Clearing the Path

Creating School Success for Pregnant and Parenting Students and Their Children

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Clearing the Path: Creating School Success for Pregnant and Parenting Students and Their Children

Executive Summary

Students who are pregnant and parenting have the same dreams, hopes, abilities, talents, and potential as other youth. They want to be successful students as well as loving responsible parents. For too long, we have accepted their academic struggles, low graduation rates, and high unemployment rates as unavoidable collateral consequences of teen pregnancy and parenting. They are not. These students face significant and unique obstacles to school success which too often limit and even define their futures. These barriers are not insurmountable. Schools and communities can and must do more to support students. By investing in and improving educational outcomes for pregnant and parenting students, we will change the lives of two generations of learners and allow our student-parents and their children to rise to their full potential.

Over the past two years, ELC staff have engaged in intensive fact-gathering, met with community members, and interviewed youth, parents, school nurses, service providers, and ELECT\(^1\) staff, as well as conducted an online survey of youth and stakeholders who work with approximately 900 students each year – all in order to understand the experiences and needs of pregnant and parenting students in the School District of Philadelphia. These efforts culminated in the identification of several systemic barriers to school success and the development of a series of policy recommendations to better support students. Our recommendations are informed by our ongoing work; the voices of youth, parents, teachers, and service providers; interviews with experts; and a review of model policies from across the country. These recommendations include supporting pregnant students to remain in school, developing an academic plan for each student, providing homebound instruction and other academic support to students on leave, and providing specific interventions, such as academic accommodations, access to on-site childcare, and breastfeeding facilities in schools to support students upon their return to school.

In undertaking this report, we have been struck by the consistency of the feedback and input we received and are confident that implementation of key recommendations will make a profound difference in improving educational and life outcomes of Philadelphia’s pregnant and parenting students and their children.

\(^1\) Education Leading to Employment and Career Training (ELECT) program offers case management and supportive services to expecting or already parenting teen mothers and fathers 21 years old and younger to support them as students to stay in school through graduation.
The Enduring Issue of Teen Pregnancy in Philadelphia

There is a continuing need to focus on teen pregnancy in Philadelphia. Despite national declines in teen birth rates, the City of Philadelphia’s teen pregnancy rate hovers at 35.2 per 1000 teens. This is nearly twice the state birth rate of 17.7 births per 1,000 for youth ages 15–19, and significantly above the national rate of 22.3 per 1,000.

Poverty is strongly linked to teen pregnancy, both as a cause and a consequence of teen parenting. Low income levels are associated with higher teen birth rates. Sixty-three percent of teen mothers receive public assistance within the first year of a child’s birth. Fifty-two percent of mothers on welfare had their first child in their teens.

Pennsylvania teen birth rates reflect greater disparities based on race and ethnicity. In 2015, the state’s teen birth rates for young African American women (47 per 1,000) and young Hispanic women (51 per 1,000) were more than three times higher than the birth rate for their white counterparts (14 per 1,000).

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The connection between teen pregnancy and other forms of marginalization is also a cause for grave concern. For example, youth in foster care are 2.5 times more likely to become pregnant by age 19 than peers who are not involved in the foster care system. Many teen mothers also report feeling marginalized and isolated as parents. In Philadelphia and elsewhere, teen pregnancy has a profound impact on housing, living situations, and other circumstances. For example, nearly 1 in 5 births to teen mothers, ages 15 to 19, is a second birth. For these teen parents, having a second child significantly compounds pre-existing barriers to school success.

**The Impact of Teen Pregnancy: Educational and Economic Outcomes of Teen Parents**

A high percentage of the teens do not complete their high school education after becoming a parent. Teen pregnancy and parenting accounts for 30% of student dropouts annually; nearly half of female dropouts indicate that becoming a parent played a role in their decisions to leave school, while one-third of female dropouts said it was a major factor. One study estimated that in 2010 alone, 70% of teen mothers in Philadelphia dropped out of high school.

