in school yearbooks.¹⁷ In another case, a band leader refused to allow a pregnant girl to participate in a special concert because she would give the school and the band a “bad image.”¹⁸ This type of discouragement and discrimination makes students feel unwelcome at school. Not surprisingly, the Let Her Learn Survey shows that many girls who are pregnant or parenting report that other students, teachers, their family members, or principals do not want them at their schools (**Figure 2**).¹⁹

Figure 2. Percentage of Girls Reporting that Specific Groups of People Did Not Want Them at School

Pregnant and Parenting Girls	
Other Students	51%
Teachers	38%
Family members	26%
Their parents or guardians	25%
Principals	31%
The counselors	21%
Their mentors	20%

Source: National Women's Law Center, Let Her Learn Survey, conducted by Lake Research Partners (2017).

Girls who are pregnant or parenting can also face both direct and indirect pressures to leave school. One charter school in Louisiana, for example, required pregnant girls to switch to another school or begin a home school program. This practice only ended when the ACLU filed a formal discrimination complaint and the Louisiana Department of Education forced the school to stop pushing pregnant girls out of school.²⁰ In another case, a student at a public high school in Detroit who had dropped out when she became pregnant at 17 was denied the ability to reenroll a year later, with the school claiming that they would not be able to keep her safe.²¹

Girls who are pregnant or parenting may also come under increased scrutiny by educators and be held to an unreasonable standard. Counselors and teachers sometimes tell student mothers that they “can’t make any mistakes” and must be on their “best behavior.”²² In the Let Her Learn Focus Groups, one girl explained, “I’m the only person pregnant in my whole school so like all eyes be on me.”²³ These pressures combined with low expectations can have a tremendous negative effect on students.

WHAT
GIRLS
SAY:

***“I’m the only
person pregnant in
my whole school***

so like all eyes be on me.”

–Let Her Learn Focus Group

Participant

Lack of Support

Lack of support can make it harder for pregnant or parenting students to succeed in school.

- In the Let Her Learn Survey, more than 1 in 4 girls who are pregnant or parenting (26 percent) said that they get little or no counseling or help about their futures.²⁴

This lack of support contrasts starkly with what the girls in the Let Her Learn Focus Groups said they need to succeed in school: counselors,²⁵ teachers with whom they could talk,²⁶ and mentors.²⁷ The girls in the focus groups also said that having help and a solid support system would allow them to achieve their dreams and goals.²⁸

Punitive Absence and Policies

Punitive absence policies can push girls who are pregnant or parenting out of school because they have to miss class for medical appointments, for their own medical recovery and needs, and when their children are ill or if their child care arrangements fall through.

- In the Let Her Learn Survey, girls who are pregnant or parenting (54 percent) were more likely than girls overall (25 percent) to report they had missed 15 days or more of school in a year).²⁹

Pregnant students need to miss school for medical appointments, childbirth and recovery. They may also experience pregnancy-related nausea, exhaustion, and other ailments that do not require a doctor's visit but nevertheless make it hard to attend school. In the Let Her Learn Focus Groups, pregnant girls said that going to school while pregnant was physically challenging.³⁰ In addition, a breastfeeding mother will need to be excused from class temporarily in order to express breast milk.

Student mothers can also find themselves in an impossible bind when their children are sick—send the child to daycare care or miss school themselves. Many child care facilities will not allow ill children to attend their programs until they have been symptom- and fever-free for 24 hours.³¹ As a result, a minor illness can keep a child out of daycare and a mother out of school for multiple days.

- Girls who are pregnant or parenting in the Let Her Learn Survey (91 percent) were more likely than girls overall (69 percent) to say that allowing special scheduling and attendance arrangements for students who provide care to family members would make schools better for girls.³²

Many schools, however, do not have clear absence policies that accommodate the needs of student mothers. In most states, individual school districts decide which absences will be excused and which will be unexcused. School districts, in turn, often allow individual schools and teachers to decide which absences will or will not be excused.³³ As a result, what constitutes an excused absence varies not only by district but by school and by classroom.³⁴ Even when schools do excuse pregnancy-related absences, they often do not allow students the necessary time to make up any missed assignments. Some schools limit the total number of excused absences a student can have, regardless of the reasons. And few school districts have policies that explicitly permit students to miss school because of their child's illness.³⁵

