

# **Pregnant & Parenting Teens**

## **Education Laws & Rights**

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# What Is Title IX?

Did you know that Title IX is a law referring to sex discrimination, ensuring that all students will not be discriminated and will be entitled to receive a free and appropriate education?

“Title IX states that a recipient of federal funding 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, childbirth, false pregnancy, termination of pregnancy, or recovery therefrom, unless the student requests voluntarily to participate in a separate portion of the program”(Pillow, 2006).

Schools may violate this law by denying the parent or pregnant teen an excused absence for pregnancy related doctor’s appointments, refusing to accept make up work, excluding them from school activities, or pushing the option of career and technical schools. These are all illegal and yet they occur in schools and contribute to increased rates of dropout.

# Who Qualifies for a Section 504 Plan?

To qualify a student for Section 504 Plans:

A student must be determined, as a result of an evaluation, to have a “physical or mental impairment” that “substantially limits one or more major life activities.” 29 USC 705(20)(b).

# Case Studies: Without & With School Supports

## **Without School Supports:**

Alyssa is a 17 year old student who is in her junior year of high school and is due to have her first baby this summer. She is hoping to return to school for her senior year but is not sure if she will be able to.

Alyssa has made an appointment in the guidance office to speak with someone about her return to school and the scheduling of her classes. The only support she gets is that they will “try” to get her core classes scheduled for the afternoon. Alyssa feels overwhelmed and her baby hasn’t even arrived yet so she is deciding to stay home and “maybe” return to school after the baby is born.

The school suggests home schooling for the first few months and also lets her know that she will need a parent or guardian to sign her out of school if she is choosing to withdrawal from the school.

This is a classic case that happens too often because school staff members are too busy and unwilling to modify and adjust to help support and motivate pregnant teens in their districts.

As a school leader, you can help ensure that your staff are aware of this ongoing dilemma by providing training that addresses how to work with teens to effectively increase graduation rates rather than contribute to dropout rates.

## **With School Supports:**

Amber is a 16 year old sophomore who is pregnant with her first child. Amber is planning on staying in school and is working on making a plan to return after her baby is born.

Amber has made an appointment with her guidance counselor and transition coordinator. They have decided that for the first two months or 8 weeks, Amber will be home schooled. This means that she will have a teacher come to the house for about two hours a day and prep her on the current assignments in her core courses. After the initial 8 weeks, Amber will return to school and have a schedule that is adaptive in such that her core courses will be scheduled for the morning but she will be able to meet with each teacher individually to work out due dates and assignments if she is late or misses any days due to her parenting responsibilities.

Amber feels confident in her abilities to do the work as both a mother and a student. She is successful and graduates with the help and support of the school staff and faculty.

# How You Can Help

A pregnant teen should be able to talk and meet with school staff, who are the staff that could help?

**School nurse, school counselor, transition coordinator, social worker, teacher...**

School leaders can create a plan and have staff trained to help pregnant teens. Here are a few ideas that staff can help with:

**Create a schedule that is adaptable for the teen, make a back-up plan, home schooling, or find a staff/teacher mentor.**

The goal of the district is (or should be) to help pregnant and parenting teens “stay in school”.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## **Can Schools send pregnant teens to another school just because they are pregnant?**

No, unless the teen asks or agrees upon the change it has to be a voluntary process to change the place of their education.

\*\*\*Schools can lose funding if they discriminate\*\*\*

## **Can a pregnant teen have a 504 Plan?**

Yes a pregnant teen can have a 504 plan if they are having pregnancy related complications that are effecting their ability to attend school and complete the work.

## **How many excused absences can a pregnant or parenting teen have?**

There is no specific number of excused absences, it is up to the discretion of the principals and teachers to determine the excuse and evidence of the excuse. Then present it to the school board for more specific procedures.

# Annotated Bibliography

Bunting, C. (2007). Principals as classroom leaders. *Principal*, 39-41.