The prospects of obtaining a college education are even more limited for teen parents. National data indicates that only 2% of all teens who have a baby before age 18 enter college by age 30, with an even smaller percentage actually graduating. As a result, teen parents experience limited earning potential in later years and are less likely to find well-paying jobs than their peers.

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*Children born to teen parents are more likely to lag behind on early childhood measures, exhibit low academic performance, drop out of school, face unemployment, and live in poverty as an adult.*

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**The Impact of Teen Pregnancy: Educational Outcomes of Children Born to Teen Parents**

Children born to teen mothers frequently lag behind on early childhood and school readiness measures; they also fare worse once in school. Research indicates that children born to teenage mothers are more likely to repeat a grade, less likely to graduate from high school, and more likely to lag behind on early childhood measures, exhibit low academic performance, drop out of school, face unemployment, and live in poverty as an adult.

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11. *Id.*
to exhibit lower performance on standardized tests.\textsuperscript{12} The children of teenage mothers are also more likely to have health problems, be incarcerated at some time during adolescence, give birth as a teenager, and face unemployment as a young adult.\textsuperscript{13} A child born to a teenage high school dropout is nine times more likely to be poor and on welfare.\textsuperscript{14} These statistics highlight the potential long-term benefits of improving educational outcomes for parenting teens.

\textit{Identified Barriers to Student Success}

ELC conducted a survey, focus groups, and interviews to identify the specific barriers to school success for pregnant and parenting students in Philadelphia. The data reveals the following challenges:

\textbf{(1) Students receive inadequate supports to remain in school during pregnancy. } Many students report that once they become pregnant, they don’t feel supported to remain in school. The majority of survey respondents report that pregnant students are denied accommodations while pregnant, undermining their connection to school. Some are stigmatized because of their pregnancy and experiences bullying in school. Some are denied dress code accommodations regarding school uniforms. Almost 60\% of respondents stated students were cited for lateness or absences that should have been excused as pregnancy related. As one student explained, \textit{“Everyone wrote me off and acted like I would drop out no matter what; nobody cared once I was pregnant.”} Some pregnant and parenting students we interviewed reported that once they were expecting or once it was known they were going to be a parent, teachers stopped providing additional supports, including special education services.

\textbf{(2) Students, parents, and staff report that students are typically out of school from 4-6 weeks after giving birth and lack “any connection” with teachers or school during that time.} Most youth report feeling disconnected from school and having no contact with teachers following the birth of their children. They often received no information about what their peers are learning, or what they were missing. Thirty-eight percent of respondents reported that students were out of school six weeks or more.


(3) **Students who return to school find themselves lagging far behind their peers and unable to make up for the lost instruction time.** Students, parents, and school staff typically report that students received no academic services while on leave because they were not provided homebound instruction, academic support, or access to cyber programming. Some ELECT staff noted that students asked them for academic support, but as non-teachers, they were unable to provide tutoring or meet the students’ educational needs. **Eighty-eight percent of those surveyed report that students received no homebound instruction or other academic support while on leave.** Survey respondents and focus group participants also consistently reported that students left school due to factors correlating to lack of academic support: 34% reported that students fell behind due to missed school days; 24% cited lack of credits, and 17% stated that they fell behind academically more generally.

(4) **The District lacks a formal reintegration process, consistent levels of support from ELECT programs, and strategic collaboration among teachers, guidance counselors, and ELECT staff to ensure that parenting students returning to school understand their rights, are supported to be successful, access the full range of educational opportunities, and make informed decisions regarding school placement and course selection.**

ELECT staff are extremely dedicated and often play a critical role in supporting students returning to school following a leave of absence. Some students report that ELECT programs served as a source of mentorship, education and awareness, group support, school engagement, and guidance in navigating a youth’s new role as parenting student. Accordingly, proposals to increase funding for ELECT programs represent a worthwhile investment in our students. However, ELECT programs also vary widely across the District with regard to the services and programming they offer to students. Some students reported that their ELECT program provided resources such as diapers but few programs and services and that the ELECT office was usually locked. Others stated that ELECT staff were readily available in their program.