Need for Accommodations in School

When schools refuse to make even simple accommodations for pregnant and parenting girls—such as providing extra time between classes or making adjustments to school uniforms—or worse, punish them for needing an accommodation, they make it harder for girls who are pregnant or parenting to succeed in school. Some schools have forced pregnant girls to sit at desks that are too small.³⁶ Others have punished girls when their pregnancies made it harder for them to fulfill arbitrary requirements. For example, one school threatened a pregnant girl who no longer fit into her public school uniform with detention if she did not keep her shirt tucked in.³⁷ One girl in the Let Her Learn Focus Groups said that she was sent home or to detention when she did not complete

her homework assignments on time: “It was kind of hard because sometimes I’ll be too tired to do homework so I couldn’t do it, and I was always in detention.”³⁸ Pushing pregnant and parenting students out of the classroom only makes it harder for them to keep up with their schoolwork and graduate.

Inaccessible Homebound Instruction

Some girls who are pregnant or parenting may need homebound instruction or online learning opportunities but face barriers to accessing these services. Some schools do not inform pregnant and parenting girls that homebound instruction exists and that they are eligible to participate.³⁹ Pregnant girls also have been told that “normal” pregnancies do not qualify for homebound services.⁴⁰ And only a handful of states require schools to offer homebound or online learning to students whose children have temporary illnesses or who are unable to attend school because they do not have access to child care.⁴¹

The Unequal Alternative

School administrators may try to push pregnant girls into alternative or off-site schools or towards G.E.D. classes, without fully explaining all of their options.⁴² Although some of these alternative programs may offer flexible scheduling and on-site child care, many do not provide rigorous academic instruction.⁴³ In addition, these alternative programs often do not have the same variety of classes or offer advanced placement or honors classes,⁴⁴ and are typically presumed to be remedial.⁴⁵

Lack of Child Care

Student mothers consistently report that they lack accessible and affordable child care, which is necessary for them to succeed in school—not only so they can attend school but also so they can work. Child care that extends beyond the students’ school day can also give the parent needed time to complete schoolwork or participate in school activities. Girls in the Let Her Learn Focus Groups reported that having to care for their children made it harder for them to complete their homework.⁴⁶

- More than half of girls (52 percent) who are pregnant or parenting in the Let Her Learn Survey reported that not having access to child care was a barrier to going to school.⁴⁷
- More than 3 in 4 girls (76 percent) who are pregnant or parenting stated that schools would do better for them if they provided child care.⁴⁸

One student mother in the Let Her Learn Focus Groups explained that she wants to “have certainty that I can take my kid to school” and “know that she is close by” so she could respond quickly if an issue were to arise.⁴⁹

Additionally, for many student mothers, the cost of child care can be prohibitively expensive. The average annual cost of full-time care for one child can range from \$3,000



to over \$17,000, depending on the age of the child, the type of care, and where the family lives.⁵⁰ Without assistance, many student mothers are unable to afford child care. However, whether a student mother will qualify for child care assistance depends on a variety of factors including: the state's income eligibility limit, how a state determines a family's income, and whether the income of other family members living with the young parent will be included. In about half of the states, the size and income of the larger family (including a minor parent's parents and siblings) can or is required to be considered when determining eligibility.⁵¹ Such eligibility requirements can keep young mothers from receiving child care assistance and placements, despite the fact that their parents may refuse to help with those expenses. Even when student mothers are eligible for child care assistance, they may not receive it or they may be placed on waiting lists for months or years.⁵²

Need for Transportation

Even students who have child care at their schools may not have a way to get their children to those programs.⁵³ Student parents are often prohibited from taking their children on school buses with them—meaning that they have to find other transportation in order to get both themselves and their children to school. In fact, in some states it is illegal for children under five to ride on a school bus.⁵⁴ Such prohibitions can be particularly challenging for students living in areas with limited public transportation.

Given this context, it is unsurprising that lack of transportation ranked among the top three barriers identified by girls who are pregnant or parenting in the Let Her Learn Survey.

