Starting A Statewide Campaign To Address Teen Pregnancy Prevention: The Texas Story

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Starting A Statewide Campaign To Address Teen Pregnancy Prevention: The Texas Story

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Introduction
There has long been a need for a statewide campaign to address Texas’ unacceptably high teen pregnancy and birth rates. Yet, in a state as large as Texas, with a myriad of cultural issues to consider, the challenges are many. The discussion about the ‘why’ of teen pregnancy can aid in understanding the deep complexity of this issue. With Texas facing the third highest rate of teen births in the nation, the “why” must be supplemented with evidence-based solutions.

In the absence of a statewide focus on teen pregnancy prevention, the Texas Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy (Texas Campaign) was formed in 2009 to provide leadership, information, and support in addressing the prevention of teen pregnancy. As a non-partisan, not-for-profit organization, the Texas Campaign provides a vehicle to engage adults and youth in dialogue about the status of teen pregnancy in the state. The Texas Campaign will provide action-oriented leadership around effective, evidence-based policies and practices that can help lower the rate of teen pregnancy. Through these efforts, youth can become productive and economically self-sustaining citizens of Texas.

Teen Pregnancy Rates in Texas are Unacceptably High
Today’s youth are having sex at early ages. In Texas, one in 10 sixth grade students report having had sex. By 12th grade, the number of students who report having had sex increases to seven in 10. With more than 2 million students in grades 6-12, the estimated number of Texas students having sex in any given year exceeds 800,000. Teens who engage in sex are at increased risk for unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). In 2008, 63 of every 1,000 girls between the ages of 15 and 19 gave birth, placing Texas as the state with the third highest rate of teen births. Perhaps not surprisingly, states with the highest rates of teen childbearing also have high rates of repeat teen births.
this regard, Texas has the second highest proportion (22%) of births to teens who are already mothers.\textsuperscript{5} Texas also ranks fourth among U.S. states for the reported number of AIDS cases among adolescents.\textsuperscript{6}

\textbf{The Costs of Teen Pregnancy are High for Everyone}

Teen pregnancy and teen births have significant social and economic costs. Pregnant teens are more likely to experience health-related complications, including anemia, physical assault by partners, and STIs, some of which can be passed to newborns before, during or just after pregnancy.\textsuperscript{7} Additionally, teen mothers are more likely to drop out of school, live in poverty, and rely on public assistance.\textsuperscript{8} Consequently, teen mothers have less financial stability and lower levels of income and occupational attainment, resulting in more than 40\% of teen mothers living in poverty by the age of 27\textsuperscript{9}; thus creating a lifetime cycle of poverty for teen mothers and their children.

Children of teen mothers also experience a number of negative consequences. These children are more likely to be born at low birth weight, live in poverty, experience abuse and neglect, and enter the child welfare system.\textsuperscript{10}

Beyond the cost of human suffering, the economic costs of teen childbearing are significant for Texas taxpayers. A 2006 study of the public costs of teen childbearing in Texas found that the cost of births to teens age 19 and under cost taxpayers at least $1.2 billion in 2008.\textsuperscript{10} These costs included:

- $211 million for public health care (Medicaid and State Children’s Health Insurance Program);
- $111 million for child welfare;
- $175 million for incarceration of adults who were the offspring of teen parents; and
- $378 million in lost tax revenue due to decreased earnings and spending.

Conversely, when teen pregnancy prevention efforts are implemented, taxpayers see a significant cost savings. Between 1991 and 2004, the teen birth rate in Texas declined by 20\%. The resulting savings to the public were estimated to be $327 million for 2004 alone.\textsuperscript{10} Based on these and other findings, successful prevention efforts produce a strong return on investment and can be seen as sound fiscal policy, as well as good public health and social policies.
Efforts to Date Have Not Been Sustained or Sufficient

A 2009 study of sexuality education instruction in Texas schools found that curricula being used in most schools are not evidence-based. The majority of schools in Texas stress abstinence, but do not teach the related skills needed to build healthy relationships and make sound decisions about sexual health. In some instances, the study found schools that were teaching misleading, incomplete, and/or incorrect information about contraceptives and other means of preventing STDs and pregnancy. As a result, Texas students are often poorly informed and lack the information and skills they need to form and sustain productive, healthy relationships. (A complete report on the status of sex education in Texas public schools may be found at www.justsaydontknow.org).