ELECT programs can and do provide an important source of stability for many youth and represent an essential infrastructure that can effectively assist pregnant and parenting students in the transition process – both prior to and after childbirth. ELECT staff are extremely supportive of expanding accommodations for pregnant and parenting students returning to school. However, their effectiveness is limited due to the lack of a formal integration process for students and limited coordination and collaboration with school administrators and staff. ELECT programs could provide an important bridge to expanded student success by facilitating the development of an academic plan, connecting students to academic resources and accommodations, supporting connections to teachers, and discussing school placement options.
(5) Many parenting students report feeling that they had no choice but to attend an accelerated school or alternative programs, which often lacked sufficient academic supports to meet their educational needs. Youth report that upon returning to school, they often learned that they were woefully behind on credits, tests, assignments, and learning. In the absence of academic support during absences or academic accommodations upon their return, they often felt they had no choice but to attend an accelerated school or program for over-age and under-credited students within the Opportunity Network. The Educational Options Program (EOP) allows students aged 17 and older to earn credits towards graduation through early evening classes.

Some students describe these alternative programs as places where “they watched a movie every day,” failed to receive adequate instruction, and felt disengaged from school. They also report that the programs were strict about attendance and lateness and students were often dropped from the rolls if late more than twice. Many students also report delays in accessing these programs due to strict rules governing registration and orientation dates and report that they felt they lacked sufficient support to be successful in school.

(6) Participants in in-depth interviews, focus groups, and survey respondents report that most parenting students drop out of school due to an inability to make up for lost instruction, challenges in obtaining childcare subsidies, and absence of on-site childcare programs. The vast majority of focus group and interview participants, as well as survey respondents report that parenting students typically drop out because pregnancy and childbirth-related absences caused them to fall far behind their peers to the point that that they could not make up for lost instruction time. In addition, several participants report barriers relating to difficulties in accessing childcare and transportation and the need for more childcare resources to be available in schools.

Legal Landscape: Rights of Pregnant and Parenting Students
The School District of Philadelphia has a legal obligation to remove the educational barriers that pregnant and parenting students face. Federal law provides students who are pregnant and parenting with important protections designed to guarantee their equal right to an education. Title IX of the Education Amendment of 1972 provides that “[n]o person … shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.”15 Regulations promulgated pursuant to Title IX specify that its prohibition against sex discrimination applies to

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discrimination on the basis of pregnancy. Title IX applies to all public and private educational institutions that receive any federal financial assistance, with certain limited exceptions. Accordingly, under Title IX, pregnant students are entitled to equal access to schools and school activities. Pennsylvania law similarly expressly provides that a “student may not be excluded from the public schools or from extracurricular activities because … the student is pregnant.” The Pennsylvania Department of Education’s Pregnant and Parenting Students Basic Education Circular makes clear that students have a right to equal educational opportunities under federal law and under the state law entitlement to a free public education. The BEC also states that although schools may offer separate or special courses for pregnant students, such programs must always be voluntary. Schools cannot, for example, involuntarily exclude a pregnant student from classes or extracurricular activities on the basis of her pregnancy. Students cannot be automatically disenrolled and transferred to a different school. Rather, a school must accommodate the student’s pregnancy.

Title IX also prohibits harassment of students based on sex, including harassment because of pregnancy or related conditions. Prohibited harassment includes making sexual comments or jokes about a student’s pregnancy, calling a student sexually charged names, or spreading rumors about her sexual activity. Schools must take prompt and effective steps reasonably calculated to end pregnancy-related harassment, prevent its recurrence, and eliminate any hostile environment created by the harassment. A school violates Title IX if sexual harassment or other pregnancy-related harassment interferes with a student’s ability to benefit from or participate in the school’s program and the harassment is tolerated.

