

# **UNDERCOUNTED AND UNDERSERVED:**

**New York City's  
20,000 School-Aged Young Mothers**

City of New York  
Office of the Comptroller  
Office of Policy Management  
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## **Acknowledgements**

We gratefully acknowledge the many contributions of members of the Comptroller's Citywide Task Force on Adolescent Pregnancy, Parenting and Prevention to the development of this report. Founded in 1981, the Task Force is made up of representatives of more than 200 organizations dedicated to teenage pregnancy prevention and services to adolescent parents. We further extend our appreciation to the New York City Department of Education and its Program for Pregnant and Parenting Services which, through its Family Centers and LYFE and TOPPP programs, has provided school-based resources to pregnant and parenting teens for more than three decades.

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## Introduction

Since 1981, the New York City Comptroller's Office has sponsored the Citywide Task Force on Adolescent Pregnancy, Parenting and Prevention, made up of representatives of more than 200 organizations dedicated to preventing teen pregnancy and providing services to adolescent parents. In addition to health and social services needs, the most pressing problem facing the adolescent parents served by Task Force members is staying in school or, if dropped out, returning to school. Staying in school has a well-documented impact on the long-term future earnings of adults, earnings that are essential to a prospering New York City economy and that contribute to family well-being. For this reason, the Comptroller's Office has a particular concern for the educational welfare of teen parents. This was a primary objective of the Comptroller's Office in undertaking this study: to develop a comprehensive picture of the numbers of young mothers who are currently enrolled in school or, if they have left school, who should be encouraged to return.

In addition, we sought to quantify the numbers of pregnant and parenting students currently reported centrally to the Department of Education, as well as those served by Department of Education programs, which provide a variety of services to this population with the goal of preventing school dropout. The difference between the number of young mothers who should or could be in school and the numbers who are recognized and served by the school system then becomes a fair basis upon which to consider whether access to school-based services for pregnant and parenting students, essential to preventing dropout, is adequate.

The broad-scale reforms underway at the Department of Education present a good opportunity to review and reconsider the special needs of pregnant and parenting students in the context of improving educational outcomes of all students.

## Background

### Early Parenting Is a Leading Cause of High School Dropout Among Girls

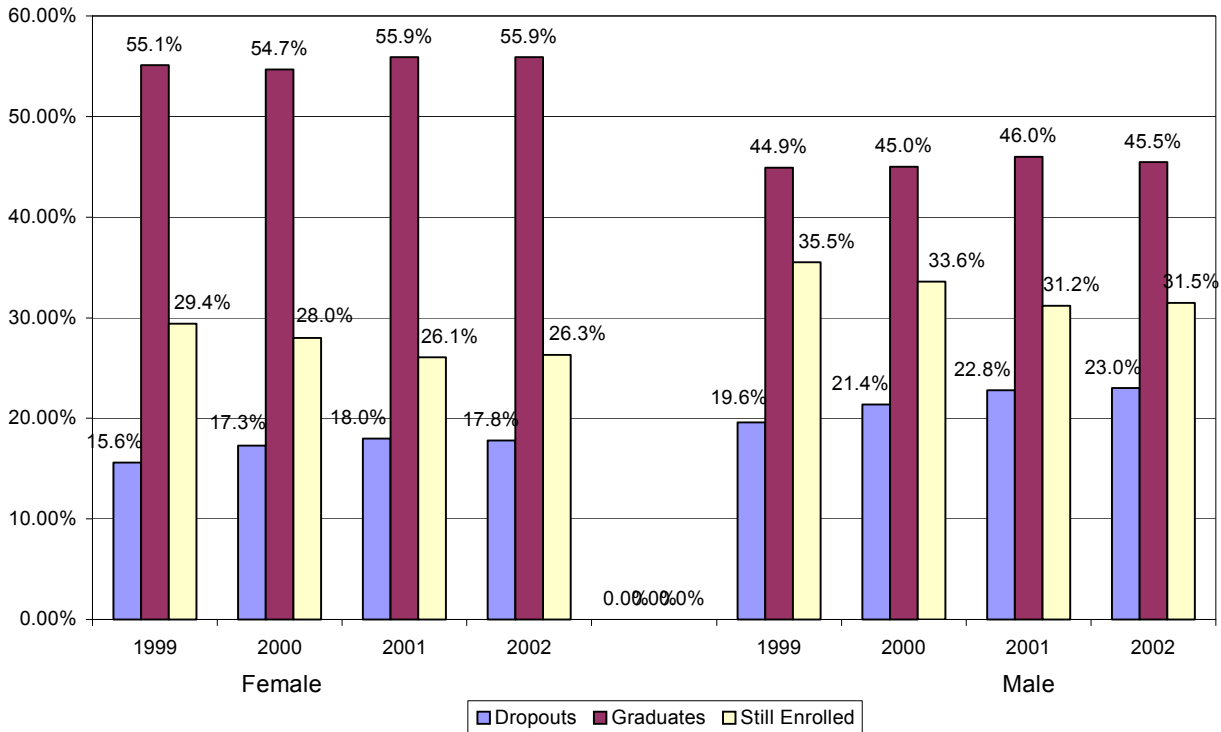
Reducing the incidence of high school dropout has been a goal of the City's high schools for decades. Attention to the service needs of pregnant and parenting girls is rightfully an important part of any dropout prevention strategy. Many teen parents have histories of poor attendance and/or academic achievement prior to becoming pregnant and it is well established that pregnancy and parenting places female students at significant risk of school dropout. According to a study done by the Robin Hood Foundation, as many as 70 percent of teens who become mothers before the age of 18 will drop out of school.<sup>1</sup> A federal cohort study of 8<sup>th</sup> graders found that among girls who dropped out by grade 10,

