

Improving Graduation Rates & Our Children's Future

How We Can Provide Positive Support to New Mexico Pregnant and Parenting Teens



The New Mexico Public Education Department (PED) and the New Mexico Graduation Reality and Dual-Role Skills (GRADS) Program talked to teen parents throughout New Mexico to find out the key challenges keeping our pregnant and parenting teens from graduating and continuing their education.

Here are **8 REASONS** teen parents drop out of school, reasons why these teens need to be supported and ways we can help.

Pregnant and parenting teens are less likely than their peers to graduate from high school, go to college and get a well paying job. Parenthood is the #1 reason that teen girls drop out of school¹. Dropping out of school places teen parents and their children at increased risk of poverty. This not only impacts the future of the parent and child, but it places an economic burden on the state and the nation.

Pregnant and parenting teens face numerous barriers to succeeding in school and graduating. Teens need support from family, school, community and a positive peer network to successfully manage life's challenges. Creating an environment where pregnant and parenting teens feel supported and motivated can help them stay in school and gain access to post-secondary education and career opportunities. Investing in the success of pregnant and parenting teens is aligned with PED's focus on *expecting a smarter return on New Mexico's investment and ensuring our students are ready for success* throughout their academic career.

1 The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. (March 2010) "Why It Matters: Teen Pregnancy and Education."



One.

Absentee Policies that Hinder Instead of Help

Many students are failed and eventually drop out – or are pushed out – due to excessive absences for days missed due to the birth and/or illness of their child. Federal law, Title IX, requires schools to treat absences due to childbirth in the same way that absences due to “other temporary disabilities” are treated. Title IX also clearly states that if other students who miss school are entitled to make up assignments, or are given the option of home instruction due to a medical condition, then the same must apply to pregnant and parenting students².

How we can help:

Review and revise local school policies to address the needs of pregnant and parenting teens and support them in continuing their education.

Ensure our school districts understand and comply with Title IX.

See that schools keep teen parents current with school work during extended absences by assigning work through email or providing homebound services.



Two.

Negative Attitudes and Low Expectations

Popular media has lulled us to believe that there is no longer a stigma to being a teen parent; however, teen parents here in New Mexico provide a very different story. Too often teen parents hear negative comments from their peers and school staff. These negative attitudes towards young mothers can erode their self-esteem and discourage their motivation to succeed. Schools may even set lower expectations for these students than the students have for themselves. In fact, many pregnant and parenting teens report that they are motivated to stay in school because they want to create a better future for their children.

How we can help:

Be someone that a pregnant or parenting teen can talk to and ask for help.

Establish a mentor program for teen parents.

Ensure that school staff are aware of the barriers that pregnant and parenting teens face.

Provide information to school staff on how to provide supportive communication to teen parents.

Acknowledge and reinforce the commitment and motivation of teen parents to stay in school and be successful.

Embrace high academic expectations for all students, including the pregnant and parenting ones.



Three.

Knowing Where to Find Help

Finding needed resources and services can be overwhelming for teen parents. Also, school personnel may be unaware of resources available for pregnant and parenting teens in their school or local community. Until recently, there was no concerted effort in New Mexico to compile all of this information in one place. In order to address this gap, the Public Education Department has created a website for pregnant and parenting teens that can serve as a one stop shop for resources and services.

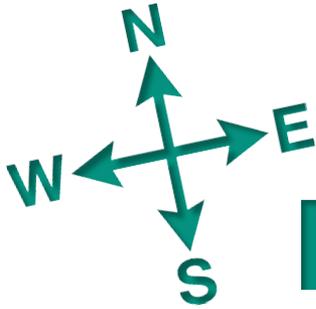
How we can help:

Identify and train staff who can provide support, information and referrals to pregnant and parenting teens for services such as medical care and child care.

Increase student and staff awareness of available services for pregnant and parenting teens at school, school-based health centers and in the local community.

Increase the number of GRADS programs (www.nmgrads.org) in high schools statewide to assist teen parents in completing school.

Direct pregnant and parenting teens to the website designed specifically for them - www.ReasonsPlus.com.



Four.

Navigating the System

Pregnant and parenting teens must make contact with different school and community-based providers in multiple places to receive the services they need for themselves and their children. Teens, like many adults, may lack the know-how to navigate these systems. This process can be time consuming and confusing for teens who may need to incur numerous absences to attend various appointments for themselves and their children. Teen parents report they are often talked down to or judged by the very providers that are supposed to be there to help them.

How we can help:

Increase coordination among teachers, school nurses, social workers, school counselors, school-based health centers, and community providers to meet the needs of teen families.