The right to equal access to education and to be free from discrimination also applies to parenting students. Pursuant to 34 C.F.R. § 106.40, “[a] recipient shall not apply any rule concerning a student’s actual or potential parental … status which treats students differently on the basis of sex.” Specifically, “a recipient shall not discriminate against any student, or exclude any student from its education program or activity, including any class or extracurricular activity, on the basis of such student’s pregnancy, … or recovery therefrom, unless the student requests voluntarily to participate in a separate portion of the program or activity … .” Accordingly, Title IX and

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16 See e.g., Pfeiffer v. Marion Center Area Sch. Dist., 917 F.2d 779, 784 (3d Cir. 1990).
17 34 C.F.R. § 106.11. The only exception is if an educational institution is controlled by a religious organization and the law’s requirements would conflict with the organization’s religious tenets. See 20 U.S.C. § 1681(a)(3).
20 Id.
21 See 34 C.F.R. § 106.40(b)(2).
22 34 C.F.R. § 106.40(b)(1).
regulations promulgated thereunder expressly prohibit discrimination on the basis of pregnancy and recovery from pregnancy, and accommodations must be made for students in both situations. A student can never be told that she may not return to the school after childbirth. This violates the requirements of 34 C.F.R. § 106.40(b)(5), which provides that the student shall be reinstated to the same status and cannot be penalized for pregnancy. Schools must make accommodations for both pregnant and parenting students so that they obtain equal access to the full range of educational opportunities.

Federal regulations also require pregnancy to be treated in the same manner and under the same policies as other temporary disabilities: “[a] recipient shall treat pregnancy, childbirth … and recovery therefrom in the same manner and under the same policies as any other temporary disability ….”23 If a student who has given birth does not otherwise qualify for leave under the recipient’s leave policy, the student is entitled to “a leave of absence for so long a period of time as is deemed medically necessary by the student's physician, at the conclusion of which the student shall be reinstated to the status which she held when the leave began.”24 Therefore, pregnant and parenting students are legally entitled to changes in policies, supports, and interventions to accommodate them during pregnancy and ensure their reinstatement to the same status as other students upon their return to school. They are also entitled to the same academic support provided to students on leave due to temporary disability and, if the student is also a child with a disability, the student is equally entitled to a free, appropriate, public education as a pregnant and parenting student.

School District of Philadelphia’s Policy for Pregnant and Parenting Students
In April 2018, the District updated its “Pregnant/Parenting/Married Students” policy – Policy 234 – which was first adopted in 1981. This policy clearly articulates the District’s strong commitment to pregnant and parenting students.

The revised policy instructs school staff, administrators, and pregnant and parenting students of their respective rights and responsibilities under these federal and state laws and identifies where students and parents can turn for help. For example, it explains that students cannot be discriminated against on the basis of pregnancy, actual or perceived parenting status, childbirth, or related recovery. The policy also explains that each school has identified a “Teen Parent Liaison” to help students understand their rights and how to report Title IX violations, make referrals to the “ELECT” Program, and access resources outside of school (e.g., childcare, health care, etc.). This liaison may be a counselor, school nurse, or member of the school staff.

This revised policy is a significant step forward towards supporting students. It describes in detail a student’s right to accommodations while pregnant and parenting, such as additional time

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23 34 C.F.R. § 106.40(b)(4).
24 34 C.F.R. § 106.40(b)(5).
to change classes, use of elevators, hall passes for bathrooms, access to missed assignments or tests, and access to a private and secure room if a student is breastfeeding. The policy also makes clear that parenting students have the legal right to return to their neighborhood school.

However, the policy and its internal administrative procedures counterpart\textsuperscript{25} fail to identify or seek to ensure effective academic support for students who miss school due to pregnancy and childbirth. Pursuant to the District’s policies, pregnant and parenting students are not eligible for any homebound instruction unless medical documentation establishes that the student has an acute condition requiring the student to be out of school for over four weeks.\textsuperscript{26} The amount of such instruction is not specified.

