Not the Exception: Making Teen Parent Success the Rule

A CASE STUDY ON THE CHELSEA HIGH SCHOOL EXPECTANT AND PARENTING STUDENT LIAISON
“The teen parent liaison has been an incredible asset to our school and the creation of this position is something that we desperately need if we want teen parents to be more empowered in having a successful future.”

— Assistant Principal, Chelsea High School
Not the Exception: Making Teen Parent Success the Rule

Introduction

Expectant and parenting students make up 26% of the students who leave school in the United States each year. These students have the same right as other students to access a high quality education. Massachusetts Alliance on Teen Pregnancy (Alliance) research published in our 2010 report, Expecting Success: How Policymakers and Educators Can Help Teen Parents Stay in School, demonstrates that for pregnant and parenting teens in Massachusetts, stigma, low expectations, inflexibility and occasionally outright discrimination challenge this right. Disparities in teen birth and dropout rates among Hispanic and African American youth mean that our communities must do better to actualize these young people’s right to a high quality education, in particular.

Expecting Success made specific recommendations to policymakers and educators on how to improve the educational attainment of teen parents to impact the trajectory of their lives and those of the young children they parent. Following Alliance Expecting Success recommendations, Chelsea High School (CHS) hired a part-time expectant and parenting student liaison for the 2011–2012 school year. As compared to the 2010–2011 school year, the dropout rate among pregnant and parenting females decreased by 27%. In addition, the liaison supported 89% of students who stayed at CHS for the 2011–2012 school year to graduate or achieve an on-time promotion (see “Indicators of Success” on page 6 for more outcomes data).

Comparative outcomes data and testimony from students demonstrate that the school-sited expectant and parenting student liaison is a promising, cost-effective practice worth piloting in other high need areas of the state. This report presents data from the first year of implementation, details the CHS support model for expectant and parenting students, and offers policy recommendations.

KEY INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

Data from the expectant and parenting student liaison’s first year, although not statistically significant, are promising:

- In the first year of implementation (2011–2012), the dropout rate among pregnant and parenting females decreased by 27% as compared to the prior year.
- The 27% reduction in the dropout rate for pregnant and parenting females means that in 2011–2012, approximately 5 more students stayed in school. If those additional 5 students go on to graduation, that could save the state $2.3 million over the course of the graduates’ lifetimes.
- Adults age 18–64 in Massachusetts who attain their high school diploma or GED make $9,249 more per year in mean annual earnings as compared to individuals who drop out.

* These savings are in government benefits and incarceration costs associated with individuals who drop out versus those who graduate or attain a GED in Massachusetts.

Our teen parents last year were more prepared, more confident, and more able to be successful than any other year that I have seen in my past eight years at Chelsea High.”

— Assistant Principal, CHS
Why Expectant and Parenting Student Liaisons?

- National data indicate that teen parenthood is a leading reason that 26% of students who drop out leave school. Applied to our state, this accounts for approximately 2,000 Massachusetts high school students who leave school each year.

- Gates Foundation research found that among all students who drop out, those who dropped out because of parenthood were “the most likely to say that they would have worked harder if their schools had demanded more of them and provided the necessary supports.”

- One individual is needed to link expectant and parenting students, in a timely and efficient fashion, to supports such as health care, maternity leave, tutors and childcare. Guidance counselors and social workers are essential, but often too overtaxed to fill this role.

- Research suggests that student graduation coaches are a successful intervention to help youth stay in school. The liaison model is similar although tailored to intensively support expectant and parenting students.

- Establishing liaisons will help school districts meet Title IX federal law requirements, which compel districts to appoint coordinators to ensure compliance and investigate any complaints of sex discrimination against pregnant and parenting students.

- Disproportionately high teen birth and dropout rates for expectant and parenting African American and Latino youth in Massachusetts heighten the urgency for schools to implement interventions, like the liaison model, that support these students. The teen birth rates among Hispanic and African American females ages 15–19 are 5.5 and 3 times the rate of their white peers, respectively. The dropout rates for Hispanic and African American students are 4 and nearly 3 times the rate for white youth, respectively.

“She connects with students very early on, so people don’t feel as rushed or pressured. We’ve done a much better job providing tutors with what they need.”

— Director of Special Education and Pupil Personnel, CHS

“Christine is on your case, she looks out for you, she helps you plan things out and remember appointments.”

— 2012 Graduate, CHS
Profile of an Expectant and Parenting Student Liaison

During the 2011–2012 school year, CHS, in collaboration with ROCA Inc., employed Christine Kidd, a part-time expectant and parenting student liaison. Christine’s experience prior to her role at CHS was based in Chelsea and included work with expectant and parenting youth.* Her responsibilities are as follows:

**Academic case management:** Expectant and parenting students need help navigating what can be a confusing educational system. Christine intensively tracks and maps student progress towards graduation and meets with students quarterly to assess and plan next steps. For pregnant teens, a maternity leave plan is a critical component to academic progress. By working with students from an early point in their pregnancy and proactively communicating with staff, Christine creates a more streamlined and effective system for school staff to support students before, during and after maternity leave.

