



Photo courtesy of Eulada Watt, Teenage Parent Services

Pregnant Teenagers

Their Education is Suffering

by *Susan M. Presti and Blanche Glimps*

"The people have a right to the privilege of education, and it is the duty of the State to guard and maintain that right."

Article I, Section 15,
North Carolina Constitution

Ayana, a 15-year-old, is on the honor roll at her North Carolina high school. Like most tenth graders, she is interested in dances, records, and boys. Yet Ayana is different. In 1979, she became pregnant and decided to have and keep her baby.

Ayana stayed in school even though it was very hard for her. She was the brunt of teasing, and she was afraid of being injured when everyone rushed through the halls between classes. "I felt so different from everyone else in school," she remembers.

Fortunately, Ayana had access to a special school for pregnant girls in a North Carolina city. She attended that school during her pregnancy and the school quarter following her delivery. Back in her old school, she faces new difficulties as a stu-

dent and a mother. "Friends treat me like a married woman," says Ayana. Her best friend's parents refuse to let the two girls see each other. Meanwhile, Ayana is having trouble keeping up her grades and is beginning to doubt she will be able to attend college.¹

Pregnant adolescents must suddenly move from being a dependent to being a provider, a leap which carries with it enormous stress. Nationally, in 1979, 1.1 million teenagers became pregnant, and 554,000 — like Ayana — chose to have and keep their baby. The majority of teenage mothers never receive a high school diploma, and many end up at an unskilled job or on welfare. Nine percent of teenage mothers attempt suicide (seven times higher than other female adolescents), and teenage mothers abuse their children at a rate 100 times

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higher than that of the general population.² The high dropout rate among pregnant teens and the consequences for the mother, the child, and society suggest, as psychologist Kristen Moore puts it, that "programs aimed at assisting young mothers to complete high school are a good investment for the government as well as the individual."³

Such programs can range from special counseling and instruction to utilizing community health resources for new parents. A flexible curriculum and homebound services around delivery time are important, as is the option of an alternative school with day care facilities. "These young girls need special instruction and counseling to learn methods of infant care, to understand child development and the importance of the mother-infant relationship," says Shirley Willis, director of the Durham Cooperative School for pregnant girls.⁴

Few dispute the idea that a pregnant student's physical, emotional, and educational needs are different from those of a nonpregnant student. Yet determining ways to meet those needs is another matter. In 1977, the General Assembly passed legislation, known as the Creech Bill,⁵ which guarantees exceptional children access to special services they need in order to continue their education. Pregnant students were explicitly included in the definition of "children with special needs." Yet four years later, officials within the State Department of Public Instruction (DPI) still maintain that DPI does not have responsibility for insuring that pregnant students receive special services nor has the General Assembly appropriated any funds for this purpose.

At a time of fiscal austerity in government, the educational needs of pregnant teenagers are a low priority. In a period of intense scrutiny of inter-governmental relationships, adolescent mothers seem to be the victims of a reluctance by state administrators to provide guidance to local school districts on this issue. The fiscal crunch and the lack of leadership at the state level have resulted in thousands of North Carolina teenagers missing out on the lofty promise of Article I of the state Constitution, "the right to the privilege of education."

No clear data exist on the number of pregnancy-related dropouts in North Carolina. The DPI collects figures on the number of school dropouts in the state, but it does not break them down by race, sex, or reason for leaving school. Even so, it does seem clear that pregnancy is a major factor in a girl's decision to quit school. Indeed, until recently, many public schools in North Carolina routinely expelled girls when the school administrators discovered they were pregnant. A 1969 survey of

selected districts indicated that most schools required pregnant girls to withdraw during some stage of their pregnancy.⁶

In 1970, DPI reported that 22,000 babies were born annually to teen mothers in the state and that pregnancy was responsible for a large number of the young mothers permanently terminating their education. In 1980, the Department of Human Resources reported 16,725 births to teen mothers in North Carolina. Then in 1981, the Legislative Research Commission on Public School Dropouts cited pregnancy, marriage, and lack of child care as important factors that increase the dropout rate.⁷

Since the 1970 DPI report, state officials and educational advocates have been working in various ways to address the needs of pregnant teenagers. The DPI report recognized "the need to create a humane and constructive concern for these school-age pregnant girls," and recommended that "an opportunity be provided to the school-age pregnant girls for further education."⁸ In response to this report, on February 4, 1971, the State Board of Education approved a policy statement encouraging continued education for pregnant students and directing DPI, in conjunction with local educational agencies, to provide appropriate educational services for such students. Despite the State Board of Education's directive, however, DPI did little to address this issue.