- Girls who are pregnant or parenting (66 percent) were more likely than girls overall (29 percent) to state that not having transportation to and from school made it hard for them to attend.
- Girls who are pregnant and parenting (66 percent) were more likely than girls overall (39 percent) to say that not having a driver's license made it hard for them to go to school.⁵⁵

Stress, Insufficient Time, and the Need to Work

In addition to school, girls who are pregnant or parenting have to focus on the day-to-day tasks of raising and caring for a child. Many girls who are pregnant or student mothers must also work to support themselves and their children. This stress can take its toll. The student mothers in the Let Her Learn Focus Groups reported that the need to earn money and care for their children made it hard to succeed in school. According to one student mother, needing to provide for her child was more important than going to school.⁵⁶

Girls who are pregnant or parenting in the Let Her Learn Focus Groups also often felt that they had little control over their lives and had to constantly do things for other people.⁵⁷

- In the Let Her Learn Survey, girls who are pregnant or parenting (53 percent) were even more likely than girls overall (16 percent) to report that having to care for a family member other than their child was a barrier to going to school.⁵⁸

According to one student mother in the focus groups, “You can’t have fun because you are so concerned with everything else that is going on in your life.” This young woman also said she has to worry about child care and money.⁵⁹

Economic, Housing, and Family Instability

Lack of economic resources and instability in their living and family situations can also be significant barriers for girls who are pregnant and parenting. They may need services such as Medicaid, nutrition assistance, child care assistance, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and access to housing to help them and their children succeed.⁶⁰ For example, pregnant or parenting girls in the Let Her Learn Focus Groups said that having free food at school would help them.⁶¹

- According to the Let Her Learn Survey, nearly 7 in 10 (69 percent) who are pregnant or parenting reported that running out of money for necessities like food is a barrier that keeps them from being able to go to school.⁶²

Unfortunately, complicated rules and requirements may keep girls who are pregnant and parenting from receiving the help they need. For example, the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) programs provides nutrition assistance to women, infants, and children. However, there is an income limit to receiving assistance and some girls may not be able to access WIC if they are residing at home and their household income exceeds the threshold,⁶³ even if the parents or guardians of the pregnant or parenting girl in the household may not be paying for the cost of caring for the infant or child.

In addition, girls who are pregnant or parenting may not have access to affordable housing and may not be able to get placements at homeless shelters.⁶⁴ This is particularly concerning given that in the Let Her Learn Survey, girls who are pregnant or parenting were more likely than girls overall to report instability in their living and housing situations.

- Girls who are pregnant or parenting (75 percent) were less likely than girls overall (92 percent) to report that they lived with their parents.⁶⁵
- Girls who are pregnant or parenting (41 percent) were more likely than girls overall (11 percent) to report that they have been homeless, lived with another family, or stayed with another family.⁶⁶
- Girls who are pregnant or parenting (51 percent) were more likely than girls overall (16 percent) to state that not having permanent housing was a barrier to going to school.⁶⁷

In the Let Her Learn Survey, girls who are pregnant or parenting also reported higher rates of instability within their families.

- They were more likely to report that someone in their immediate family had been hurt or injured on purpose by another family member or someone they were dating or going out with (46 percent of girls who are pregnant or parenting compared to 16 percent of girls overall).⁶⁸
- They were more likely to report that someone in their immediate family had been arrested or jailed (51 percent of girls who are pregnant or parenting compared to 25 percent of girls overall).⁶⁹

Stigma, Bullying, Harassment, and Violence

Negative life experiences such as violence, trauma, and homelessness can make it more likely that a teenage girl will become pregnant.⁷⁰ At the same time, getting pregnant and becoming a parent also increases the likelihood that a girl will experience negative life events. Being pregnant or a parent, for example, can make girls a target for unwanted sexual attention and harassment. One girl in the Let Her Learn Focus Groups said boys think that “just because you [have] a baby that you are going to sleep with them.”⁷¹

Girls who are pregnant or young mothers in the Let Her Learn Focus Groups reported feeling stigmatized both in school and by society at large. One girl said, for example, that she “could hear everybody whispering” about her.⁷² Another felt uncomfortable going out when she was pregnant because “everybody was staring.” She felt that adults would ogle her and make judgments about whether her mother cares for and supports her.⁷³ And another said that being a parent was challenging because “society looks at you like a whore.”⁷⁴ In addition, other research shows that pregnant girls often report losing friends and being treated as an outcast.⁷⁵

WHAT
GIRLS
SAY:

“Society looks
at you like a whore”.