\textit{The District is committed to supporting the retention of pregnant and parenting students in schools and acknowledges that one of the most effective ways to minimize the risk of negative outcomes in terms of health, welfare and educational achievement is to support pregnant and parenting students to remain connected to learning. School District of Philadelphia Policy 234}

In addition, the policy does not include standardized accommodations available to all students in all schools to ensure access to disability-related modifications and a transition protocol for students returning to school. Instead, the policy states that “to the extent feasible” educational and support services will be provided “on a case by-case basis” and that students “may” continue attending school in the regular classroom (as is the student’s right under federal law), or be educated through Philadelphia Virtual Academy or in another setting. There are no policies to ensure that: (1) students remain connected to school (which is critical to student engagement); (2) students’ grades are frozen (to ensure students are not wrongfully penalized due to pregnancy); (3) students are provided with additional time to prepare for and complete tests and missed assignments; and (4) students are supported to remain in their prior school rather than being diverted to inferior accelerated alternative schools.

\textbf{Recommendations: Removing Barriers and Supporting Students}

There is a clear need for policy change to protect the rights of pregnant and parenting teens. The results of our online survey, focus groups, and in-depth interviews highlight the need for specific policy reforms and interventions in the following areas: (1) access to academic instruction and


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ongoing connections during a student’s maternity leave; (2) a formal reintegration process to ensure access to the educational opportunities, credit assessment, and graduation planning; and (3) more detailed accommodations and services for students returning to school as parenting students, including academic accommodations, expanded access to childcare, and support for breastfeeding mothers.

These findings are not unique to Philadelphia. Accordingly, we reviewed national studies and reports, state legislation, and model policies and strategies from across the country to develop a series of recommendations for the School District of Philadelphia. Our policy recommendations are as follows:

1. **Develop an “Pregnant and Parenting Academic Plan” and Provide Targeted Academic Support for Students During Leave from School**

Research shows that parenting leave of six weeks or more provides important health and wellness benefits for both the child and the parent. Studies show that this time improves a child’s health, dramatically increases the neurological and psychosocial development of the infant, and supports attachment to parents. It also supports maternal health, increases breastfeeding, and strengthens the parent-child relationship.27

*Recognizing the value of this critical time, we propose that schools work with students to develop an individual “Parent Academic Plan” that will enable the students to remain engaged in school and continue learning while on leave.* Parenting students should receive academic interventions to support them to stay on track to graduate. Every student’s situation is different: some students may opt for online learning or an independent study, while others would receive homebound instruction, but all students will benefit from adopting a Parent Academic Plan policy. Importantly, leave time for a pregnant student can be planned based on an anticipated due date.

Accordingly, we propose amending **Policy 234** to require guidance counselors, ELECT staff, and other designated teachers and school staff to work with the student to develop such a plan. This Parent Academic Plan would include identifying a designated Point of Contact POC who would remain in touch with the student and communicate directly during the weeks the student is on leave. The Parent Academic Plan would also identify how many credits the student needs to

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graduate, the anticipated date of return, and what supports and services the student will receive to remain on track to graduate.

**Policy 234** should also be amended to provide homebound instruction, cyber programming, and other academic support to students on leave. Students who are recovering from childbirth should automatically qualify for this assistance, including homebound instruction, based on a doctor’s note regarding the student’s pregnancy/childbirth. Such instruction should consist of a requisite number of instructional hours per week to meet the needs of the student and may include access to cyber learning to support students to stay on track to graduate. Another option could include a school-based independent study program. This model has been used in Los Angeles for parenting students who require long-term medical leave.28

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**SPOTLIGHT:** At one charter school in Philadelphia, pregnant and parenting students who are on leave following childbirth communicate directly with a teacher on a daily basis. These students reported that this continuing contact made them feel connected to school and more likely to return. These students also received homebound instruction while on leave, which supported them to stay on track to graduate.