In 1973, the North Carolina United Way convened a task force to examine the problem pregnancies. The group recommended that every pregnant girl be permitted to remain in her school of record or to attend an alternative school and that family life education curricula be developed for grades kindergarten-12 as a means of preventing problem pregnancies. Then in 1974, the General Assembly addressed the issue through the Equal Educational Opportunity Act, which recognized that "tremendous public interest exists to seek ways of more effectively rendering a beneficial service to all of our children, and especially those who have special needs."⁹ The act included pregnancy in its definition of special needs; for the first time North Carolina law specifically protected the right of pregnant students to continue their education.

Meanwhile, national legislators were also addressing the rights of teenage mothers. In the Education Amendments of 1972, the U.S. Congress adopted Title IX, which prohibited any school that receives federal monies from discriminating on the basis of sex.¹⁰ Title IX thus forbade discrimination on the basis of pregnancy or marriage. Then in 1975, Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142), which established guidelines for guaranteeing educational services to exceptional

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children and stipulated that, in order to receive federal monies for such services, states would have to follow these guidelines.

To comply with the new federal guidelines, in 1977 the General Assembly passed the Creech Bill, which guarantees all children with special needs between the ages of 5 and 18 the right to a "free appropriate publicly supported education." While the federal law which prompted the Creech Bill did not explicitly include pregnancy under the category of "special needs," the Creech Bill did:

The term "children with special needs" includes, without limitation, all children between the ages of five and 18 who because of permanent or temporary mental, physical or emotional handicaps need special education, are unable to have all their needs met in a regular class without special education or related services, or are unable to be adequately educated in the public schools. It includes those who are mentally retarded, epileptic, learning disabled, cerebral palsied, seriously emotionally disturbed, orthopedically impaired, autistic, multiply handicapped, *pregnant*, hearing-impaired, speech-impaired, blind or visually impaired, genetically impaired, and gifted and talented. (*emphasis added*)¹¹

The Creech Bill required special services for those persons who fall within the categories just named. Major provisions of the act required: 1) the State Board of Education to develop a plan for the implementation of the legislation; 2) local educational agencies (LEAs) to either offer special educational services for children with special needs or purchase such services from other agencies; 3) the LEAs to prepare annual individualized education programs (IEPs) for

every child with special needs in the district; and 4) the DPI to monitor the effectiveness of the IEPs.¹²

The Division of Exceptional Children within the Department of Public Instruction is the state agency responsible for fulfilling the mandate of the Creech Bill. In its *Rules Governing Programs and Services for Children with Special Needs*, the Division identifies pregnant girls with special needs as those who, "because of their pregnancy, require special education and/or related services other than that which can be provided through regular education services."¹³ The *Rules* go on to describe "a continuum of programs and services available to children with special needs," including hospital/home services for those expected to be confined for four weeks or more for treatment or convalescence. Homebound students are "to be given instructions based on their individual needs from three to five hours per week unless prohibited for medical reasons."

The *DPI Rules* suggest that virtually all pregnant students are eligible for homebound services during the period surrounding their delivery. But in 1980, according to the reports of school principals throughout the state, only 10 percent of those students who were pregnant received special educational services. The principals reported 4,417 pregnancies in their schools. Of that total, 462 students received special services.

Thousands of pregnant teenagers did not receive special services in 1980, apparently in violation of the guarantees of the Creech Bill and of the *Rules* issued by DPI in 1979. But Ted Drain, director of the DPI's Division of Exceptional Children, disagrees with such an interpretation. "A child must be handicapped as well as pregnant

in order to qualify for special services under the legislation," says Drain.

