



## Success Story: Minnesota Department of Health

### *Meeting the Unique Needs of Expectant and Parenting College Students*

Developed in 2010, the Minnesota Student Parent Support Initiative is a post-secondary educational program that offers support to expectant and parenting college students and their children in nine colleges and universities across Minnesota. The program was developed to address the unique challenges faced by this population, including high risk for drop out, unplanned pregnancies, unhealthy behaviors, and difficulties preparing for future careers. Specifically, the program established goals to help expectant and parenting students accomplish their post-secondary education goals at institutions of higher education, maintain positive health and well-being for themselves and their children, and increase the capacity of institutions of higher education for serving expectant and parenting teens and their children.

The program, which currently serves almost 2,000 student parents and their children, offers a wide range of resources, including emergency financial assistance for child care, utilities, food, and rent; parenting education classes; social support groups and health education classes (i.e. smoking cessation, family planning, healthy eating, etc.); and screening for students for intimate partner violence, depression, tobacco use, and alcohol. The program is customizable so that participants choose their level of participation based on their individual needs.

In addition to offering direct services to the students, some participating institutions of higher education advocate on behalf of students by assessing if the schools' policies can be modified to meet the needs of this population. For example, they advocate for lactation rooms on campus and for excused absences when parents need to care for their sick children.

The program has made significant strides in its short existence. They have increased their recruitment on campuses by attending campus orientation events, appointing expectant and parenting students as mentors to new students, and working closely with professors and healthcare clinic staff to increase referrals to the program. Specifically, Winona State University's branch of the program employed a unique strategy of partnering with its child care center to increase cross referral between the two programs and ensure that student parents are offered comprehensive support.

At a state level, the program has built partnerships with the Minnesota Department of Human Services and the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development to recruit future prospective students who are enrolled in job-training programs or the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program.

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