

Making the Connection...

TEEN PREGNANCY AND EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

We all want young people in South Carolina to succeed in school so they can go on to thrive as adults. Unfortunately, becoming pregnant (or getting a partner pregnant) makes it hard for teens to do their best in school. Preventing teen pregnancy is one important way of making sure that teens have the opportunity to achieve success in school. Conversely, school failure and disconnection from school are important risk factors for becoming pregnant as a teen.¹ Helping teens get involved and succeed in school can reduce the likelihood of teen pregnancy.

SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT

- Youth who are not engaged in school are more likely to engage in risky behaviors that can lead to teen pregnancy.
- Teens who are engaged in school become sexually active later and are less likely to become pregnant in their teens, while students who drop out of school are more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviors and become pregnant.²

IN SOUTH CAROLINA...

- Many teens are engaging in risky behaviors. On the 2009 Youth Risk Behavior Survey³:
 - 53% of high school students reported they had ever had sexual intercourse and 39% reported they had sex within the last three months. Among the students who were currently sexually active, 40% did not report using a condom the last time they had sex, and 19% reported they drank or used drugs before having sex.

- 69% of high school students report ever drinking alcohol, and 18% reported binge drinking (5 or more drinks of alcohol at a time) within the last 30 days.
- 39% of high school students report ever using marijuana, and 19% reported using a prescription drug without a doctor's prescription.
- A small proportion of students report they are failing in school. 7% of high school students described their grades as mostly D's or mostly F's.³

DROP-OUT

- One study found that only 51% of young women who became mothers as teens got their high school degree by the age of 22. The same study showed that 89% of young women who were not teen parents had gotten their degree.⁴
- Teen pregnancy can directly contribute to young women dropping out of school. One study found that 30% of teen girls identified pregnancy or parenting as a reason for dropping out of school.⁵

IN SOUTH CAROLINA...

- The state has one of the lowest high school graduation rates in the country. Only 59% of students entering 9th grade in the 2003-2004 school year graduated from high school within four years. Across the United States, 74% of students graduated during the same time period.⁶

CHILDREN OF TEEN MOTHERS

- When entering kindergarten, children of teen mothers scored lower on reading and math assessments than children of mothers in their twenties.⁷
- Children of teen mothers are less likely to graduate from high school than children born to mothers who are 20 or 21.⁸

IN SOUTH CAROLINA...

- In 2008, 21% of children in kindergarten were assessed as not being ready for the first grade. During that school year, 5% of students failed first grade, 2.5% failed second grade, and 1.5% failed third grade. By the third grade, 16% of students were behind the grade level for their age.⁹

FOCUSING ON PREVENTION

Rates of teen pregnancy are increasing in South Carolina. From 1997 – 2003, teen pregnancy rates decreased by 22%. However, this downward trend reversed and between 2004 and 2007, the rate of teen pregnancy in South Carolina increased by 10% from 33.1 to 36.5 (per 1,000 girls).¹⁰ Given the close links between teen pregnancy and educational achievement, this increase gives cause for concern to everyone who cares about education in South Carolina.

Schools can play an important part in preventing pregnancy among their students in a number of ways. Striving to engage all students and intervening early with those at risk of dropping out can help students avoid a variety of problems, including teen pregnancy. In addition, schools can provide comprehensive health education using research proven approaches to teen pregnancy prevention designed to build the

knowledge, attitudes and skills that students need to avoid risky sexual behaviors. Schools can also reach out to teens who are pregnant or parenting to provide them the assistance they need to stay in school and avoid becoming pregnant again before they complete their education. By preventing teen pregnancy, more South Carolina young people will have the chance to complete their education and reach their goals.

SOURCES

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