The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) was first developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 1990 to assess the health risk behaviors of youth and adults in the United States. For the 2017 survey administration, two optional questions about homelessness were added to the survey, with 17 states responding to those optional questions. In 2019, 27 states responded to the optional questions. The 2021 standard questionnaire will, for the first time, include one question about homelessness. States will also have the opportunity to choose an additional optional question. SchoolHouse Connection analyzed demographic and risk factor data from the YRBS in 27 states [1], comparing high school students experiencing homelessness and those not experiencing homelessness. This series shares the striking and heartbreaking results of that analysis, with tangible action steps schools can take to promote safety and health for students experiencing homelessness.

For the 2019 YRBS, states and participating districts could choose to ask a question on the survey about becoming or getting someone pregnant: "How many times have you been pregnant or gotten someone pregnant?" SchoolHouse Connection's analysis of responses indicated that students experiencing homelessness were 10 times more likely to have become pregnant or gotten someone pregnant. [2] Additionally, students who have been pregnant or gotten someone pregnant were 10 times more likely to experience homelessness than students who had not been pregnant or gotten someone pregnant. These numbers vary based upon living situation and race/ethnicity:

- Students living in shelters were the most likely to have been pregnant or gotten someone pregnant - 40%, or 20x the rate of students living in their parent's or guardian's home.
- Overall, Hispanic/Latinx students experiencing homelessness were more likely to have been pregnant or gotten someone pregnant than students of other races and ethnicities.
- Students experiencing homelessness were also 12 times more likely than their housed peers to indicate they were not sure if they had been pregnant or gotten someone pregnant.

The YRBS utilizes a two-stage cluster sample design to generate a representative sample of high school students across various states. Schools were selected with probability proportional to school district enrollment size and representative classrooms were then randomly selected. Each state met the CDC requirement for overall response rate of at least 60% for using population weighted data. The weighting was adjusted for non-response rates and for students’ grades, gender, race, and ethnicity. More information about the sample procedure and weighting process, as well as the data that support the findings of this study, are available publicly on the CDC website. All analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Version 27 and R Studio 1.4.1103. All prevalence rates and tests of significance were calculated using weighted data.

Becoming pregnant or getting someone pregnant as a teenager has implications for both parent and child. Only 50% of teen mothers graduate high school by the age of 22. [3] Lack of a high school degree can lead to continued homelessness into young adulthood, particularly for young parents. The greatest single risk factor for young adult homelessness is lacking a high school diploma or GED, while the second risk factor is being a single parent. [4] These risks are exacerbated for youth of color. Further, the children of teen parents are more likely to drop out of high school, face health risks, interact with the justice system, and experience unemployment as a young adult. [5] Supporting students experiencing homelessness who become pregnant or have gotten someone pregnant carries the potential for two-generational impact.
STRATEGIES FOR SUPPORTING PREGNANT AND PARENTING STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

1. Provide Access to Medical Care

Healthy development begins while children are still in the womb. Providing access to routine medical care for young parents experiencing homelessness can promote healthy growth for children, and ensure risks associated with pregnancy are minimized. For unaccompanied homeless youth, many states have revised their laws to make sure these young people are able to access routine medical care, and many states have specific laws allowing minors to consent for prenatal care and care for their children. Programs like Maternal Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) and Early Head Start provide federal funding to local programs who offer support and care to parents and children, particularly those experiencing homelessness. DC Public Schools partners with area hospitals and medical providers to offer school-based health centers on seven high school campuses. Those centers offer family planning services, pregnancy testing, and prenatal care, as well as medical care for any children of enrolled high school students. Each health center also recognizes minor consent to medical care for students who qualify as unaccompanied homeless youth.

DID YOU KNOW?