**Social services case management:** Christine supports social work staff by referring students to appropriate programs and community-based services through students’ pregnancies and up to their completion of high school. She serves as a link to the community and has increased access to community-based supports for young parents.

**Sustainability and advocacy:** Christine advocates for students around childcare and attendance issues and fosters in students an ability to navigate systems. She has also convened work groups among school staff to identify and address important policy and education issues. Christine helps to create sustainability in support services for expectant and parenting students in her pursuit to establish new and improved policies and practices related to attendance, childcare and maternity leave. When CHS creates policies that articulate supports for expectant and parenting students, it helps hold current and future staff accountable to provide these supports and ensure equitable access to supports for each student.

**High expectations and respect for students:** Christine sets high expectations for her students. Because she is sited at the high school, parenting students receive constant encouragement. Christine’s colleagues highlight that her respect for students and her passion for the work are key to student success. As one colleague stated, “Christine treats all students with the utmost respect and compassion and has a genuine desire to support them in order to help them cope with their current situations.” Christine has played an important role in shifting CHS towards a culture that sees teen pregnancy as a potential setback rather than an indicator of inevitable drop out.

* The liaison was afforded through the Department of Public Health’s Massachusetts Pregnant and Parenting Teen Initiative (MPPTI). MPPTI is made possible through a grant from the Office of Adolescent Health, stemming from the 2010 Affordable Care Act.

“Christine has worked on shifting the mindset of teachers and staff so that they do not see teen pregnancy as an immediate indicator of failure.”

— Assistant Principal, CHS
The School Based Health Center

Students at CHS benefit from having a school based health center (SBHC) with a dedicated nurse practitioner who is invested in their success. The Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) SBHC provides on-site physical and mental health care. Jordan Hampton has been the MGH Nurse Practitioner at the SBHC for 12 years. In her central role as a primary care provider, Jordan works to prevent teen pregnancy and, for expectant and parenting students, prevent secondary pregnancy.

For pregnant students, the SBHC ensures an early and continued connection to prenatal care, which improves health outcomes for students and their babies. 100% of pregnant CHS students received adequate prenatal care beginning in their first trimester during the 2011–2012 school year,14 while only 72% of teen mothers statewide receive adequate prenatal care.15 Jordan helps students manage their own healthcare and connects them to their prenatal care providers when issues arise. The SBHC also ensures that breastfeeding students know that they will have a place to pump when they return to school.

While only 72% of teen mothers statewide receive adequate prenatal care, 100% of pregnant CHS students received adequate prenatal care.
Partnership

Partnership is key to the success of expectant and parenting students at CHS. Christine fosters partnership in four areas: healthcare, social services, academics and civic engagement/youth empowerment.

**Healthcare:** With student consent, the nurse practitioner informs Christine as soon as she identifies a pregnant or parenting student, at which point Christine connects with the student to discuss his or her academic path. Christine and Jordan also hold a monthly mothering group.

**Academic support for teens and their children:** Christine serves in a unique role as a liaison between teachers, the special education director and student support staff (guidance counselors, social workers, SBHC nurses, deans, principal, assistant principals, truancy officer and CHS school redesign representatives). She also connects regularly with the central district office, including the superintendent. Lastly, she initiated a partnership with Raising a Reader, a childhood literacy program through which students improve their parenting skills and ability to read with their children.

**Social services:** Partnership with school social workers makes a difference for young parents. Christine connects school social workers directly to any student who is in crisis (e.g. experiencing abuse or homelessness). She is also responsible for facilitating community based social services referrals. During her first year, Christine strengthened the relationship between CHS and ROCA, Inc.’s Healthy Families and Young Parents Programs. According to Christine, 62% of expectant and parenting students at CHS have received services from these programs.

**Civic engagement/youth empowerment:** Expectant and parenting students at CHS have the opportunity to have a voice in the policymaking process because they participate in the Massachusetts Alliance on Teen Pregnancy’s Teen Parent Lobby Day at the State House. Christine also increased CHS’s role in the Summit for Teen Empowerment, Progress, and Parenting Success (STEPS), which helps foster in her students a sense of community and empowerment.

Thirteen percent of all teens who gave birth in 2009 in Massachusetts had already given birth at least once before. The percentage of repeat pregnancy at CHS was only **2%** during the 2011–2012 school year.

“It’s about high standards and asking for appropriate supports they need to reach the same outcomes we want for all our students — it’s not asking for different curricula.”

— Christine Kidd, Expectant and Parenting Student Liaison, CHS
“Our expectant and parenting students develop lifelong, transferable skills of communication, self-advocacy and goal setting in order to have a more successful future.”

— Assistant Principal, CHS

Indicators of Success

Data from the expectant and parenting student liaison’s first school year, although not statistically significant, are promising. We hope that future efforts to implement and evaluate the expectant and parenting student liaison model will confirm these promising results.