—Let Her Learn Focus Group
Participant

In the Let Her Learn Survey, girls who are pregnant or parenting were also more likely than girls overall to report that they had experienced harassment or violence of all kinds (see **Figure 3**).

Figure 3. Percentage of Girls Reporting Harassment and Violence		
Experience	Girls who are pregnant or parenting	Girls Overall
Kissed or touched when they did not want to	56%	21%
Physically forced to have sexual intercourse when they did not want to	33%	6%
Hurt or injured on purpose by someone they were dating or going out with	43%	9%
In a fight at school	36%	12%

Source: National Women's Law Center, Let Her Learn Survey, conducted by Lake Research Partners (2017).

Girls who are pregnant or parenting ranked protection from bullying and harassment among the most important things that schools could do to help them.

Pregnant and parenting girls' concerns about safety affected their school attendance.

- Girls who are pregnant or parenting (64 percent) were more likely than girls overall (32 percent) to report that not feeling safe at school is a barrier to attending school.⁷⁶
- Girls who are pregnant or parenting (39 percent) were more likely than girls overall (14 percent) to have been absent from school because they felt they would be unsafe at or on the way to or from school.⁷⁷

Not surprisingly, girls who are pregnant or parenting ranked protection from bullying and harassment among the most important things that schools could do to help them (see **Figure 4**).

Figure 4. Percentage of Girls who Report that Protection from Harassment, Bullying, & Discrimination Would Make Schools Better for Them

Solutions	Girls who are pregnant or parenting
Protect them from bullying and deal with it immediately if it occurs	85%
Have someone in the school to help resolve conflicts, negotiate appropriate disciplinary and clear minor infractions from students' records	89%
Share information about the appropriate ways to report discrimination and harassment	88%

Source: National Women's Law Center, Let Her Learn Survey, conducted by Lake Research Partners (2017). Includes girls who say solution would help a lot, help somewhat, or help a little.

Negative Feelings

The Let Her Learn Survey shows that the vast majority of girls who are pregnant or parenting experience symptoms of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (**Figure 5**).

Figure 5. Girls Reporting Negative Feelings

Felt bad about themselves, or were a failure or let everyone down	74%
Felt down or depressed or hopeless	79%
Had repeated disturbing memories, thoughts or images of a stressful experience from the past	82%
Felt afraid or as if something awful might happen	72%
Felt angry about how they were treated	82%
Had thoughts that they would be better off dead or hurting themselves.	61%

Source: National Women's Law Center, Let Her Learn Survey, conducted by Lake Research Partners (2017). Includes girls who say they experienced the feeling more often than not or occasionally.

Similarly, student mothers in the Let Her Learn Focus Groups identified stress and anxiety as one of their biggest concerns.⁷⁸

- In the Let Her Learn Survey, nearly 9 in 10 girls who are pregnant or parenting (89 percent) said that providing a crisis counselor would help to make schools better for girls.⁷⁹

PROTECTIONS FOR PREGNANT OR PARENTING STUDENTS UNDER FEDERAL LAW

Title IX prohibits educational programs that receive federal funds from discriminating against students based on “pregnancy, childbirth, false pregnancy, termination of pregnancy, or recovery therefrom,” or their “actual or potential parental, family, or marital status.” This means that schools must treat all students who might be, are, or have been pregnant (whether currently parenting or not) the same as they would treat other students with temporary medical conditions.

At a minimum, therefore, any school that receives federal funds must:

- Provide equal access to school for pregnant or parenting students, including equal access to extracurricular activities. For example, a school cannot require a doctor’s note from pregnant students to participate in activities unless the school requires a doctor’s note from all students who have conditions that require medical care. Schools also cannot prohibit students from participating in extracurricular activities or honor societies or make them ineligible for awards or recognition because they are pregnant or parenting.
- Excuse all absences related to pregnancy or childbirth for as long as deemed medically necessary by a student’s doctor. A student must also be given a reasonable amount of time to make up any missed work and at the conclusion of the leave “must be reinstated to the status that she held when the leave began.”⁸⁰
- Not force pregnant or parenting students into alternative programs. If a school offers separate programs or schools for pregnant or parenting students, these programs must be voluntary and offer opportunities equal to those offered in traditional school settings.