Title X-funded programs and state funds in support of family planning services have been a vital resource for pelvic exams, prevention and treatments services for STDs, and contraceptive services for low-income women. Nationally, Title X-supported family planning centers helped to reduce unintended pregnancies among low-income women of all ages by one-third in 2008. In Texas, these funds provided contraceptive services that helped women avoid an estimated 45,900 unintended pregnancies, which would have resulted in 20,400 births and 19,200 abortions. However, the 2011 Texas Legislature recently eliminated two-thirds of state funding for family planning services. The budget for family planning went from $111.5 million in 2010-11 to $37.9 million in 2012-13. According to the Department of State Health Services, the $73.6 million in funding cuts will cause a reduction of 180,000 clients out of 220,000 that currently receive family planning services. The Legislative Budget Board estimates that the cuts could lead to 20,500 additional births. It remains speculative if these cuts will disproportionately impact sexually active teens who may rely on publicly funded clinics as their only source of reproductive health care.

Finally, there are a number of teen pregnancy prevention programs and initiatives operating in Texas. Some of these programs are outstanding in their approach and impact, such as the Baylor Teen Health Clinic in Houston, the Healthy Futures Alliance in San Antonio, and the Prevention Research Center at the UT School of Public Health in Houston. However, many efforts around the state are hindered by lack of knowledge about evidence-based approaches, lack of professional development in effective practices, and/or limited community support.
We Know What Works
Extensive research on, and evaluation of, prevention programs around the United States is producing a growing body of evidence about what works to delay teen sexual activity, improve contraceptive use among sexually active teens, and prevent teen pregnancy. Specifically, effective approaches share three themes:

- Among adolescents who have not had sex, they encourage and reinforce these teens’ decisions to be abstinent;
- They reduce risky sexual activity among adolescents who have had sex by providing medically accurate information and access to preventive health care, including contraception. As a result, sexually active teens are more likely to use contraceptives consistently and correctly; and
- They include common characteristics of programs that have been demonstrated to be effective, including: Using trained leaders who believe in the program; actively engaging youth in ways that personalize the information received; addressing peer pressure; teaching communication skills; and reflecting the age, sexual experience, and culture of the youth in the program.

Evaluations of comprehensive approaches that include all of these elements consistently show the following results:

- Decreases in rates of sexual activity;
- Fewer partners among sexually active teens;
- Decreases in unprotected sexual activity; and
- Decreases in rates of STDs

Comprehensive approaches to sexuality education in the multiple places where youth can be found - in schools, community programs, and public health clinics - will go far to reduce teen pregnancy and teen births in the state. These efforts are necessary, but insufficient; effective programs cannot do it all. Parents and other trusted adults play important roles in making lasting changes as to how youth form relationships and make healthy decisions about sexuality. Adults are responsible for ensuring that youth have access to age-appropriate and medically accurate information, preventive health services, and the skills to remain healthy and safe. Recent surveys of teens support the important role of parents and other adults; in fact, 80% of teens say it would be easier to delay sexual activity and avoid pregnancy if they were able to have more open, honest conversations about these topics with their parents.
Engaging parents and other adults in the dialogue around teen pregnancy prevention is a challenge, but one that is vital to overcome. While 73% of adults in a national survey say they wish young people were getting information about both abstinence and contraception (rather than either/or),\(^\text{17}\) parents are sometimes reticent about discussing sex with their children. Some are uncomfortable talking about the subject. Others worry that talking about sexuality will encourage their children to experiment.\(^\text{18}\) This and other myths – such as “kids will pick up what they need to know” – have been proven to be false.\(^\text{19}\)

To have a meaningful impact on teen pregnancy rates in Texas will require a large, coordinated effort that can:

- Reframe the dialogue about solutions to teen pregnancy prevention in ways that engage all adults and youth;
- Advocate for effective programs and policies; and
- Build capacity in local communities to implement age-appropriate, medically accurate, and evidence-based prevention programs, and to provide access to preventive health services, including contraceptive services.

