



REDUCING UNINTENDED PREGNANCIES DURING THE COLLEGE YEARS - CREATING A STRATEGIC PLAN

Policy Priority: Increase college completion rates by reducing unintended pregnancy among 18 and 19 year old college age youth with the highest rates of teen pregnancy.

Overview of the problem: Eighteen and nineteen year old youth account for the highest rates of teenage pregnancy in Texas. Many of these pregnancies are unintended and happen at a critical time in a youth's life – when finishing high school or beginning college. Living on their own for the first time, young adults must make many important decisions that can impact their future. If these youth are graduating from high school with little education about healthy and safe sexual relations and how to prevent unintended pregnancy, they are at great risk. While parenting a child is a rewarding life experience, being young and unprepared for parenting can be economically and emotionally challenging as they begin their college years.

61% of female community college students who become pregnant during this time will not complete their college education and strain our state's financial resources by:

- Increasing the number of persons who will need public assistance of some kind in order to support their children, and
- Reducing the number of adults who are prepared to enter the workforce and contribute meaningfully to our state's economy.

Preventive health education and health care can give young adults the tools they need to make important life decisions, so that they can focus on college and career. Colleges and universities may assume that young adults enroll in higher education with a basic understanding of how to take care of themselves. However, many youth arrive at college without that knowledge. In this respect, higher education leaders can play a pivotal role in educating young adults, at a critical transition time in their lives, about how to be safe, how to be healthy, and sometimes, how to prevent an unintended pregnancy.

In a poll of registered voters conducted by Basalice & Associates in late November 2016:

- 85% of respondents favored initiatives and programs that provide college students in Texas with information about ways to best avoid unplanned pregnancies

Proposed Solution: Increase college completion rates by reducing unintended pregnancy through the development of a strategic plan to educate students about safe sexual activity. The plan may also educate about preventing campus sexual assault. Engage community college and higher education leaders to develop the plan.

Mississippi and Arkansas have both enacted legislation to address unplanned pregnancy among students at community colleges and public universities. Efforts in these two states were motivated in part by the high level of teen pregnancy and births among college age teens, and in part by the ongoing interest in improving educational achievement and completion.