Recommendations for Helping Girls Who Are Pregnant or Parenting Succeed in School

Policymakers, educators, and communities should help create learning environments and school support systems that meet the needs of girls who are pregnant or parenting. Becoming a parent can be a powerful motivator; many student parents report a renewed interest in school with a new focus on providing for themselves and their children. According to one student mother in the Let Her Learn Focus Groups, becoming a parent pushed her to “strive for greatness.” She said she wants to “leave a legacy that [her son] can follow and be proud of.”⁸¹

Girls who are pregnant or parenting need support to remain in and succeed in school while also caring for a child. High quality programs for student parents that provide academic assistance as well as supportive services, such as child care and counseling, can improve graduation rates and help student parents move on to post-secondary education or obtain employment after high school.⁸² Help for these young women must extend beyond things directly related to being pregnant or a mother, such as excused absence and access to child care, and should also address issues like trauma, harassment, violence, and economic insecurity that girls who are pregnant or parenting are more likely to experience. Such strong support can help pregnant or parenting students overcome the barriers they face and achieve their dreams and goals.

Policy makers

- Policymakers should engage pregnant and parenting girls in the process of crafting solutions to the educational barriers they face, making sure to include a diverse set of voices. (One way of doing this is by creating youth advisory committees like the Young Women’s Initiatives, first launched in New York City, <http://www.shewillbe.nyc/>.)
- The U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR) should provide technical assistance to schools to help them comply with Title IX’s prohibition against discrimination because of pregnancy and related health conditions.
- OCR should clarify that Title IX’s ban on pregnancy discrimination protects students who are breastfeeding and requires schools to provide breastfeeding students with an appropriate space and breaks to breastfeed or express breast milk.
- OCR should continue strong enforcement of Title IX to ensure that girls who are pregnant or parenting have equal access to educational opportunities.

- Congress should increase funding for the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) program, which provides funding to states to help low-income families pay for child care, so that more parents—including student parents—can receive assistance.
- States should facilitate access to CCDBG assistance for student parents by permitting them to be eligible for child care assistance (without requiring them to work while attending school); allowing parents to receive assistance to cover their child care costs during the hours they are attending school, doing schoolwork, and traveling between school and home; informing student parents about the availability of child care assistance; and funding contracts for child care programs in or near schools that serve student parents.
- States should pass laws and regulations that codify and expand upon Title IX's protections for girls who are pregnant or parenting. Specifically, states should:
 - Require schools to excuse all pregnancy related absences, including absences to recover from childbirth, as well as all absences necessary to care for an ill child.
 - Require schools to provide pregnant and parenting students a reasonable amount of time to make up any missed work during excused absences.
 - Require schools to provide homebound instruction and/or access to online educational programs for pregnant or parenting students.
 - Require schools to provide reasonable accommodations for pregnant and parenting students. For example, pregnant students may need to take extra time between classes or use the restroom more often.
 - Require schools to allow breastfeeding students to express breastmilk or breastfeed their child during school.
- States should take affirmative steps to help address the educational barriers that pregnant and parenting students face by:
 - Funding child care programs at or near secondary schools and structuring eligibility criteria for child care subsidies so that they are easily accessible for student parents.
 - Ensure that buses can accommodate small children or provide an alternative mode of transportation.
 - Funding comprehensive services for pregnant or parenting students that include counselors and social workers, job training programs, and parenting education.

Schools

- Schools must ensure that they are in compliance with Title IX by:
 - Excusing all pregnancy related absences and providing a reasonable amount of time for girls to make up missed work.
 - Providing access to homebound and/or online instruction for pregnant and parenting students.
 - Protecting students who are pregnant and parenting from harassment by teachers and peers.