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2. **Make Homebound Instruction Available to All Parenting Students**

As explained in federal guidance on this topic, allowing pregnant students to receive homebound instruction encourages them to remain in school.29 Wisconsin provides homebound instruction and instructs school districts to avoid providing a standard period of time, e.g., six weeks, for homebound instruction for school-age parents, as this may be inconsistent with the student’s individual needs.30 In New York, a home instruction teacher provided through the city’s borough offices of home instruction must sustain a cooperative relationship with the students’ home school to ensure a proper instructional program.31 Michigan law requires districts to provide homebound instruction services to pregnant and parenting students who have a medical condition that requires them to be confined to the home during regular school hours longer than five or more

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29 Supporting the Academic Success of Pregnant and Parenting Students Under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (2013) available at https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/pregnancy.pdf


school days. The homebound instructor must provide a minimum of two periods of instruction per week, take assignments to the student, provide support to the parents or other caregivers so they can help guide the student in the instruction, provide tutorial services to help the student gain basic information to complete assignments, and provide other supports that might be useful in helping the student maintain as much academic progress as possible while temporarily away.  

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**SPOTLIGHT:** Michigan law requires school districts to provide homebound instruction for students who are home for more than five days and delineates the duties of homebound instructors to support students.

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3. **Provide Special Education Services to Students with Disabilities**

Students with disabilities who require special education services often have a harder time when they become pregnant and are parenting because they are offered fewer supports and services that are tailored to meet their needs and enable them to make meaningful progress. A few students reported that teachers provided “selective instruction,” dependent on whether they determined a student was deserving.

Policy 234 should be amended to reflect the fact that students with disabilities continue to be legally entitled to a free, appropriate, public education at all times and must continue to receive mandated supports and services delineated in their Individualized Education Program (IEP) while pregnant and during absences from school. In addition, the student’s IEP Team should meet to develop the student’s Pregnant and Parenting Academic Plan.

4. **Reduce Reliance on Accelerated/Alternative Schools**

In light of feedback we received, and limited educational opportunities available through accelerated programs, the District should expressly encourage and support students to remain in their neighborhood schools rather than gravitating to such alternative programs. Sufficient information must be provided to ensure that parents and youth make fully informed decisions about transferring to accelerated programs and other EOP options. These placements should be viewed as a “last resort” rather than a first option for these students. In addition, for those who
choose to attend these programs, students should not be on “waiting lists” for programs or be out of school for weeks waiting to attend an orientation, as often occurs. Rather, if a student is out of school awaiting an orientation or specific school placement, the student should receive online academic support provided at the District. Any students in alternative or accelerated schools should also have an Academic Plan which delineates how many credits they need and which program and courses would best support their graduation and post-graduation goals.

5. **Revise Policies Regarding Absenteeism and Truancy**

Our research disclosed that pregnant and parenting students often incur *unexcused absences* while pregnant and on maternity leave, even when the absence should have been excused. Students often struggle to obtain documentation within the requisite time period to receive an excused absence. Some students explained that they obtained “discharge summaries” from a health professional that did not qualify as a doctor’s note or that their child was ill and they did not want to take their infant outside. Some schools also required the youth’s parent to be physically present at the school in order to excuse the parenting student for an appointment either for that student or the student’s child. This creates hardships for both the student and the family. Several students reported that their parents were out of the picture or would not come to school due to the parent’s own work or childcare responsibilities.