In 1980 the Attorney General's Office issued an opinion which contested Drain's interpretation. It concluded: "In summary, a local school system has the same legal responsibility to a pregnant student as to any other child defined by law as a child with special needs."¹⁴

Other legal experts on the issue agree with the Attorney General's ruling rather than with Drain's position. "To qualify as a special needs child, a pregnant student must be both pregnant and unable to receive an adequate education in regular class unassisted by special education services," explains Bonnie Davis, assistant director of the Institute of Government. "But those are the only conditions the student must meet under the law. It simply does not square with the plain language of the statute to limit the condition of pregnancy as a qualifying condition to students who possess another special needs condition."¹⁵ According to Assistant to the Superintendent of Public Instruction Bill Peek, who helped draft the Creech Bill, the legislation guarantees that "to the degree the pregnant status has brought about needs, the pregnant girl should be receiving services."

Such opinions, though, have done little to change the posture of the Division of Exceptional Children. Barbara Conner, information specialist for the Division, states flatly, "I don't have anything to do with pregnant girls . . . [They] do not fall within the Division of Exceptional Children. They are not part of our jurisdiction. I don't understand the reasoning [for including them in the Creech Bill]."

The Division's interpretation seems to be dictated by monetary issues. Because pregnancy is not included under the federal special education legislation (PL 94-142), no federal monies are available to school districts for the provision of special services to these students. And despite the

passage of the Creech Bill, the General Assembly has never appropriated monies specifically for this purpose. Rather, the legislature appropriates a lump sum for special educational services. The Division of Exceptional Children "hasn't got enough money to take care of all the other children with special needs," says Dr. Minta Saunders, former assistant secretary for children in the Department of Human Resources, who has been involved in interagency efforts to coordinate health and educational services to pregnant girls.

In a needs assessment for the 1981-1983 biennium, the Division determined that an additional \$32 million would be required merely to provide services to the handicapped students it was then assisting. In its 1981-1983 expansion budget, DPI requested an extra \$31 million for the Division, but the Advisory Budget Commission rejected the request. In its appropriations bill for 1981-1983,¹⁶ the General Assembly did not increase the Division's budget (in real terms) from the previous biennium. If the Division expanded its special services clientele to include pregnant girls, it would further attenuate scant resources.

Since the state is not providing any funds to the schools specifically to serve the pregnant population, DPI "must be sure it doesn't usurp the prerogatives of the local schools," says Dudley Flood, director of Student Services within DPI. In other words, since it targets no money to local school systems for services to pregnant girls, the Department cannot make demands upon the localities to provide specific services to pregnant students. Hence, it is up to the localities to provide such services as they can — homebound services, extended day, special programs, and separate or alternative school programs.¹⁷ Consequently, the availabil-

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ity of these options varies from district to district. (See box for a description of two programs.)

The unevenness of these services at the local level has led many groups, including the Governor's Advocacy Council on Children and Youth, to press DPI to clarify its position on services for pregnant students and to provide more guidance to local school districts as to what their obligations are under the law. Bill Peek admits that the different interpretations of the Creech Bill may be sending mixed signals to the local education agencies (LEAs). "Our office may need to clarify the vibes that are going out on exceptional children," he says. "Further conversation needs to take place with regards to needs, who can provide them, and in what setting."

Local school administrators seem to agree with

Peek's assessment. In a 1981 survey, 59 percent of the state's local school administrators indicated that they would like to have state guidelines available to assist the local schools in developing services for pregnant students; 44 percent indicated there were no written policy guidelines from their local school boards for providing services to pregnant teens.¹⁸

Despite the lack of clear guidance from either state or local authorities, there have been some efforts to improve the coordination of services to pregnant teens. The most notable effort has been by the Department of Human Resources (DHR), which has a vested interest in services for pregnant girls since county health departments frequently provide pre- and postnatal care to pregnant teens. In 1980, DHR and DPI issued a "memorandum of

Alternative Schools

Some school districts in the state have developed alternate school programs to better meet the needs of pregnant students. A school for pregnant girls, for example, exists within the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system. The Greenville city school system operates a school for students with varying special needs, including pregnancy.