**A Framework for the Texas Campaign: The Big State Strategy**

Any statewide effort in Texas immediately confronts two substantial obstacles to success: the sheer size of the state and the vast differences among regions. Texas has 20 media markets, more than 1,000 school districts, 254 counties, 72,000 miles of highway, and 24 million people. Culturally, Texas has not only the familiar divide between urban and rural areas, but also substantial variances within those categories: a farming community in the Rio Grande Valley is quite distinct from a farming community in the Panhandle, and the urban culture of Dallas has little in common with the urban culture of San Antonio. Consequently, implementing a centralized statewide campaign to reduce teen pregnancy is likely to fail both because of the vast financial resources it would require and because a centralized effort would ignore the unique characteristics of different Texas regions.

The Texas Campaign has recognized from inception that the success or failure of teen pregnancy reduction efforts ultimately depends on what is being done at the local level. As the First Annual Statewide Conference to Prevent Teen Pregnancy (2010) demonstrated, all across Texas formal and informal coalitions, organizations, and groups of concerned individuals care deeply about teen pregnancy and are frustrated by the lack of progress being made.
In some regions, these groups may understand their communities, they may include the stakeholders whose buy-in is critical to success, and they may know how to leverage local financial support. But far too often they don’t know enough about the evidence-based programs that are already working in Texas, or they don’t have access to the existing data and research on teen pregnancy. Vital resources are often wasted on ineffective and inadequate programs because there is no formal structure for sharing experience or seeking solutions from others in the field.

In other parts of the state, communities experiencing significant teen pregnancy rates lack even the basic capacity to develop and sustain effective prevention efforts. There may be local concern, but no coordinated support for mobilizing to address the issue.

The Texas Campaign can fill these needs by providing statewide leadership in changing and broadening the dialogue about teen pregnancy, promoting effective action at the local level, and building capacity in local communities to implement successful evidence-based prevention programs.

At the statewide level the Texas Campaign can work to consolidate evidence-based data and best practices, and connecting community leaders to resources and technical expertise. The Texas Campaign will invest in the development of new messages around teen pregnancy and reframing the problem in a way that helps sidestep opposition to these often difficult solutions.

It is also recognized that simply serving as a clearinghouse of information and resources to local communities is not enough. The Texas Campaign must help empower local partners to implement effective programs and policies. This could mean training, whether in replicating a model or in persuading a local school board to support a new intervention effort. And in communities where capacity doesn’t exist, the Texas Campaign can help build it. Regardless of the activity, there must be constant feedback and response to that feedback to ensure local needs are being met.
Goals of the Texas Campaign
As a part of the larger strategic plan, the Texas Campaign has identified four key goals for the organization.

Goal 1: Reframe and increase the discussion about teen pregnancy to focus on solutions through education and public awareness.
Every person in the community – parents, teachers, youth service providers, faith leaders, business leaders, public officials, and others – has a role in preventing teen pregnancy. The Texas Campaign will engage all stakeholders in solutions to teen pregnancy by raising awareness about effective prevention programs and policies, and providing information and ideas for talking to youth about healthy adolescent sexual development.

Goal 2: Promote policies that support effective, evidence-based programs through advocacy and public policy development.
Ultimately, a systemic solution that implements effective approaches and builds capacity in local communities to prevent teen pregnancy have the greatest impact in reducing teen pregnancy. Much can be achieved through health and education policies at the state and local levels that are supportive of age-appropriate and medically accurate information, and evidence-based approaches.

Goal 3: Support implementation of age-appropriate, effective action at the local level by identifying and disseminating evidence-based practices.
To be successful, all teen pregnancy prevention efforts must be grounded in current research on effective practices. The Texas Campaign will identify and disseminate information about evidence-based practices and connect community partners to resources for professional development.