We recommend that **Policy 234** be revised to ensure that attendance rules can be applied with greater flexibility to pregnant and parenting teens. For example, students who are pregnant and parenting should be allowed to use “discharge notes” or other documentation to substantiate an excused absence, be permitted to leave school for a doctor’s appointment, and be provided with additional time to obtain documentation in light of their circumstances. Such flexibility is consistent with policies adopted in other school districts. In the School District of Hillsborough in Tampa, minimum attendance requirements are waived for students participating in teenage parent programs. 33

6. **Provide Support To Assist Students Transitioning Back To School, Including Credit Assessments**

Many students reported that they did not know how many credits they had obtained or needed to graduate. In several cases, this caused students to withdraw from school with only a few credits remaining to be earned. As part of the Pregnant and Parenting Academic Plan, students in high school should know how many credits they need to graduate and how they will earn those additional credits towards graduation. In addition, all grades should be frozen until the student

returns to school, and there should be no penalties for tests and assignments missed during that period.

**SPOTLIGHT:** North Carolina law requires schools to provide homework and make-up work to all pregnant and parenting students to ensure that they have the opportunity to keep current with assignments and avoid losing course credit due to absences. (See § 115C-375.5. *Education for pregnant and parenting students*, available at [https://ncleg.net/EnactedLegislation/Statutes/HTML/BySection/Chapter_115C/GS_115C-375.5.html](https://ncleg.net/EnactedLegislation/Statutes/HTML/BySection/Chapter_115C/GS_115C-375.5.html).

7. **Provide Reasonable Accommodations During and After Pregnancy, Including Breastfeeding Accommodations**

Pregnant and parenting students *must* be offered all reasonable accommodations to remain in and make progress in school. Such categorical uniform accommodations should expressly include: specific pregnancy-related accommodations, such as larger desks, uniform vouchers, elevator access, cellphone access for emergency calls, all-access passes to use the bathroom, as well as parenting-related accommodations, including adjustments to class schedules, freezing grades while on leave, access to healthcare, childcare and transportation. For example, Los Angeles Unified School District allows “scheduling flexibility whenever possible” to enable full participation and reduce school absences due to medical concerns. This district also facilitates changes to class schedules to minimize loss of school time and to provide access to childcare and provides a reduced schedule of classes for students with medical complications due to pregnancy or childbirth. Such accommodations should include specific supports relating to private spaces for lactation and milk storage as discussed below.

Los Angeles Unified School District’s standard accommodations for breastfeeding explicitly include the following: providing a reasonable amount of time (20 to 40 minutes, two to three times a day) to accommodate the need to express breast milk or breastfeed an infant child and time to set up and clean equipment, as well as collect, label and store milk; access to a power source for a breast pump or any other equipment used to express breast milk, and access to a place to store expressed breast milk safely. In addition, students cannot incur an academic penalty as a result of their use of such reasonable accommodations and must be afforded an opportunity to make up any work missed due to such use. Finally, a student can file a complaint of noncompliance with the provision of reasonable accommodations for lactating students through the District’s Uniform Complaint Procedures.
By way of example, School District **Policy 234**, which already recognizes and supports breastfeeding in schools, could be revised to strengthen this important protection for students through more explicit provisions. Specifically, the policy should be amended to state:

A. All schools with pregnant or parenting students must provide appropriate accommodations to any lactating student to express breast milk, breastfeed an infant child, or address other needs related to breastfeeding.

B. All schools with pregnant students shall discuss breastfeeding accommodations available to lactating students, whether through the IEP process, through ELECT case management, or through other means before the birth of the child.

C. Appropriate breastfeeding accommodations shall include, but are not limited to:
   1) Permission to bring onto a school campus a breast pump and any other equipment used to express or store breast milk;
   2) Access to a clean, private, and secure room, other than a restroom, to express breast milk or breastfeed an infant child;
   3) Access to a power source for a breast pump or any other equipment used to express breast milk;
   4) Access to a place to store expressed breast milk safely;
   5) Permission to have food or water while expressing breast milk or while breastfeeding an infant child; and
   6) An appropriate amount of time (e.g., 20 to 40 minutes) to accommodate the student’s need to express breast milk or to breastfeed an infant child.