Teenage Parent Services (TAPS) has been operating since 1970 in Mecklenburg County. The county Department of Social Services and Board of Education coordinate the program, which is open to any pregnant student enrolled in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system. During the 1979-1980 school year, 419 students participated in the program. Usually, guidance counselors refer pregnant students to the TAPS program. Students who decide to enter the program remain in their home school until the end of the school quarter. They enter TAPS at the beginning of the new quarter and can remain there until the end of the quarter following the birth of their child.

The TAPS staff includes teachers, counselors, social workers, a psychologist, a media specialist, and a public health nurse, and its program offers a varied curriculum and multiple services. Along



Photo courtesy of Eulada Watt, Teenage Parent Services

"Career Day" at Teenage Parent Services (TAPS), a school for pregnant girls in Charlotte.

with basic academic and elective subjects (history, math, business, home economics, etc.), students can participate in workshops designed to meet the needs of pregnant girls. Workshop topics include anatomy and reproduction, sexuality, prenatal care, child care, reality counseling, and values clarification. Social workers and teachers make home visits together to talk with the students' families. The program also offers assistance in finding transportation to doctors' offices, securing child care, and filling out applications for voter registration and financial aid programs. In addition, all students receive a nutritious breakfast and lunch free of charge or at reduced cost.

TAPS conducts special activities throughout the year. A "Career Day" is held during which former TAPS students who have pursued advanced training return and share their professional experiences. Holidays and special events at the school provide an opportunity for families and boyfriends or husbands to interact with

agreement concerning the provision of services to pregnant school age girls/school age parents for the purpose of reducing infant deaths and improving infant health." In the memorandum, the agencies agreed to promote "local referral processes to ensure that all school age pregnant girls have access to continuing education and/or vocational training in addition to the necessary health and social services necessary to achieve the birth of healthy infants."

The memorandum, which was distributed to all local health departments and LEAs, outlines suggested measures for pursuing these goals, but according to Dr. Jimmie Rhyne, who heads DHR's Maternal and Child Health Branch, "It's up to the localities to try to implement the memo as best they can." Consequently, the services

available to a pregnant girl vary, depending upon where she lives in North Carolina. "In the larger urban areas, where there are quite a number of good programs in place, services are being utilized," says a DHR official. "But in the more rural areas, where there are fewer services regardless of what your problem is, there are fewer services for pregnant teens. Where you live in North Carolina makes a difference in terms of the services you get."

To address the unevenness of services throughout the state, some officials feel that the current law should be modified. Drain, the director of the Division of Exceptional Children, cites two reasons for eliminating pregnancy from the state's special education legislation and passing new legislation which would put pregnancy in a category

TAPS students and staff. A student newspaper, produced monthly, chronicles the events of the TAPS program.

Students strongly support TAPS. "The teachers are really concerned about you," commented one student. "They go along with the decisions you are trying to make, and help you with the goal you set for your life." Another said, "If you really don't know much about a baby, they teach you a lot." If TAPS were not available, the students feel that a similar program would have to be constructed in each high school within the city.

Students voice equally strong support for the Agnes Fullilove Community School (AFCS) in Greenville. "I like the program here - it helps you out as you help yourself," said one student. AFCS is an alternate school for a number of student subpopulations: pregnant girls, parents, employed persons, dropouts - "anybody who wants a high school diploma and doesn't want to be in the traditional high school," says Ann Harrison, director of exceptional children and pupil personnel for the Greenville City Schools. The AFCS Prenatal-Child Development program for pregnant girls offers free on-site day care facilities for students and staff. The nursery serves about five infants up to two years of age. Jane Poe-Eure, coordinator of the Prenatal-Child Development Program explains why the day-care service started: "We had girls who'd come to school every single day when they were pregnant, and after they had their babies, they dropped out. The real problem was after the pregnancy, not during." Martha McNair, who for the past two years has supervised the nursery on a salary provided by the county Council on Aging, says, "The nursery is really needed because some of these girls couldn't go to school

without it. They can't afford baby-sitters." The nursery doubles as a "child development laboratory" where the students learn basic infant care.

Pregnant students must remain in AFCS until the time of their delivery and are then allowed up to four weeks at home before returning. (Returning is optional, though the AFCS staff encourages teen mothers to continue their education.) During their time at home, they receive coursework geared towards adjustment to parenthood, combining such subjects as reading, biology, and consumer-oriented problems.

