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## SUMMARY OF POLICY IMPLICATIONS

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This policy paper addresses how to strengthen school-based efforts for adolescent parents and their children so that they can be more effective in meeting the needs and improving outcomes of these young families. Based on the experience and lessons of a six-year effort - the Initiative to Strengthen School-Based Programs for Adolescent Parents and Their Young Children - funded by several national foundations<sup>1</sup> and administered by the Center for Assessment and Policy Development (CAPD), this document addresses several specific challenges faced by school-based programs. These challenges include:

- Making teen parents and their children visible;
- Helping the education system work for teen parents and their children;
- Providing critical services and supports to teen parents and their children;
- Linking schools with TANF services and resources; and
- Providing services to all teen parents, both non-TANF and TANF.

While this paper highlights innovative solutions to these challenges from the field, the major focus is on identifying policy changes - at the community, state and federal levels and those appropriate to private funders - that would allow programmatic solutions to be more broadly implemented. Pulling together these policy implications across each of the challenge areas reveals a rich array of possibilities that would strengthen school-based programs for adolescent parents and their children. These implications are summarized below.

### **Summary of Policy Implications to Strengthen School-Based Programs for Adolescent Parents and Their Children**

#### ***Making teen parents and their children visible***

- TANF, schools, health and social service agencies should regularly calculate rough estimates of teen parents and their children in planning service delivery sites and approaches, including outreach.
- Other funding programs should require estimates of the numbers of teen parents and their children and the priority that will be given to teen parents and the children of teen parents in applications and program plans.
- Requirements for identifying and ensuring adequate support for minor parents should be enacted into law and resources provided for carrying out assigned agency responsibilities.
- There should be centralized responsibility for teen parents within schools.
- The public, school staff and other provider agencies should be made more familiar with the rights of parenting adolescents to educational opportunities through public schools under Title IX and the availability of subsidized child care available through TANF and other sources to support school attendance.

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**Summary of Policy Implications (cont.)**

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***Helping the education system work for teen parents and their children***

- The protections that Title IX affords pregnant and parenting students should be broadly promoted as a matter of district policy to students, parents, community members, school staff, administrators and school board members.
- School districts should seek to balance resources and priorities between enhanced services for adolescent parents within comprehensive high schools and stand-alone alternatives.
- Districts should commit core school district funds for the development and implementation of alternative instruction methodologies and other innovative educational approaches for at-risk students within mainstream schools.
- Replication packages and other information on alternative instructional methodologies and other educational interventions appropriate for at-risk students should be made available so that local school districts have access to information on new strategies for at-risk students.
- Districts should balance the goal of high school graduation for teen parents with realistic assessment of both student educational needs and status and community options for GED completion.
- TANF resources should be used to build the capacity of schools to address the needs of parenting students as well as support an array of educational options for teen parents in the broader community. Options could include but not be limited to community colleges and other community-based educational programs.
- Centralized responsibility for teen parents within school districts should extend to the young children of teen parents, and link with the district's efforts in the area of early childhood development and school readiness.

***Providing critical services and supports to teen parents and their children***

- Community service providers - especially those charged with supporting early child development - need to consider schools as an important potential site for delivering services to, or at least reaching, parenting teens and their children.
- Public and private funding of community provider agencies, including early childhood service providers, should include requirements to implement strategies that link with school-based programs for teen parents and their children.
- Flexible funding streams should be developed (similar to those in California and Florida) that can pay for comprehensive coordinated case management services for all parenting students and their children, regardless of eligibility for public assistance or other means-tested benefits.
- Funding and technical assistance should be provided to support the development of a community system for case management, including standards of practice and accountability systems.
- Additional support for the dissemination of information and staff training on effective practices in working with teen parents and their children should be part of public and private funders' agenda in the areas of family strengthening, economic self-sufficiency and early child development.

***Linking schools with TANF services and resources***

- Plans for the implementation of TANF should address the special needs and circumstances of parenting teen recipients.
- Local TANF agencies and school districts should develop joint procedures for identifying parenting teen TANF recipients and referring them to appropriate educational programs.
- TANF funds should be used to support the development of school capacity to effectively educate teen parents and to link teen parents and their children with community services.

Summary of Policy Implications (cont.)

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***Providing services to all teen parents, both non-TANF and TANF***

- State TANF policies and regulations should allow and in fact encourage support to non-TANF as well as TANF teen parents as a welfare prevention strategy.
- In allocating other public funds for support services such as child care subsidies, case management and parenting education, community agencies or boards should place high priority on teen parents and the children of teen parents.
- States should enact and fund legislation to provide additional resources to school districts based on the number of teen parents and children of teen parents served through schools.
- State funding should also support the provision of technical assistance to local districts on how to build effective school-based programs, including development of a range of educational options.

**Taking the Next Step: A Broad Community-Wide Strategy for Young Families**

The experience of the Initiative also supports the need for a broader, community-wide strategy - one that creates a coordinated plan and builds a comprehensive system for teen parents and their children. School-based programs will be a necessary and major component of such a broad strategy, but their efforts must

be complemented by community-based programs and services. These will be required not only to reach older teen mothers whose educational and other needs cannot be effectively met in school-based programs, but particularly to ensure that teen fathers and the children of teen parents are adequately served.

Such a community-wide strategy must come from not a single institution or agency, but from a coalition of public and private organizations that touch the lives of young families. In most communities now, there is no one entity within a community with responsibility for ensuring that teen parents and their children get off to a good start as individuals and as a family unit, and there is generally no place where all the systems can come together to develop a coordinated and comprehensive strategy. Instead, there are many agencies and organizations, including schools, with a piece of that responsibility.

Creating a framework for collaboration among public agencies, private providers and schools toward a common agenda on behalf of teen parents and their children will be difficult. Yet we feel that is the necessary next step, if we want to go beyond the efforts of individual school- and community-based programs to a strategy that builds strong young families for the future. Therefore, we end this policy document with a brief discussion of the likely products of such a strategy, and of what it will take to make such a strategy a reality.