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<sup>1</sup> Maynard, Rebecca A., Editor (1996), *Kids Having Kids, A Robin Hood Foundation Report on the Costs of Adolescent Childbearing*. New York: Author.

53.6 percent cited pregnancy or parenting as the cause. This same study found that among girls whose first birth occurs by age 17, only 54.1 percent complete high school by age 19, while 94.3 percent of girls who delay childbirth until age 20 complete high school.<sup>2</sup> In addition, a comprehensive study of school outcomes of pregnant and parenting students in a service program in Ohio found that those receiving support services enabling them to remain in school fared far better than students returning to school after a pregnancy-related drop out.<sup>3</sup>

**Table 1: Female and Male 4-Year Graduates and Dropouts, NYC Public High Schools**



Source: New York City Dept. of Education, Division of Assessment and Accountability, *The Class of 1999 Four-Year Longitudinal Report and 1998-99 Event Dropout Rates (Feb. 2000)*, *The Class of 2000 Four-Year Longitudinal Report and 1999-00 Event Dropout Rates (March 2001)*, and *The Class of 2001 Four-Year Longitudinal Report and 2000-01 Event Dropout Rates (March 2002)*.

Recent trends in New York City high school dropout rates underscore the need to take a close look at the level of services available to pregnant and parenting students. After years of progressive decreases, New York City's high school dropout rate has increased or remained steady in each of the past four years. While girls generally are more likely to graduate -- and more likely to graduate in four years -- than boys, they have been similarly affected by the recent upswing in the dropout rate. Dropout rates for

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Dept. of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, First, Second and Third Follow-up Files, 1994.

<sup>3</sup> Box, Johannes M. and Veronica Felbrath (1997), *LEAP: Final Report on Ohio's Welfare Initiative to Improve School Attendance Among Teenage Parents*. New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation.

girls rose from 15.6 percent in 1999 to 18.0 percent in 2001, decreasing slightly to 17.8 percent in 2002; for boys, dropout rates rose from 19.6 percent in 1999 to 21.4 percent in 2001, reaching 23.0 percent in 2002 (see table 1).

## Why Is It Important for Teen Mothers to Complete High School?

The more formal education students attain, the better their lifelong earnings and standard of living. Children of these students also directly benefit. Many studies have found that children perform better in school in direct proportion to the years of schooling of their parents.<sup>4</sup>

### A Brief History of the Legal Rights of Pregnant and Parenting Students to Attend School

The right of pregnant and parenting students to remain in New York City's schools is only 35 years old. Until 1968, New York City, as well as more than two-thirds of the nation's school systems, routinely dismissed pregnant students under what were then characterized as "known or shows" policies.<sup>(1)</sup> No similar policies barring male students who fathered children are known to have existed.<sup>(2)</sup>

Civil litigation, most notably *Ordway v. Hargraves* (1971), brought by Fay Ordway, a Massachusetts high school student who had been dismissed from school as a result of a pregnancy, laid the foundation for federal action.<sup>(3)</sup> In 1972, federal Title IX was enacted, which prohibited discrimination against students in schools receiving federal funding based on sex.<sup>(4)</sup> Title IX regulations further stipulate that "A recipient [of federal funding] shall not discriminate against any student, or exclude any student from its educational program or activity, including any class or extracurricular activity, on the basis of such student's pregnancy, childbirth, false pregnancy, termination of pregnancy or recovery therefrom. . ." <sup>(5)</sup>