This article describes simple steps that principals can take to help their staff grow. The author, Carolyn Bunting is a former teacher educator and public school administrator, and is now an educational writer and consultant. She lists five simple steps that principals or school leaders can take to indirectly help teachers learn and grow. The schedule and time constraints of school leaders are well known. This article describes some ways in which school leaders can efficiently help their staff. The steps can help leader's link ideas and opportunities to conduct and support their staff without having to be in the classroom.

Miller, B. C., Bayley, B. K., Christensen, M., Leavitt, S. C., & Coyl, D.D. (2006).

Adolescent pregnancy and child bearing. In G.R. Adams & M.D. Berzonsky (Eds.), *Blackwell handbook of adolescence* (pp. 415-449). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

The authors Gerald Adams and Michael Berzonsky created this volume by bringing leading psychologists together and giving an overview of adolescent development. Gerald Adams is a Professor of Family Relations and Human Development at the University of Guelph in Ontario. Michael Berzonsky is a Professor of Psychology at the State University of New York at Cortland. This chapter refers to the many issues and



concepts that teens experience while pregnant and making decisions of keeping, aborting, or considering adoption of their baby. Teen pregnancy rates and trends are discussed as well as peer relationships, family relationships and individual influences. The authors discuss relevant information found from case studies and data from research relating to pregnant teens. Prevention and intervention efforts can reduce the risks of pregnancy among adolescents. Some prevention and intervention efforts are family involvement, positive parent-child relationships, positive peer influences, and education. Information provided in this chapter will help ensure that school leaders are aware of the research documented to support pregnant teens and their mental health within the school environment.

Pillow, W. (2006). Teen pregnancy and education: Politics of knowledge, research, and practice. *Educational Policy, 20*(1), 59-84.

The author Wanda Pillow is an associate professor in the Department of Educational Policy at the University of Illinois. She discusses many important key points about the policy and rights of students who are pregnant or parenting under Title IX. Title IX states no student shall be discriminated upon and that an equal education must be provided. The article discusses the laws and politics of educating pregnant and mothering teens. The author argues for the rights and laws to be changed and until they are changed even under Title IX pregnant teens will not get the education they are entitled to.

Romo, L. R., & Nadeem, E. (2007). School connectedness, mental health, and well-being of adolescent mothers. *Theory into Practice, 46*(2), 130-137.

This article was written by Laura Romo and Erum Nadeem. Laura is an assistant professor at Gevirtz Graduate School of Education in the state of California. Erum Nadeem has a Ph.D and is a postdoctoral fellow at School of Public Health and Health Services Research Center in Los Angeles, California. This article describes risk factors of adolescent mother's mental health and needs for social support. Adolescent mothers are at a high risk for suffering from several types of psychological distress. Identifying these needs and interventions can make a difference in the mental health of these adolescences. The article identifies social supports such as using a school nurse to communicate and educate the adolescent. The school can provide this type of support to help build positive mental health for pregnant or parenting teens. School leaders can create programs within their schools to help support social development among pregnant adolescence.

Rooney, J. (2008). What do we believe? *Educational Leadership*, 88-90.

This article discusses the role of leadership and what roles a leader should have when directing those around him or her. Joanne Rooney is the author and is the codirector of the Midwest Principals Center in Illinois. She discusses the principal's position as the main focus in this article and suggests looking beyond the checklist of things to do and implementing more strategies. By networking with other leaders and brainstorming ideas for schools, principals can encourage their staff to try new things and ideas by setting this model. School leaders can use this information to begin building programs in their schools and getting their staff to help and support the cause.

Weissberg, R. P., Kumpfer, K. L., & Seligman, M. P. (2003). Prevention that works for children and youth. *American Psychologist*, 58(6/7), 425-432.

The authors of this article have collaborated with their psychology and health promotion backgrounds to promote strength and resilience among young people. The percentages of young people with mental health problems are a focus as well as the percentages of those who do not receive any treatment. Pregnant and parenting teens may suffer from mental health problems and can benefit from social supports within the schools.

Prevention is a key focus in this article, well-coordinated research based strategies can be used to resolve or reduce issues among young people. The information in this article can inform school leaders about strategies and programs that can be implemented in their schools.