The AFCS staff also tries to provide vocational counseling and help identify job opportunities for students. Each senior must set specific goals for post-high school work. The staff aids students in filling out applications and practicing interviews, and also provides job counseling. Many graduates find steady jobs and "a lot of these girls go on to Pitt Community College," says Poe-Eure.

The AFCS program has demonstrated considerable success. In a follow-up study of 35 pregnant girls in the program, an East Carolina University graduate student found that 91 percent said the program helped them as a parent; 82 percent either graduated or were still continuing their education (and 45 percent indicated they would have dropped out if they had not had the option of AFCS); and only 8 percent had had a second child.* One graduate of the program says simply, "There are better chances over here." Another adds, "Most students would rather be here than in public schools." □

*Pamela D. Wilson, "Follow-up of 35 Pregnant School Girls Who Were Enrolled in the Prenatal-Child Development Program at Agnes Fullilove Community School," 1980 (unpublished).

separate from special education issues. First, it's not part of the federal law; second, he says that local school units have complained that individualized education programs (IEPs), nondiscriminatory assessments, and due process hearings (all guaranteed under the Creech Bill) are superfluous for pregnant students.

During the 1981 legislative session, Drain and others suggested the change described above, but it never crystallized into proposed legislation because of legislators' negative reactions to the idea of reconsidering the Creech Bill. Some legislators feared that in the current political atmosphere opening the Creech Bill to amendment would jeopardize special educational services to all handicapped students because various special interest groups would lobby to eliminate or include any number of groups.

As long as legislation was passed protecting the rights of pregnant students, eliminating pregnancy from the Creech Bill would not damage a pregnant girl's educational opportunities. In fact, new legislation — if it specified the services that should be provided for pregnant girls — might help such students by clarifying the services LEAs are required to provide to them. But some legislation guaranteeing their right to an education is essential. "Some principals would still throw out pregnant students if they could," says a DPI official.

Pregnant girls need special counseling, a flexible curriculum, homebound services around the time of their delivery, and the option of an extended day or alternative school program so they can continue their education while they are raising their child. But such services are not available to all pregnant students in North Carolina.

In the absence of any modification of the Creech Bill, the state needs to clarify its policy on services to pregnant students. "The commitment [in DPI] to do something for pregnant girls has been nebulous at best," says Student Services Director Flood. Unless DPI provides the LEAs with guidelines for protecting the rights of pregnant students through appropriate services, educational opportunities for these girls will remain limited, and North Carolina will continue to have large numbers of pregnant girls who will never complete their high school education.

Most pregnant teenagers in the state are not as fortunate as Ayana, who had a baby at age 15 and is struggling to finish high school. Having the special services available during her pregnancy and immediately after the delivery helped her to get her feet on the ground.

"My baby is here now and I love her," says Ayana. "Yet, I know I am much too young to be a mother. I would tell all young girls and boys not to get too involved with each other. If the feelings

you have for each other are true, they will be there when you both are older and can handle the consequences."

For thousands of teenagers, the kind of advice that Ayana offers will come too late. But that doesn't mean the right to an education has to be lost. Indeed, the wisdom and counsel of the framers of the Constitution must not be forgotten: "It is the duty of the State to guard and maintain that right." □

FOOTNOTES:

¹In 1980-1981, Dr. Blanche Glimps conducted a survey of pregnant teenagers and school administrators to determine the success of current policies and the need for new initiatives. The study was under the auspices of the Bush Institute for Child and Family Policy at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Ayana (not her real name) was one of the students interviewed.

²Studies cited in *Teenage Pregnancy in North Carolina: Better Choices for a Better Future*, Governor's Advocacy Council on Children and Youth, June 1980, p. 3.

³Kristen Moore, et.al., "Teenage Childbearing: Consequences for Women, Families, and Government Welfare Expenditures," unpublished paper presented at the 87th annual convention of the American Psychological Association, Sept. 1-5, 1979, New York.

⁴Shirley Willis, "The 'When' and the 'Why' of the Cooperative School for Teenage Pregnant Girls," a history of the Durham school for pregnant girls, 1975, p. 5.

⁵Chapter 927 of the 1977 Session Laws.