- Making reasonable accommodations for pregnant, parenting, and breastfeeding students.
- Ensuring that pregnant and parenting students have equal access to educational opportunities and are not forced into specialized programs or schools. Any specialized academic programs must be rigorous and able to prepare students for post-secondary education and careers.
- Appointing a trained and knowledgeable Title IX coordinator.
- Schools should be proactive in helping pregnant and parenting students succeed in school by:
 - Reviewing and updating all policies related to pregnant or parenting students to ensure they reflect current law and are consistent with providing a rigorous and supportive academic environment.
 - Providing training to all educators and staff who work with students on how to support girls who are pregnant or parenting. Administrators, teachers, nurses, and school counselors should all be aware of school policies, including the need to provide accommodations for pregnant or parenting students and excuse pregnancy related absences.
 - Widely disseminating information about school policies related to pregnant or parenting students, including services that are available to them, such as homebound instruction, child care services, and counseling.
 - Permitting young parents to ride the school bus with their children, when allowed by state law.
 - Excusing absences for student parents who must miss school to care for an ill child and providing a reasonable amount of time for students to make up any missed school work.
 - Working with girls who are pregnant or parenting to develop individualized learning plans that will allow them to succeed in school while also meeting the demands of raising and caring for a child.
 - Ensuring that girls who are pregnant or parenting have access to school and mental health counselors and social workers.
 - Supporting programs that will allow girls who are pregnant or parenting to successfully combine paid work with school attendance.
 - Developing specialized programming for pregnant or parenting students that provides supports, such as child care, counseling, mentoring, and connections to outside resources that will help girls who are pregnant or parenting succeed in school.

Parents/Guardians and Advocates

- Parents/guardians and advocates can request their schools policies relating to pregnant or parenting students and check to see if they meet the requirements set forth under Title IX (see <http://nwlc.org/resources/pregnant-and-parenting-students-rights-toolkit/>).
- Parents/guardians and advocates can look up the name and contact information for each school's or district's Title IX coordinator, a position required by law, and ask that coordinators be appointed immediately if not already in place.
- Parents/guardians and advocates can encourage schools to develop partnerships with community-based organizations and child care facilities that can provide appropriate and responsive services to girls who are pregnant or parenting.