New York State Education Law followed suit in 1972, making it illegal for public schools in the state to refuse admission or exclude from any course of instruction anyone on the basis of sex.<sup>(6)</sup>

1. Schreiber & Day (1971), *Schools for Pregnant Girls* 4, as cited in Tamara S. Ling, "Lifting Voices: Towards Equal Education for Pregnant and Parenting Students in New York City," *Fordham University Law Journal*, August 2002.
2. K. Luker (1996), *Dubious Conceptions* 62, as cited above.
3. *Ordway v. Hargraves*, 323 F. Supp. 1155 (D. Mass. 1971).
4. 20 U.S.C. § 1681 (a).
5. 34 C.F.R. § 106.40(b) (2001).
6. N.Y. Education Law § 3201-a.

In addition, the costs to New York City in lost wages, increased use of public entitlements and social services for teen mothers who drop out of school are high. Nationally, nearly 80 percent of teen mothers turn to public assistance for support.<sup>5</sup> Half of all single mothers receiving public assistance were teenagers when they had their first child.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, median weekly earnings for female high school graduates aged 25 and older (\$421) are 39 percent higher than those of high school dropouts (\$303).<sup>7</sup> On an annualized basis, female high school graduates earn \$6,136 more than female high school dropouts. If the 70 percent of teen mothers under age 18 estimated to drop out of school each year (5,858) in New York City were to complete high school, their annual increase in wages could reach a combined total of \$36 million.

Nationally, teenage parenting is estimated to cost U.S. taxpayers \$5 billion annually in medical, welfare and food stamp expenses and lost tax revenues.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Grissmer, David W. et al (1994), *Student Achievement and the Changing American Family*. Santa Monica: RAND.

<sup>5</sup> The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy (February 2002), *General Facts and Stats*, Washington, DC: Author.

<sup>6</sup> The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy (July 2001), *Fact Sheet: Imagine: A Look at the Real Costs of Teen Pregnancy*, Washington, DC: Author.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Dept. of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (August 2001), *Highlights of Women's Earnings in 2000, Reports 952*, Washington, DC: Author.

<sup>8</sup> Op cit 6.

# School-based Services to Pregnant Teens Are Also Essential to Their Children's Health

In addition to economic risks, the infants of teen mothers are less likely to have had appropriate prenatal care and more likely to suffer low birth weight than infants of older mothers. Either can lead to long-term health or developmental problems, including a greater likelihood of infant death, chronic respiratory problems, mental retardation and cerebral palsy.<sup>9</sup> These problems can be prevented or reduced by timely referrals for medical care.

**Table 2: Births with Late (7+ months) or No Prenatal Care to NYC Teen Mothers Aged 17 and Younger, with Comparison (2000)**

Year Child Born	Mothers <15 Years, Late/No Prenatal Care	Mothers 15-17 Years, Late/No Prenatal Care
2000	49	475
1999	59	462 (1)
1998	37	164 (2)
1997	50	----
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>195 (22.8%)(3)</b>	<b>1,101(14.7%)(4)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,296 (15.5%)</b>	
<b>% Births with Late or No Prenatal Care, Mothers 18+ (2000)</b>		<b>6.1%</b>

Source: NYC Dept. of Health, *Summary of Vital Statistics, 1997-2000*. 1. Assumes two-thirds are 15 or 16. 2. Assumes one third is 15, who would be 17 in 2000. 3. N=857. 4. N=7,511.

**Table 3: Low Birth Weight Infants (Less than 5.5 Lbs.) Born to NYC Teen Mothers Aged 17 and Younger, with Comparison (2000)**

Year Child Born	Infants of Mothers <15 Years	Infants of Mothers 15-17 Years
2000	31	378
1999	29	307
1998	29	149
1997	32	----
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>121 (14.1%)(1)</b>	<b>834 (11.1%)(2)</b>
<b>Total (N=8,368)</b>	<b>955 (11.4%)</b>	
<b>% Births to Low Birth Weight Infants, Mothers 18+ (2000)</b>		<b>7.8%</b>

Source: NYC Dept. of Health, *Summary of Vital Statistics, 1997-2000*. 1. N=857. 2. N=7,511.

The incidence of late or no prenatal care among very young mothers -- those most likely to be required to attend school -- is particularly concerning. In New York City, teen mothers aged 17 and younger are two and one-half times more likely to have had late or no prenatal care during their pregnancies than mothers aged 18 and older (see table 2).