Goal 4: Build capacity in local communities to implement effective practices by connecting them to resources and technical expertise.
In a state as large and diverse as Texas, much of the success of teen pregnancy prevention efforts will depend on work at the local level. Acknowledging this reality, a central part of the work of the Texas Campaign will be to provide leadership to help build the capacity of local communities to implement effective practices by providing information and connecting them to resources and technical expertise.

Key Activities
First Annual Statewide Meeting on Teen Pregnancy Prevention
The key event in 2010 was a statewide kickoff meeting and first annual conference held on October 26. What Works and How Do We Make it Happen in Texas? drew more than 250 legislators, school board trustees, school nurses, teachers, and other youth-serving professionals to discuss the issues related to too-young, too-early birth in Texas.

For the Texas Campaign, the conference accomplished three important goals. First, it demonstrated interest from key constituencies across the state in using evidence-based strategies to address teen pregnancy prevention and in connecting with others working in this area. Conference evaluation responses showed high levels of frustration regarding the lack of progress on teen pregnancy in Texas and a tremendous desire for the sharing of ideas, challenges, and successes.

Second, the conference publicly introduced the Texas Campaign and allowed for valuable connections with individuals and groups working to reduce teen pregnancy in their local communities to be made. The Chair of the Texas Campaign conducted more than a half-dozen interviews with television and print media, and press from across the state covered the event. Since the conference, the Texas Campaign has received numerous requests from attendees for additional information and participation in local meetings.

Finally, evaluating the conference and the responses from participants enabled the Board of Directors to identify the need the Texas Campaign can fill in the state and to develop an organizational framework for how best to execute our four primary strategies and successfully reduce teen pregnancy in Texas.

Statewide Listening Tour
Building on the momentum of the statewide conference, members of the Board of Directors have identified five communities interested in hosting a regional meeting on teen pregnancy prevention and with some capacity to form a local coalition around teen pregnancy prevention. These communities are El Paso, San Antonio, Dallas, Houston and Hidalgo County. Beginning in May 2011 and throughout the summer, Texas Campaign Board members began dialogue with these communities about the impact of teen pregnancy in their respective communities. They also discussed short- and long-term strategies to address this issue. As part of this dialogue, the Texas Campaign is working to identify what role it can play and what resources it can bring to these local efforts.

Creating the Basic Infrastructure for Building a State-Level Teen Pregnancy Prevention Organization
Advocates for Youth, in conjunction with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), has developed guideline documents for building and sustaining state-level teen pregnancy prevention organizations. These guidelines were the foundation for the formation of the Texas Campaign and continue to guide the work to date. State-level teen pregnancy coalitions, groups, task forces, etc. have been in existence for years, and they generally function as catalysts for change, advocates, educators, and technical assistance providers. Given the different political, cultural, and structural considerations of each state, these groups function in creative and unique ways. In short, “one size fits all” doesn’t apply in organizing a statewide teen pregnancy prevention campaign.

Step 1: Identify, Recruit, and Engage Key Leadership:
Most campaigns begin with a passionate “birth parent or parents” who are the founders of the organization who also provide the drive, guide, and lead the development of the organization. The Texas Campaign had such a founder who still serves as Chair of the Board and other key leaders were asked to serve on the board of directors and still do until this day. These key leaders are some of the giants in the field of teen pregnancy prevention and youth development and provided “instant credibility” for the Campaign. In addition, an informal steering committee was convened in August of 2008 to help plan a first “all-comers” meeting that was held in October of that year.

In September of 2008 a general announcement was sent to those who worked in the field of pregnancy prevention and, as a result, approximately 35 individuals attended the first “all-comers” meeting held at Texas State University in San Marcos, TX. Consultants from Advocates for Youth led this meeting at which interest was gauged in organizing a statewide group to address teen pregnancy prevention in Texas. From this original group a list of potential board members was developed and expanded, as well as the beginning of a list-serve of those individuals interested in the work of the Texas Campaign.