- 1 Wanda S. Pillow, *Unfit Subjects: Educational Policy and the Teen Mother* (New York: Rutledge Falmer, 2004), 117.
- 2 John M. Bridgeland, John J. Dilulio, Jr. & Karen Burke Morison, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts* (2006), 6, available at <https://docs.gatesfoundation.org/documents/thesilentepidemic3-06final.pdf>.
- 3 Kate Perper, Kristen Peterson, and Jennifer Manlove, Child Trends, *Diploma Attainment Among Teen Mothers* (2010), 1, available at https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/child_trends-2010_01_22_FS_diplomaattainment.pdf.
- 4 Perper, Peterson, and Manlove, *Diploma Attainment*, 1.
- 5 Brady E. Hamilton & T.J. Mathews, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, *NCHS Data Brief, Continued Declines in Teen Births in the United States* (2015) 1, available at <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db259.pdf>.
- 6 Ibid. 1.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Ibid. 1, 3-4. U.S. Centers for Disease Control data on race and ethnicity of females is collected from information on birth certificates. "Latina" is used to refer to females of any race whose birth certificates indicated they are of Hispanic origin. "Native American" is used to refer to females whose birth certificates indicated they are American Indian or Alaskan Native. "White, non-Hispanic" females are those whose birth certificates indicated they are white but not of Hispanic origin. "Black, non-Hispanic" females are those whose birth certificates indicated they are Black but not of Hispanic origin.
- 10 Ibid. 3-4.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 National Women's Law Center, Let Her Learn Survey.
- 13 National Women's Law Center, Let Her Learn Focus Groups (D.C. 2017), 4-5.
- 14 Reports from advocates who work with girls who are pregnant or parenting to Kelli Garcia. Notes on file with the National Women's Law Center.
- 15 National Women's Law Center, Let Her Learn Focus Groups.
- 16 National Women's Law Center, Let Her Learn Focus Groups (D.C. 2017), 36.
- 17 Tara Culp-Ressler, "Too Often, Teen Mothers Receive Shame Instead of Support," *Think Progress*, May 17, 2013, available at <https://thinkprogress.org/too-often-teen-mothers-receive-shame-instead-of-support-805b5fa8d9d#.jtuvqcq83>.
- 18 National Women's Law Center, *A Pregnancy Test for Schools* (2012), 9, available at https://nwlc.org/sites/default/files/final_nwlc_pregnantparenting_report.pdf.
- 19 National Women's Law Center, Let Her Learn Survey.
- 20 American Civil Liberties Union of Louisiana, Delhi Charter School Principal and School Board, August 6, 2012, available at <https://www.aclu.org/other/delhi-charter-school-demand-letter?redirect=womens-rights/delhi-charter-school-demand-letter>; American Civil Liberties Union, *Louisiana School Eliminates Policy that Forces Pregnant Students Out of School* (2012), available at <https://www.aclu.org/news/louisiana-school-eliminates-policy-forces-pregnant-students-out-school>.
- 21 Erin Einhorn, "School Districts Stopped Paying Attention, but Teen Pregnancy is Still a Problem: Are Online Schools a Better Option for Teen Moms--Or Just a High-Tech Version of Schools That Once Hid Pregnant Girls from Shame?" *The Nation*, June 3, 2015, available at <https://www.thenation.com/article/school-districts-stopped-paying-attention-teen-pregnancy-still-problem/>.
- 22 Pillow, *Unfit Subjects*, 126.
- 23 National Women's Law Center, Let Her Learn Focus Groups (D.C. 2017), 4-5.
- 24 National Women's Law Center, Let Her Learn Survey.
- 25 National Women's Law Center, Let Her Learn Focus Groups (Atlanta 2016), 18.
- 26 National Women's Law Center, Let Her Learn Focus Groups (Atlanta 2016), 16.
- 27 National Women's Law Center, Let Her Learn Focus Groups (D.C. 2017), 15, 16.
- 28 National Women's Law Center, Let Her Learn Focus Groups (Atlanta 2016), 15.
- 29 National Women's Law Center, Let Her Learn Survey.
- 30 National Women's Law Center, Let Her Learn Focus Groups (D.C. 2017), 4-5.
- 31 National Women's Law Center, *A Pregnancy Test for Schools*, 4-5.
- 32 National Women's Law Center, Let Her Learn Survey. Includes girls who say this would help a lot, help somewhat, or help a little make schools better.
- 33 National Women's Law Center, *A Pregnancy Test for Schools*, 5.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Ibid. 6. .
- 36 Pillow, *Unfit Subjects*, 125.
- 37 National Women's Law Center, *A Pregnancy Test for Schools*, 3.
- 38 National Women's Law Center, Let Her Learn Focus Groups (D.C. 2017), 37.
- 39 National Women's Law Center, *A Pregnancy Test for Schools*, 6.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 North Carolina requires schools to provide homework and make up work to pregnant and parent students. N.C. Gen. Stat. Ann § 115C-375.5(b)(3) (West 2012).

