



BPS Policy on Expectant and Parenting Students

Presentation to School Committee
May 21, 2014

Summary

- Schools are responsible for supporting their expectant and parenting students in order to prevent these students from dropping out
- In addition, schools are required to comply with federal Title IX law, which protects expectant and parenting students from discrimination
- The current BPS policy is outdated and lacks sufficient detail about the rights and responsibilities of schools and students
- We have undertaken an extensive community process to update and strengthen this policy
- The main provisions of the proposed policy relate to maintaining student confidentiality, ensuring a safe and supportive learning environment, promoting academic success, implementing sensible attendance policies, and using school liaisons to share information
- We plan to move forward with implementation in conjunction with our existing wellness efforts and in partnership with community organizations

We have a responsibility to support the success of our expectant and parenting students

- For many students who drop out of school, pregnancy or parenthood is a primary reason for this decision
- Federal Title IX law protects the rights of pregnant and parenting students:

No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.

- Schools have different levels of knowledge and engagement with issues related to expectant and parenting students

The BPS policy on Expectant and Parenting Students has not been updated for many years

- Current policy was **last revised in 1987**
- Includes general requirement for schools to support and assist expectant and parenting students, but **does not spell out students' rights under the law**
 - Focuses on “leaves of absence” rather than articulating students' rights and responsibilities around attendance
 - Makes no reference to Title IX protections or strategies for compliance
- Requires middle and high schools to identify a school liaison, but **does not clarify the role of school-based liaisons**
- This policy is **not widely known or used**, and it does not require particular methods of sharing and publicizing information

We carried out a thorough and inclusive engagement process to update this policy

- Convened a **working group of internal and external stakeholders**, including representatives from:
 - BPS (school-based staff as well as representatives from Student Services, the High School Office, Health & Wellness, Health Services, Educational Options, and the Equity Office)
 - Boston Public Health Commission
 - Key Steps
 - Massachusetts Alliance on Teen Pregnancy
 - Office of City Councilor Ayanna Pressley
- Conducted a series of **focus groups**:
 - Pregnant students
 - BSAC
 - Headmasters
 - School Nurses
- **Sought and received comments** from a variety of other stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and principals

Key provisions of the policy

▪ **Maintaining confidentiality**

- Expectant and parenting students may choose how and when to seek services and support
- School staff must follow all applicable laws and regulations on student confidentiality, and personal information must be kept confidential within the confines of the law

▪ **Ensuring a safe, supportive learning environment**

- Title IX protects the rights of expectant and parenting students to attend school in an environment free of discrimination or harassment
- Expectant and parenting students may not be excluded from any school, program, class, or activity on the basis of their expectant/parenting status

▪ **Promoting academic success**

- Enrollment or participation in an alternative school or program must be completely voluntary
- School staff are expected to maintain high expectations for student success

Key provisions of the policy (continued)

▪ **Implementing sensible attendance policies**

- Absences due to pregnancy and related medical conditions are considered excused absences
- Student parents are entitled to a fair and reasonable parental leave following the birth of a child
- Parenting students may take excused absences when their child is sick or has a medical appointment during school hours
- Schools are encouraged to work with expectant and parenting students to determine a school schedule that promotes on-time and regular attendance

▪ **Using liaisons to share information**

- Schools with any grades 6-12 must identify a school-based liaison for expectant and parenting students to help share information
- Liaisons are responsible for informing the school community about this policy and sharing resources for expectant and parenting students

Next steps and implementation

- Going forward, we will concentrate on four areas:
 - Developing guidance and resources for **school nurses**
 - Sharing tools and strategies for **academic planning**
 - Gathering resources and sharing best practices among **school-based liaisons**
 - Working with **students** to spread the word about the new policy
- We aim to integrate this work with the implementation of the Wellness Policy in order to **track key metrics**
- We will continue to **work with community partners** to learn from their expertise and maintain an updated list of resources