Consistent with national trends, the infants of very young mothers in New York City also have a greater likelihood of low birth weight, with its concomitant risks. As illustrated in table 3, infants with mothers aged 17 and under are one and one-half times more likely to be born low birth weight than the infants of mothers aged 18 and older.

School-based referrals for prenatal care and other health and social services offer an important opportunity to reduce preventable risks to these infants. Formal as well as incidental contacts with pregnant and parenting students offer school staff many opportunities to recommend services as well as to monitor whether or not recommendations are being followed. Students at the same time have regular occasions to discuss problems and get advice from staff they have come to know and trust.

<sup>9</sup> Op cit 2.

# School-Based Services Offered by the Department of Education

The New York City Department of Education identifies and provides services to pregnant and parenting students pursuant to Chancellor's Regulation A-740, *Education and Services for Pregnant Students and Student Parents*, last updated in September 2000 (see Appendix). The regulation requires each school to designate a faculty member whose job it is to confidentially identify pregnant and parenting students for the central administration and refer them for prenatal care and other services as needed.

Regulation A-740 also sets forth the educational choices available to pregnant and parenting students. Pregnant students have the right to remain in their current school or may, at her choosing, transfer to a school closer to home or one of the school system's four Family Centers (schools for pregnant teens), located in each borough, with the exception of Staten Island. Family Centers provide educational and support services throughout pregnancy and the postpartum period, for an average stay of 18 months. The majority of students, unless already close to fulfilling graduation requirements, eventually return to their home schools, which are in a position to offer a full-service curriculum, to do so.

For parenting students, selected high schools also offer onsite, City-subsidized child care services to parenting students, beginning when their child is two months old and continuing until the child is 2.9 years (older children may be referred for community-based childcare). Known as the LYFE (Living for the Young Family through Education) program, services include parenting education and support by social workers in addition to childcare.

## Findings

### 1. While the teen birthrate in New York City is down, many City teens still give birth each year.

The birth rate among teenage girls aged 15 to 19 in New York City has declined by 28 percent over the past decade (see table 4). The birth rate among the City's teens aged 15-19 in 2000, at 41.5 births per 1,000, is lower than the national average (47.7 per 1,000) and considerably lower than rates in most major U.S. cities, including Washington, D.C., Los Angeles and Chicago (see table 5). Despite this good news, 10,800 girls under age 20 still gave birth in New York City in 2000 alone. More than one

**Table 4: Births and Birth Rates per 1,000 Females Aged 15-19, New York City, 1990 and 2000**

	<b>Births to 15-19 Year Olds</b>	<b>Total Females 15-19</b>	<b>Birth Rate per 1,000 Females 15-19</b>
<b>2000</b>	10,598	255,356	41.5
<b>1990</b>	13,445	233,721	57.5

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 2; NYC Dept. of Health, *Summary of Vital Statistics*, 2000; Census 1990 Summary Tape File 1; and Community Studies of New York, Inc./Infoshare.

third (3,813) of these girls were aged 17 or younger, and therefore were still required, under the compulsory education law,<sup>10</sup> to attend school. Under both federal and state law, pregnant and parenting girls have the same legal rights as other students to an education. All students must remain in school until the end of the year in which they turn 17 (in New York City, 16 in the rest of the State), and have the option of remaining in school until achieving a diploma or turning 21, whichever comes first.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> N.Y. Education Law § 3205(1)(b).

<sup>11</sup> N.Y. Education Law § 3205(3).



**Table 5: Births and Birth Rates per 1,000 Females 15-19 Years Old in Selected U.S. Cities (2000)**

	Births 15-19	Total Females 15-19	Rate Per 1,000
<b>Boston, MA</b>	787	22,240	35.4
<b>New York, NY</b>	10,587	255,356	41.5
<b>Yonkers, NY</b>	255	5,882	43.4
<b>Washington, DC</b>	1,057	19,851	53.2
<b>Syracuse, NY</b>	418	7,062	59.2
<b>Los Angeles, CA</b>	7,445	122,359	60.8
<b>Philadelphia, PA</b>	3,597	55,782	64.5
<b>Buffalo, NY</b>	752	10,497	71.6
<b>Chicago, IL</b>	7,950	98,839	80.4
<b>Rochester, NY</b>	707	7,814	90.5
<b>Houston, TX</b>	6,331	66,594	95.1
<b>Atlanta, GA</b>	1,504	14,968	100.5
<b>United States</b>	468,990	9,828,886	47.7

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 2 and Child Trends, Washington, DC, *Facts at a Glance*, September 2002.