Step 2: Create a Work Space (Home or Professional Office)
While the Texas Campaign didn’t create a formal workspace for the organization, the founder used personal resources to conduct the start-up work of the Campaign. In addition, a post office box, e-mail address, and web site domain name (txcampaign.org) were secured in order to provide a basic infrastructure for contacting the Campaign.
Step 3: Identify and Invite First Board of Directors
A number of key volunteers were recruited for the first Board of Directors. These individuals generally had professional experience in youth services (physician, researcher, educator, etc.) or a related field (i.e. public information/education, etc.). In that this was a founding and working board, it was decided the majority of the first board should be comprised of those who already familiar with the issues related to teen pregnancy. The board is currently discussion expansion to include several “spheres of influence” in the community as the Texas Campaign matures.

Step 4: Create a Strategic Direction and Organizational Identity
There was a great deal of discussion directed towards “who we are” and numerous board meetings were focused on what the exact role the Texas Campaign should be. The mission and goals were determined in a lengthy, deliberative process that took well over one year (See Appendix A). Other similar statewide organizations provided relevant documents from their respective groups to help inform the decisions made by the Board.

Step 5: Complete Basic Legal Documents
The Texas Campaign borrowed heavily from other established statewide groups in adopting articles and by-laws. These documents were modified to fit the needs of the Texas Campaign, but certainly were not generated in-whole by the Campaign. Once these documents had been approved by the board, Texas-requisite documents were filed with the Secretary of State’s office to be considered a business entity in the State of Texas. In addition, the Texas Campaign successfully completed the application process to be classified as an IRS 501(c) 3, not-for-profit organization. It is crucial that any start-up organization qualify for 501(c) 3 status in order to apply and compete for private foundation funds. Potential funders will generally not award grants to for-profit entities, thus being recognized by the IRS as a not-for-profit is critical to success in attracting outside funds to support the work of the group.

Step 6: Establish Essential Policies and Complete Critical Processes
A number of essential policies and practices must be established as the organization matures. The necessary documents may vary depending on the organizational maturity of the group. For example, it may not be necessary to establish personnel policies in the first year if there are no employees. Two critical processes that must be completed are a strategic plan and three to five year fundraising plan. Because of requirements for
funding from an outside organization, the Texas Campaign hired an external consultant to help guide the strategic planning process. The 2011-2014 Strategic Plan was recently completed and has been approved by the Board. However, it wasn’t until the middle of the second year of the Texas Campaign that a formal plan was attempted. Making decisions about the direction and role of the organization must first be agreed upon before embarking on a strategic planning process.

The fundraising plan is also tied directly to the strategic plan. Most long-term funders require a detailed strategic plan before considering start-up and/or continuation funding.

**Step 7: Identify Funding Sources and Build Relationships with Funders**

An influential Board member enabled the Texas Campaign to develop early relationships with several funders to provide start-up funds for the organization. The leadership of the Texas Campaign was very clear with funders that start-up dollars would be used to build core infrastructure (i.e. hiring of part-time, hourly staff and consultants) in order to keep the organization viable. Virtually all successful state-level organizations eventually move from all-volunteer boards to paid staff. Regardless of the level of enthusiasm and commitment by the volunteers, there is only so much that can be done by volunteers with full-time jobs and other competing priorities.

Because of the continued momentum of the Texas Campaign, start-up funders have increased their respective levels of commitment to fund the organization beyond the original funding amounts. In addition, the Board is developing a funders’ collaborative to help identify and target like-minded foundations and organizations that would support the work of the Texas Campaign.

**Step 8: Hire Executive Director**

The hiring of an executive director (ED) is the most important element of a successful campaign. The board should proceed with care and due diligence in making sure the ED is a good fit with the organizational mission of the group. In some cases, a viable candidate presents him/herself early in the process and the timeline for hiring is greatly reduced. However, in most cases, a careful search must be followed. The Texas Campaign Board of Directors has developed a realistic job description, as well as tying the ED position to the strategic plan. As a result of a successful search, a full-time ED has been hired and will be
introduced at the Second Annual Statewide Conference on the Teenage Pregnancy Prevention in Texas in October of 2011.