Early Head Start provides services and learning opportunities for young children as well as support for pregnant women and fathers. In addition to facilitating access to healthcare, food assistance, and mental health care, Early Head Start programs also help pregnant women access emergency or transitional housing in some circumstances. Engaging young pregnant women experiencing homelessness is critical because it also allows for continuity of care when their child is born. Ensuring your local Early Head Start program includes the needs of young parents experiencing homelessness in their needs assessment is a first step in providing much-needed services.
2. Increase Identification and Support by Building Connections between McKinney-Vento and Title IX Programs

Title IX is a federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination based on sex, which includes protections for pregnant and parenting students. [6] These protections include excused absences due to pregnancy or childbirth, the opportunity to make-up any missed work; and requires colleges and universities to appoint a Title IX coordinator to work with pregnant and parenting students. Schools and districts can strengthen support for students experiencing homelessness who are pregnant or parenting by offering opportunities for McKinney-Vento and Title IX program administrators to connect. For example, school districts across New Mexico offer the Graduation, Reality, and Dual-Role Skills (GRADS) program for pregnant and parenting students. As part of their staff training, they invited McKinney-Vento district liaisons to participate and facilitated conversations that highlighted the intersections of both programs, along with strategies for utilizing both programs in order to meet student needs. The GRADS program has enjoyed an 82% graduation rate of their expecting and parenting students, well above the national average.

To find your local Title IX coordinator, click here.

To find your local McKinney-Vento liaison, click here.

3. Provide options for continuing and finishing high school education

Young parents in high school often experience multiple interruptions in their coursework on the path to a diploma. Homelessness makes staying in school even more difficult. Schools can help alleviate these competing demands by offering supports like flexible class scheduling, one-on-one counselors, and on-site child care. In Baltimore, Maryland, the United Way of Central Maryland created a Neighborhood Zone which includes a child care center inside of Benjamin Franklin High School, providing on-site child care for parents who are finishing their high school diploma. Importantly, the child care center is not a “drop and go;” staff work to build relationships with and engage both children and their student parents to ensure healthy development and support for both generations. As a result, 70% of student parents have graduated high school (compared to 50% nationally), 172 children have received high-quality, early childhood education, and 96% of children avoided a disruptive school transfer when their families were forced to move.
4. Remove barriers for enrolling in and completing postsecondary education

Fewer than 2% of teen mothers earn a college degree before age 30, and more than half of all parenting college students leave school without a degree. For young parents experiencing homelessness, accessing postsecondary opportunities can feel impossible. Understanding the application process, navigating financial aid that will be sufficient for a growing family, and ensuring housing that accommodates children are all priorities. Colleges and universities are responding to the needs of pregnant and parenting students experiencing homelessness in multiple ways:

- Increasing identification by partnering with Financial Aid to use the FAFSA to identify students under age 24 who have listed dependents and, therefore, might be parenting youth who are struggling to meet basic needs.
- Misericordia University provides furnished housing year-round for single mothers. In addition to providing housing, Misericordia also covers costs of textbooks, meal plans, medical needs, and laundry access for single mothers and even provides them the opportunity to study abroad. To learn more about Misericordia’s initiatives, watch our archived webinar here.
- Wilson College will cover the cost of child care for school age children at the YMCA.

RESOURCES

- Missed Opportunities: Pregnant and Parenting Youth Experiencing Homelessness in America (Chapin Hall)
- Helping Homeless Students Succeed in College: Strategies for Parenting Students (SchoolHouse Connection)
- School-Based Health Care Alliance

[1] AK, AR, CA, CO, CT, DE, HI, ID, IL, KS, KY, LA, ME, MD, MI, MT, NH, NM, NC, ND, PA, RI, SC, SD, VT, VA, WI
[2] These statistics were obtained by analyzing data from districts and states who included both a question about homelessness and a question about pregnancy on their survey, which limited the sample size to three districts and two states: Cleveland, OH; Eaton Consortium, MI; Genesee Consortium, MI; California; and Michigan. Two additional districts asked both questions, but their data was not available. Due to small sample size, these estimates may be statistically unreliable. However, based on other analyses of homeless students, it is likely that even with a larger sample size, these same trends would hold true.