## 2. In New York City, an estimated 20,000 mothers under age 21 have yet to complete high school.

Of these 20,000 mothers, 8,368 are teen mothers under age 18 who are required by law to be in school. These 8,368 students are the equivalent of more than six average-sized (1,285 student) New York City high schools (see tables 6 and 7).

**Table 6: Estimated Cumulative Number of NYC Teen Mothers Aged 17 and Younger, for Whom School Attendance is Mandatory**

Year Child Born	Mothers Age <15 at Birth	Mothers Age 15-17 at Birth
<b>2000</b>	202	3,611
<b>1999</b>	213	2,555 (1)
<b>1998</b>	223	1,345 (2)
<b>1997</b>	219	----- (3)
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>857</b>	<b>7,511</b>
<b>Total as of 12/31/00</b>	<b>8,368</b>	

Source: NYC Dept. of Health, *Summary of Vital Statistics*, 1997-2000.  
 1. Assumes two-thirds of 15-17 year olds are 15 or 16. 2. Assumes one third of 15-17 year olds are 15. 3. Girls aged 15 in 1997 would exceed age 17 by the year 2000.

**Table 7: Estimated Cumulative Number of NYC Teen Mothers Aged 18 to 21, No High School Diploma**

Year Child Born	Mothers Age 18-19 at Birth	Mothers Age 20 at Birth
<b>2000</b>	3,469	1,695 (1)
<b>1999</b>	3,654	-----
<b>1998</b>	3,000 (2)	
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>10,123</b>	<b>1,695</b>
<b>Total as of 12/31/00</b>	<b>11,818</b>	

Source: NYC Dept. of Health, *Summary of Vital Statistics*, 1997-2000. Assumes all births are first births and does not adjust for in-out migration of mothers. 1. Estimated figure, based on 20 percent of births to 20-24 year olds who had completed less than 12<sup>th</sup> grade. 2. Estimated figure. Dept. of Health *Vital Statistics* prior to 1998 aggregate parents completing grades 9-12, making it impossible to distinguish those parents who have yet to complete high school.

The number of teenaged girls (15-19) in New York City who give birth on an annual basis -- 10,800 in 2000 -- is only a fraction of the total number that is either required or eligible to attend public school. A complete picture also requires a cumulative tally of all school-aged mothers, regardless of when they gave birth, so long as they are not otherwise known to have achieved a high school diploma or a GED.<sup>12</sup> When added together in this fashion, the expected number of teen mothers either attending or eligible to attend the City's public schools increases over the simple annual rate to 20,186.

When calculated in this manner, not only are the numbers of young mothers large, the proportion -- 41.5 percent -- who are under 18 and thus required to be in school, suggests that far more girls become parents while still in high school than is commonly recognized by the Department of Education.

### **3. Despite a population of more than 20,000 school-aged mothers, school-based personnel report an average of only 150 pregnancies each year to the Department of Education.**

The discrepancy between 20,000 births to young women up to age 21 and 8,000 up to age 18, and 150 pregnancies reported system-wide each year by school staff under Chancellor's Regulation A-740, is enormous. With so few pregnancies by school-aged teens reported, it is apparent that for the majority of pregnant and parenting students, no one in the school system knows with any assurance whether they are in school, in a GED program or dropped out. This suggests that there are serious shortcomings in the Department's procedures for identifying pregnant and parenting students.<sup>13</sup> At best the majority of these young mothers are matriculating in the City's high schools with their pregnant and parenting status unrecognized and no formal related services provided. At worst, untold numbers of these very young mothers, often significantly behind in high school credits before, if not after, childbearing, are dropping out of school, most never to return. Department of Education regulations (Chancellor's Regulation A-240) permit students at age 17 to be discharged from full-day high school to GED preparation programs upon confirmed enrollment in such programs. Students over age 17 may also be discharged from school -- without parental consent -- following 20 consecutive days' absence from school.

In fairness, reporting of pregnant and parenting students is a complicated undertaking. Some students elect not to disclose their pregnancies to school personnel. Other pregnant students give birth during the summer months, and never disclose their pregnancies to their schools; yet others may drop out of school while in the early stages of pregnancy. Still other students drop out before becoming pregnant, while still others simply stop coming to school. However, the significant risk of dropout by pregnant girls is an urgent argument for improving the current system.