- 42 National Women's Law Center, *A Pregnancy Test for Schools*, 5.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 National Women's Law Center, *A Pregnancy Test for Schools*, 5; Einhorn, "School Districts Stopped Paying Attention."
- 45 National Women's Law Center, *A Pregnancy Test for Schools*, 5.
- 46 National Women's Law Center, Let Her Learn Focus Groups (Atlanta 2017).
- 47 National Women's Law Center, Let Her Learn Survey. Includes girls who said this was a major barrier, somewhat of a barrier, or a minor barrier to going to school.
- 48 Ibid. Includes girls who say this would help a lot, help somewhat, or help a little make schools better.
- 49 National Women's Law Center, Let Her Learn Focus Groups (D.C. 2017)
- 50 Child Care Aware of America, *Parents and the High Cost of Child Care: 2016 Appendices* (2016), 4-5, available at http://www.usa.childcareaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/CCA_High_Cost_Appendices_2016.pdf.
- 51 Sarah Minton, Kathryn Stevens, Lorraine Blatt, and Christin Durham, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, *The CCDF Policies Database Book of Tables: Key Cross-State Variations in CCDF Policies as of October 1, 2014*, OPRE Report 2015-95 (2015), 20-21, available at https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/ccdf_policies_database_2014_book_of_tables_final_11_05_15_b508_3.pdf.
- 52 Karen Schulman and Helen Blank, National Women's Law Center, *Red Light Green Light: State Child Care Assistance Policies 2016* (2016), 7, available at <https://nwlc.org/resources/red-light-green-light-state-child-care-assistance-policies-2016/>.
- 53 Reports from advocates who work with girls who are pregnant or parenting to Kelli Garcia. Notes on file with the National Women's Law Center.
- 54 National Women's Law Center, *A Pregnancy Test for Schools*, 6.
- 55 National Women's Law Center, Let Her Learn Survey. Includes girls who said these were a major barrier, somewhat of a barrier, or a minor barrier to going to school.
- 56 National Women's Law Center, Let Her Learn Focus Groups (Atlanta 2017).
- 57 National Women's Law Center, Let Her Learn Focus Groups (D.C. 2017).
- 58 National Women's Law Center, Let Her Learn Survey. Includes girls who said this was a major barrier, somewhat of a barrier, or a minor barrier to going to school.
- 59 National Women's Law Center, Let Her Learn Focus Groups (D.C. 2017).
- 60 Healthy Teen Network, *Policy Platform to Promote Health and Success Among Young Families* (March 2009), available at <http://www.healthysteennetwork.org/resources/public-policy-platform-promote-health-success-young-families/>.
- 61 National Women's Law Center, Let Her Learn Focus Groups (Atlanta 2017).
- 62 National Women's Law Center, Let Her Learn Survey. Includes girls who said this was a major barrier, somewhat of a barrier, or a minor barrier to going to school.
- 63 United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, "Women, Infants and Children (WIC): WIC Eligibility Requirements," available at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/wic-eligibility-requirements>.
- 64 Massachusetts Alliance for Teen Pregnancy, *Living on the Edge: The Conflict and Trauma that Lead to Teen Parent Homelessness* (2013), 6, available at <http://www.massteenpregnancy.org/sites/default/files/publications/matpliving-edgesummer2013.pdf>.
- 65 Ibid.
- 66 National Women's Law Center, Let Her Learn Survey.
- 67 Ibid. Includes girls who said this was a major barrier, somewhat of a barrier, or a minor barrier to going to school.
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 Ibid.
- 70 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Adolescent Health, *Co-Occurring Risks in Adolescence: Implications for Teen Pregnancy Prevention*, 1-2; Sanna J. Thompson et al., "Runaway and Pregnant: Risk Factors Associated with Pregnancy in a National Sample of Runaway/Homeless Female Adolescents," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 43 (2008), 4-7; Sheri Madigan et al., "Association Between Abuse History and Adolescent Pregnancy: A Meta-analysis," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 55 (2014), 157-58.
- 71 National Women's Law Center, Let Her Learn Focus Groups (Atlanta 2017)
- 72 National Women's Law Center, Let Her Learn Focus Groups (D.C. 2017).
- 73 Ibid.
- 74 National Women's Law Center, Let Her Learn Focus Groups (Atlanta 2017).
- 75 The University of Chicago, Section of Family Planning and Contraceptive Research, *Family Planning and Contraception Research, Findings from the Postpartum Adolescent Birth Control Study: Relationships Between Adolescent Mothers and their Peers During the Transition to Parenthood* (2011), 1-2, available at <http://familyplanning.uchicago.edu/research/studies-by-topic/postpartum-abcs/Peers.pdf>.
- 76 Ibid. Includes girls who said this was a major barrier, somewhat of a barrier, or a minor barrier to going to school.
- 77 Ibid.
- 78 National Women's Law Center, Let Her Learn Focus Groups (D.C. 2017).
- 79 National Women's Law Center, Let Her Learn Survey. Includes girls who say this would help a lot, help somewhat, or help a little make schools better.
- 80 U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights *Supporting the Academic Success of Pregnant and Parenting Students Under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972* (2013), 10, available at <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/pregnancy.pdf>.
- 81 National Women's Law Center, Let Her Learn Focus Groups (D.C. 2017).
- 82 Cynthia B. Costello, Institute for Women's Policy Research, *Pathways to Postsecondary Education for Pregnant and Parenting Teens* (2014), 12-14, available at <https://iwpr.org/publications/pathways-to-postsecondary-education-for-pregnant-and-parenting-teens/>.



LET HER LEARN

 NATIONAL
WOMEN'S
LAW CENTER
EXPANDING THE POSSIBILITIES

11 Dupont Circle NW, Suite 800
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: (202) 588-5180
Fax: (202) 588-5185
Email: info@nwlc.org
Website: nwlc.org