Lessons Learned

Several “lessons” were learned in starting the Texas Campaign and should be instructive to other such start-up groups. They are listed below in no hierarchical order.

First, never lose sight that teen pregnancy prevention is a very sensitive issue in virtually every community and different “comfort” levels exist for different people in the community. Public presentations of the work done by a teen pregnancy prevention program should be crafted to deal with this reality. That being said, this doesn’t mean that campaigns shouldn’t take on the tough issues related to teen pregnancy prevention just because of community sensitivities, but these concerns shouldn’t be ignored.

Second, campaigns should focus on evidence-based practices and not get caught up in the “abstinence-only” vs. “comprehensive” sexuality education debate. If a curriculum, policy, practice, etc. has been determined by peer-reviewed, empirical evidence to “work,” a campaign should support such curricula, policy, or practice. Focusing on evidence helps to reduce (but certainly not eliminate) political controversy associated with teen pregnancy prevention programs.

Third, campaigns should operate in an independent fashion from the control and influence of other organizations. Boards often need to operate “courageously” without being unduly influenced by other groups or organizations. For that reason, care should be taken in inviting potential board members who are service providers or work directly for groups involved in teen pregnancy prevention. Board members represent the best interests of the campaign, not the best interests of their respective employers.

Fourth, statewide campaigns shouldn’t be “big tent” organizations. Focusing on evidence-based strategies often doesn’t fit the philosophy of other teen pregnancy groups/programs/individuals, etc. and potential board members should first agree to the core beliefs of the organization (See Appendix A) and sign a board contract stating such agreement. Having board members who don’t believe in the core mission, vision, and values of the organization are extremely disruptive to the work of the board.

Fifth, statewide campaigns shouldn’t be membership organizations. The only “members” of the Texas Campaign are members of the board of
directors. Having general membership can reduce the independence of the board to act in the best interests of the organization.

Sixth, caution should be taken in trying to move the organization “too fast”. There is often a great deal of enthusiasm at the founding of an organization, but it is common for there to be a certain level of burnout among the volunteers. It is better to do fewer tasks well, rather than a number of tasks “halfway”.

Seventh, there needs to be a paid staff person to provide at least minimal support to the organization. It is unrealistic and perhaps unfair to expect volunteers to do all the work. That’s why it is so important to have working relationships with funders to support these initial start-up costs.

Finally, there are a number of high-level functioning statewide campaigns across the U.S. and the work they have done should be used to support the work of the start-up group. There is no reason to “start from scratch” with every document, policy, or discussion point. Building collaborative relationships with the other statewide groups is crucial to the success of any startup group.

Conclusions
Too young, too soon pregnancy has been a problem in Texas for a number of years and no single organization has the capacity to change this dynamic overnight. Progress made in reducing unintended teen pregnancy will be made incrementally and will require the efforts of many groups and individuals in the community. The Texas Campaign was formed to provide an organization that others can coalesce around in order to address these problems at the local level. As the organization grows and matures, it will be seen as the first-choice option for information, research, technical assistance, and leadership for local constituencies across Texas.
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Appendix A
Mission and Beliefs of the Texas Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy

Mission
As a 501 c (3) not-profit organization, we are dedicated to the prevention of teen pregnancy in Texas through education, technical assistance, and research.

Beliefs

- The prevention of teen pregnancies is the best interest of adolescents, their families, and society.
- Parents should be the primary sexuality educators of their children.
- The most effective health and sexuality education is abstinence-first, age-appropriate, and comprehensive.
- The use of evidence-based strategies, effective curricula and programs reduce teen pregnancy.
- Communities play a key role in reducing teen pregnancies.
- Youth should be recognized as assets and involved as equal partners in all aspects of prevention activities in their communities.
- The prevention of teen pregnancies improves the health and economic prosperity of Texas.
- Access to age-appropriate preventive healthcare should be available regardless of socioeconomic status, race, gender, or ethnicity.
- Sexuality is a normal part of adolescent growth and development.