Increase accessibility for needed services and make adjustments to meet individual student needs.

Advocate for school-based health centers to provide services to the children of teen parents, such as well-child exams and immunizations.



Five.

Juggling School and Parenthood

Teens often feel overwhelmed about continuing their education and raising a child. Not only do teen parents miss school for an extended period of time due to child birth, they continue to miss school to care for their child and attend doctor appointments. Teen parents may find themselves falling too far behind in school to catch up and lacking enough credits to graduate. Teens may also drop out of school because they feel they need to go to work. Teen parents say that they are not requesting that teachers give them an easy “A”, but would like support to help them stay in school.

How we can help:

Ask teen parents what they need and be responsive to those needs.

Provide flexible scheduling, including later start times, half-days and evening, weekend, summer and online classes.

Provide academic counseling and ensure that pregnant and parenting teens have current Next Step Plans that address their educational and career needs and goals.

Offer one-on-one tutoring after school.

Help link teen parents with opportunities for job skill development and obtaining employment.



Who's Watching the Children?

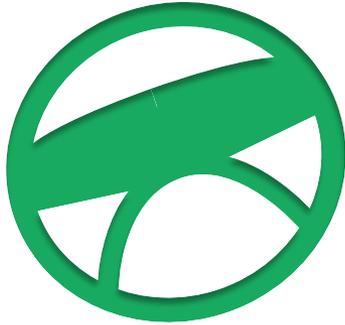
A lack of reliable and quality child care is often why teen parents do not complete their education. Many teens do not have child care support at home and must drop out of school to take care of their child. Teen parents have more opportunities to participate in school activities and graduate from high school when they have access to onsite child care.

How we can help:

Assist teen parents in applying for child care assistance and accessing nearby child development centers.

When resources are available, provide school-based child development centers that offer opportunities to teen mothers to participate in the care of their children.

Keep current school based child development centers open after school hours to help teen parents complete school assignments and receive tutoring assistance.



Seven.

Baby On-Board

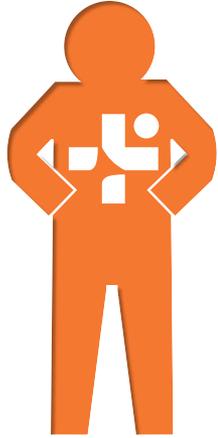
Transportation is a significant reason that teen parents struggle to attend school and access child care, job training, work, and health care. Often teens do not have cars, and public transportation may be unavailable or extremely time consuming to use. Some districts do not allow babies and children of teen parents to ride the school bus.

How we can help:

Help locate services and employment close to where teen parents reside.

Arrange special car or van pools or use other government-funded transportation services.

Allow teen parents and their children to ride in district school buses.



Eight.

What About Dad?

Teenage pregnancy often leads to single motherhood. Society tends to blame the young men for this situation; however, there are many young fathers quite willing to be involved in the lives of their babies. There may be little help available for them to achieve this goal. Providing young fathers with mentoring and opportunities for developing parenting skills can build confidence in their new fathering role.

How we can help:

Organize young father support and peer mentoring groups.

Offer courses for young fathers focused on parenting skill development.

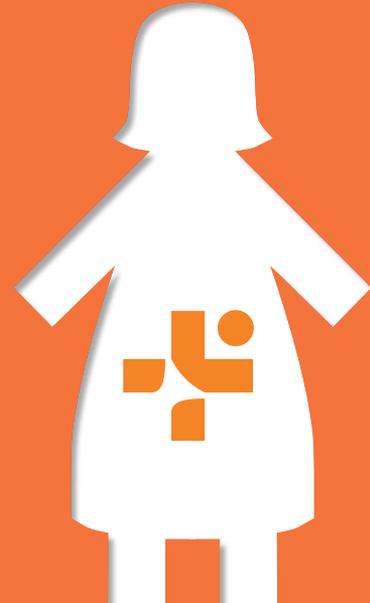
Offer excused absences for teen fathers to attend doctor appointments for their children.

Encourage policy makers and program planners to address the needs of teenage fathers as a specific group.

ReasonsPlus is a statewide effort to provide positive supports to pregnant and parenting teens. The cornerstone is a comprehensive website, www.ReasonsPlus.com, which provides a variety of resources and information specifically for pregnant and parenting teens to help reduce barriers to achieving academic success.

Now is the time to identify, preserve and expand services for pregnant and parenting teens. Together, we can protect two generations at once, and invest our tax dollars wisely to promote educational success and economic independence.

www.ReasonsPlus.com



ReasonsPlus

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Kids First, New Mexico Wins