

Maryland's Model Policy to Support the Educational and Parenting Goals and Improve the Educational Outcomes of Pregnant and Parenting Students

Introduction and Background

While according to the National Vital Statistics Report (2021), the US teen birth rate has been declining since 1991, it is still substantially higher than in other western industrialized nations with unique racial/ethnic and geographic disparities. Pregnancy and birth are significant contributors to high school dropout rates among girls with only about 50% of teen mothers receiving a high school diploma by age 22. The National Women's Law Center and the National Campaign report that less than 2% of teen mothers obtain their college degree by age thirty and only two thirds of children born to teen mothers earned a high school diploma, compared to 81% of children born to older parents. Challenges for teen mothers include finding daycare and transportation for their child so the mom can stay in school, finding money for childcare, and the need to advocate for their rights as defined in Title IX. Often young mothers face discrimination, inflexible school policies, and other barriers that make it difficult for them to remain in school.

This model policy addresses several of the pressures identified in the *Let Her Learn: Stopping School Pushout for Girls who are Pregnant or Parenting*, study conducted by the National Women's Law Center in 2017. Issues such as punitive absence policies, the need for accommodations in school, homebound instruction policies, unequal alternative learning environments, support for childcare, and transportation create significant challenges for teen mothers. In a Briefing paper created by the Texas Comprehensive Center in 2019, the following key points were identified: teenage parents who receive support from school-based services tend to remain in school more than those who receive no support, and teen hopes for a complete education without stigma and school-based challenges must be supported by modified policies and procedures to support them. Like all parents, teen parents aspire to a better life for their children and want to remain in school to complete their education. Removing barriers to education through school policies will help in meeting that goal.

In their document, *Pregnant and Parenting Students: Supporting Academic Success through Title IX*, the National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education recommended that the Department of Education develop a comprehensive plan for providing technical assistance in protecting the Title IX rights of pregnant and parenting students. Providing a state level model policy serves to provide such technical assistance. The policy should clearly explain that absences related to pregnancy must be excused and that the students should be given a reasonable amount of time to make up missed work. These absences should include excused absences due to the illness or medical appointments of a student's child. Policies must also provide flexible options for pregnant and parenting students, credit recovery options, as well as anti-discrimination provisions, academic rigor, logistical support, and resources for programs to support pregnant and parenting students. All of these components are included in the Maryland Model policy.

In accordance with the provisions of Section §4-139 of the Education Article, Annotated Code of Maryland - *Maryland's Model Policy to Support the Educational and Parenting Goals and Improve the Educational Outcomes of Pregnant and Parenting Students*, the US Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, *Title IX Supporting the Academic Success of Pregnant and Parenting Teens*, and based on the review of literature and research, the Maryland State Department of Education has developed and adopted the following Model Policy to address educational and parenting goals and to improve the educational outcomes of pregnant and parenting students. Coupled with the earlier provisions of §7-301.1 of the Education Article, *Education-Pregnant and Parenting Students*, which took effect July 1, 2017, this policy requires schools to excuse, as a lawful absence, any pregnancy or parenting related conditions, and to allow pregnant and parenting students to make up work. Local school systems are also required to develop a written attendance policy for pregnant and parenting students in accordance with these requirements to be published on the school system's website. The provisions of §4-139 added the requirement for each high school to designate a private lactation space in the school with specified requirements, and excuse absences from a class due to the use of a lactation space to nurse or express breast milk. It also required schools to designate at least one staff member to connect to the extent practicable, pregnant and parenting students with resources to find safe, affordable, and reliable childcare, early education services, and transportation services to and from school.

Directions for Local School Systems

The provisions of Chapter 346 of the Education Article, Annotated Code of Maryland - *Maryland's Model Policy to Support the Educational and Parenting Goals and Improve the Educational Outcomes of Pregnant and Parenting Students*, which took effect July 1, 2021, requires local school systems to add supports to their current policy for pregnant and parenting teens. Based on the MSDE Model policy, each local school system must update and publish their policy to reflect the changes to the legislation by June 1, 2022. Each local school system must provide evidence of the model policy, training, and policy published in the student handbook to the MSDE on a form provided by the MSDE by June 1, 2022.

The MSDE developed this document to provide a model policy for use by local school systems as they create their required policy to support the educational and parenting goals and improve the educational outcomes of pregnant and parenting students. Included with the policy document is a reference to guidance components required by Section 7-301.1 of the Education Article, *Education-Pregnant and Parenting Students*, which took effect July 1, 2017.