- In the first school year of implementation (2011–2012) the dropout rate for expectant and parenting females decreased by 27% as compared to the previous school year.
- The 27% reduction in the dropout rate for pregnant and parenting females means that in 2011–2012, approximately 5 more students stayed in school. If those additional 5 students go on to graduation, that could save the state $2.3 million over the course of the graduates’ lifetimes. Adults age 18–64 in Massachusetts who attain their high school diploma or GED make $9,249 more per year in mean annual earnings as compared to individuals who drop out.
- In 2010–2011, prior to CHS instituting the liaison model, 37% of pregnant and parenting females served by the School Based Health Center dropped out, vs. 27% of the pregnant and parenting females in 2011–2012, when the liaison model was implemented.
- Of the 10 males served in year one, only one left school, an astonishing retention rate of 90%.
- Thirteen percent of all teens who gave birth in 2009 in Massachusetts had already given birth at least once before. Nineteen percent of all teen mothers nationally will have another birth before they turn twenty. The percentage of repeat pregnancy at CHS was only 2% during the 2011–2012 school year.

Several data points serve as reminders that expectant and parenting students are at higher risk for dropping out:

- While the general CHS student body had an average of 11 absences and 18 tardies by April 13, 2012, expectant and parenting students had an average of 21 absences and 25.5 tardies by the same time in the school year.
- The annual dropout rate at CHS for males and females in 2010–2011 was 5.8%, while it was 24% for Christine’s combined cohort of expectant and parenting males and females (and 27% among her pregnant and parenting females).

* These savings are in government benefits and incarceration costs associated with individuals who drop out versus those who graduate or attain a GED in Massachusetts.
Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The year one success story of Chelsea High School’s expectant and parenting student liaison should compel policymakers, school administrators, advocates and funders to pursue means to sustain the position in Chelsea and replicate this intervention in other high schools.

Policy Recommendations

1. Massachusetts should initiate grants, awarded through competitive bid, for other high schools to pilot expectant and parenting student liaisons. We recommend that priority be given to communities with higher teen birth rates and Boston because of its large number of births to teens (see chart below).

2. Districts must designate Title IX coordinators to ensure pregnant and parenting students are regularly and consistently informed of Title IX protections as stated by the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice. We recommend that priority be given to communities with higher teen birth rates and Boston because of its large number of births to teens (see chart below).

3. If districts implement the graduation coach model, coaches should be trained to support expectant and parenting students and be well suited to facilitate linkages with community based organizations.

Massachusetts’ education system is a pillar of excellence for the nation, yet in the 2010–2011 school year, nearly 3% of our youth dropped out. We know that expectant and parenting students make up a quarter of young people who are leaving school and we have a research-based solution with promising results. We must bring to bear the tools at our disposal. The welfare of our youth, their children and the success of our education system for generations to come are at stake.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2009 Rank by Birth Rate</th>
<th>Municipality</th>
<th>Number of Births in 2009</th>
<th>Birth Rate in 2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Holyoke</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>96.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Lawrence</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>79.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Chelsea</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>76.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Springfield</td>
<td>438</td>
<td>72.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>New Bedford</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>58.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Lynn</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>55.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>521</td>
<td>26.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We know that expectant and parenting students make up a quarter of young people who are leaving school and we have a research-based solution with promising results.
Notes


3. Chelsea High School (CHS) student outcomes data were produced by the expectant and parenting student liaison from CHS's student data tracking system and from files maintained by the expectant and parenting student liaison and School Based Health Center (SBHC) nurse practitioner. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education dropout rate formula as it appears here: Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education. (2011). High School Dropouts 2010–2011 Massachusetts Public Schools. Retrieved from http://www.doe.mass.edu/infoservices/reports/dropout/1011/summary.pdf was used.

4. Information was acquired through conversations, which occurred between May and October 2012, with the expectant and parenting student liaison at Chelsea High School.

5. Chelsea High School (CHS) student outcomes data were produced by the expectant and parenting student liaison from CHS's student data tracking system and from files maintained by the expectant and parenting student liaison and SBHC nurse practitioner.


14. Chelsea High School (CHS) student outcomes data were produced from CHS's student data tracking system and from files maintained by the expectant and parenting student liaison and SBHC nurse practitioner.


16. Chelsea High School student outcomes data were produced from CHS's student data tracking system and from files maintained by the expectant and parenting student liaison and SBHC nurse practitioner.


“Pregnancy and subsequent birth of a child can be a point in any person’s life when they choose to prioritize their lives in a new way. For adults, this often means managing their household finances in a new way, getting healthier or working on their relationship with their partner. Young people facing a pregnancy and encroaching parenthood often go through a similar thought process and many young people who were unsure about their commitment to education might re-engage more willingly. As educators, we can choose whether to view pregnancy as an inevitably negative turning point for a student — What about their college plans? How can they do this to themselves? — or we can see it as an opportunity to engage with them in a new way with heightened stakes and a new source of motivation.”

— Christine Kidd, Expectant and Parenting Student Liaison, CHS