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<sup>12</sup> See Center for Assessment and Policy Development (1996), *Assessing the Number of Eligible Teen Parents for School-Based Programs*. Bala Cynwyd, PA: Author.

<sup>13</sup> It is important to note that if all pregnancies to school-eligible girls, including those ending in miscarriage or abortion, were counted, the discrepancy would increase many fold. An analysis of Department of Health *Summary of Vital Statistics 1996-2000* reveals that in addition to 8,368 live births to girls under age 18, there were 24,998 non-term pregnancies reported.

**4. Despite more than 20,000 school-aged mothers, only 1,940 -- fewer than 10 percent -- receive services from any of programs intended to keep them in school (see table 8).**

The balance, some 18,000 young mothers, is unaccounted for by the school system, much as when they were pregnant.

The four Family Center programs, serving pregnant students for an average of 18 months, enroll only approximately 600 girls annually, indicating that the larger share of pregnant students, to the extent that they remain in school, elect to continue in their home high schools. While this is clearly these students' right, the availability of services to students in mainstream schools, such as referrals to prenatal care and support for the return to school after the postpartum period, is far from certain. This is suggested by the small number of pregnant and parenting students reported centrally each year (150) by faculty members under Chancellor's Regulation A-740.

As for mothers of all ages who attend school (or work), safe, reliable childcare is a major concern. For this population, who are young and unlikely to have had significant child-rearing experience, quality childcare is especially important. The Department of Education's LYFE childcare program, however, exists in only 42, or 18 percent, of the City's 232 high schools. As a result, the program can serve only an average of 1,400 teen mothers each year.

**Table 8: Estimated Number of Teen Mothers Eligible for Department of Education Services and Number Served**

	<b>Teen Mothers</b>	<b>Total Served by Dept. of Education Programs</b>
<b>No. Teen Mothers Under Age 21 (2000)</b>	20,186 (a)	
<b>Current Enrollment, Schools for Pregnant Teens (2002-03)</b>		618
<b>LYFE Program Parents Served (2000-01)</b>		1,322
<b>Total Served</b>		1,940 (b)
<b>Unmet Need (a-b)</b>	<b>18,246</b>	

**Recommendations**

**1. Establish a working group to review and make recommendations for revising Chancellor's Regulation A-740.**

The system described in Chancellor's Regulation A-740 clearly fails to identify the majority of pregnant and parenting students. As this report finds, of an estimated 20,000 teen mothers who attend school or have dropped out and are still school eligible, only 150 are reported centrally each year as required

under Chancellor's Regulation A-740. In order to help assure that pregnant and parenting students remain in school, the school system must first know who they are. While the right to privacy concerning pregnancy and parenting must always be respected, this is not necessarily at odds with devising policies that encourage pregnant and parenting students to avail themselves of services that help them remain in school.

We recommend that the schools' Chancellor establish a working group, made up of providers of services to pregnant and parenting adolescents and, to the extent practicable, teen parents themselves, with the goal of improving Chancellor's Regulation A-740, *Education and Services for Pregnant Students and Student Parents*. A working group that incorporates the experiences of personnel who work with pregnant and parenting teens as well as that of student parents themselves has the best chance of developing strategies that will effectively identify and serve pregnant and parenting students.

## **2. Use the Department of Education's Leadership Academy to train school administrators in the educational rights of pregnant and parenting students.**

Revised regulations for improving identification and services to pregnant and parenting students are only useful if school administrators have a full, working knowledge of their contents. While there is no way to know all of the reasons for the underreporting of pregnant and parenting students under the current Chancellor's Regulation A-740, misunderstanding of the Regulation should not be among them. As a new Regulation A-740 is developed, it is imperative that both seasoned and new principals receive a thorough training in their obligations to these students.

## **3. Develop a stronger continuum of services, consistently available throughout the high schools, for pregnant and parenting students.**

A pregnant or parenting student's ability to access support services that help prevent dropout must not depend upon the school he or she attends. Currently, the level of services available to a pregnant or parenting student varies from school to school. If a pregnant student is fortunate enough to attend a school with a LYFE program, for example, finding quality, convenient childcare will be relatively easy. If not, waiting lists for community-based child care subsidized by the City number over 46,000. The LYFE program, however, operates in just 42, or 18 percent, of the City's 232 high schools.

The broad-scale reforms currently underway at the Department of Education represent an opportunity to review and improve the service structure available to pregnant and parenting students, with an eye to a uniform system, readily accessed as needed by pregnant and parenting students, regardless of which high school they attend.

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## Appendix