⁶Survey of 37 North Carolina local educational agencies on policies relating to pregnant girls, conducted by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools.

⁷Report to the 1981 General Assembly of North Carolina from the Legislative Research Commission on Public School Dropouts.

⁸Catherine C. Cooke, "Pregnant School Girls in North Carolina: A Problem for Education," N.C. Department of Public Instruction, 1970, p. 11.

⁹Chapter 1293 of the 1973 Session Laws, 2nd Session.

¹⁰P.L. 92-318.

¹¹G.S. 115C-109 (as recodified in Chapter 423 of the 1981 Session Laws).

¹²By 1980, according to the National Association of State Boards of Education, at least 15 states in addition to North Carolina guaranteed services to pregnant students through special education legislation.

¹³16 NCAC 2E .1501-.1540

¹⁴Opinion written by Kaye Webb, Assistant Attorney General, September 30, 1980.

¹⁵Letter from Bonnie Davis to Blanche Glimps, November 13, 1980.

¹⁶Chapter 859 of the 1981 Session Laws.

¹⁷Twenty percent of the female population in extended day programs is pregnant, according to Nurham Warwick, coordinator of education and work, Department of Public Instruction.

¹⁸Conducted as part of the survey described in footnote one.

Meeting the Needs of Pregnant Students and Teenage Parents

Below are five recommendations for the Department of Public Instruction which might help provide a more supportive educational environment for pregnant students and teenage parents in North Carolina.

1. Appoint a person to coordinate programs for pregnant students and school age parents and for interagency matters related to such programs.
2. Through the State Board of Education, develop a policy statement that encourages local boards of education to develop a systematic method of serving pregnant students and teenage parents in their districts.
3. Through the Division of Exceptional Children, revise its *Rules Governing Programs and Services for Children with Special Needs* to clarify how pregnant students are eligible to receive services for exceptional children.
4. Develop and implement procedures for determining the extent of pregnancy related dropouts within the state.
5. Solicit private and public funding to provide LEAs with money to support their efforts to develop programs for pregnant students and teenage parents.

Periodically, the Department of Public Instruction prepares official plans to address issues for which the Department has responsibility. It has not prepared a formal plan on the needs of pregnant students and teenage parents. Below is an outline of a plan which could be used to implement the recommendations listed above.

I. Position Statement

Pregnant students and teenage parents are a group with special needs. The State is concerned with providing an educational environment which addresses their needs. An educational environment for pregnant students and teenage parents should be conducive to the continual growth of these individuals.

II. Program Goals and Implementation Plan

- A. Goal: To decrease the incidence of school dropouts among pregnant students and teenage parents.

Plan: Make regular school and homebound services available to all pregnant students. Provide extended day, special schools, and special programs where possible, using local resources.

- B. Goal: To assist the student with understanding parenthood through courses on the subjects of pregnancy and childbirth, child development, and infant care.

Plan: Courses on child development, consumerism, sexuality, and decision-making should be available throughout the student's educational career.

- C. Goal: To utilize and coordinate existing local resources and to provide personal, academic, and vocational counseling to assist the students in assessing their present and future life directions.

Plan: The "Memorandum of Agreement" issued in 1980 by the Departments of Human Resources and Public Instruction should be fully implemented with regards to health, social, educational, and local referral processes. (See article for a full explanation of this memorandum.)

- D. Goal: To prevent the cycle of premature parenthood among school age students.

Plan: Local school districts introduce and/or expand an effective health education curriculum.*

III. Program Evaluation

The Principal's Annual Report form should be modified to include:

- A. Number of pregnant students in the school.
- B. Number of pregnant students receiving homebound services.
- C. Number of students referred to alternate school programs (including extended day).
- D. Number of pregnant students receiving other special educational services provided by the school.
- E. Number of pregnant students who dropped out of school.
- F. Number of students reentering school after having dropped out (in previous years) due to pregnancy.

*State law mandates such a program, but adequate funds have not been appropriated to meet the law's requirements (G.S. 115C-81[e]), the 1978 "Act to Establish a Statewide School Health Education Program Over a Ten-Year Period of Time," as recodified in Chapter 423 of the 1981 Session Laws).