D. Students shall not incur an academic penalty for using appropriate breastfeeding accommodations and shall be provided the opportunity to make up any work missed due to use of appropriate breastfeeding accommodations.

**SPOTLIGHT:** Los Angeles Unified School District offers pregnant and parenting students a host of specific and clearly defined accommodations in school to support student engagement, academic achievement, and accommodations in school.

8. **Support Parenting Fathers**

Many fathers are not given any support at all as new fathers seeking to be involved in the care of a child. Students reported that the limited supports available in many schools only focused on mothers. As new fathers, these students should be eligible for “excused leave to participate in
“parenting” in the early and critical stages in their child’s life. This is essential to support the father’s bonding with their child.

9. **Provide Sex Education in School**

Many students we spoke with requested more comprehensive sex education and health classes in schools to address prevention of pregnancy and pregnancy itself.

10. **Offer Childcare in Schools**

Students report being pushed out from school because they do not have access to childcare. Students should be informed about their childcare options, and work with a counselor to locate and obtain quality childcare. In addition, we propose that designated schools in the District offer on-site childcare options in school.

**SPOTLIGHT:** In Oregon, local districts are required by law to provide alternative programs and services to pregnant or parenting students, including counseling, life skills and parenting education, childcare, transportation, career development, and health and nutrition services. Local school districts must also provide schedules that address the individual needs of pregnant and parenting students. **Oregon Revised Statute 336.640** available at [https://www.cosa.k12.or.us/sites/default/files/materials/events/oregon_teen_parents_public_education_fact_sheet.pdf](https://www.cosa.k12.or.us/sites/default/files/materials/events/oregon_teen_parents_public_education_fact_sheet.pdf)

11. **Expand the Role of ELECT Programs**

We strongly support investing in ELECT programs to improve their collaboration and coordination with school staff to better support students academically and to eliminate logistical and resource challenges students face. For example, currently many teachers and counselors fail to connect with ELECT staff, and therefore little information is provided to students who are out on leave. Teachers and counselors should be required to be part of the ELECT team to support students. ELECT staff can assist in the development of Academic Plans, talk to students about their options for school placement and courses, accommodations and additional supports, and their rights under federal law and **Policy 234**. There should also be a dedicated ELECT space for students to connect with each other and to meet with ELECT staff. At present, in many schools, the ELECT room is only available if a staff member is present. This prevents students from accessing the room on their own schedule. The room is typically available during advisory, lunch, and electives. Students
request that the room’s hours be extended to include hours before and after school. The restrictions on the room also prevent students from using the ELECT space for mentoring, groups meetings, and having an additional space for lactation. Finally, healthy snacks should be included in all ELECT rooms to support students and enhance their access to nutritious foods.

**Conclusion**

 Pregnant and parenting students are among the most educationally at-risk of all student cohorts. The collateral consequence of failing these students is that we fail their children as well. A child born to a teenage high school dropout is nine times more likely to be poor and need public assistance for financial support. They are also more likely to themselves give birth as a teenager.34

 We must stop seeing these vibrant and insightful youth as academic failures. We are the ones who are failing them. We must take a new look at the policies and practices that undermine their academic progress and act as roadblocks to their promising futures. We must begin by listening to and working with pregnant and parenting students and investing in strategies to support them to be successful in all they endeavor to do in life. By clearing the path for parenting teens to receive a quality public education and access the full range of educational opportunities that they need to be successful, our schools will not only break a cycle of poverty, but ensure that two generations of learners flourish.

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**Education Law Center-PA (ELC)** is a nonprofit, legal advocacy organization with offices in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, dedicated to ensuring that all children in Pennsylvania have access to a quality public education. Through legal representation, impact litigation, trainings, and policy advocacy, ELC advances the rights of underserved children, including children living in poverty, children of color, children in the foster care and juvenile justice systems, children with disabilities, English learners, LGBTQ students, and children experiencing homelessness. For more information, visit [www.elc-pa.org](http://www.elc-pa.org).

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