



Success Story: Virginia Department of Health

Institutions of Higher Education Providing Critical Resources to Pregnant and Parenting Student-Parents

Virginia's Office of Adolescent Health-funded Pregnancy Assistance Fund (PAF) initiative provides support to young adult (ages 18-29) male and female students enrolled in institutions of higher education who are pregnant or parenting young children under the age of 5 (student-parents). Primary activities of Virginia's PAF funding include the establishment of the Offices of Pregnant and Parenting Student Support (OPPSS); the development of a peer mentor program; enhanced efforts to identify and refer services for student-parents experiencing sexual assault, intimate partner violence and stalking issues; and the development of a targeted public awareness campaign to promote on-campus support programs for student parents.

The Virginia Office of Child and Family Health Services, housed with the Virginia Department of Health (VDH), contracts with eight institutions of higher education, spanning 22 sites/campuses, to provide services to student-parents. Partnering schools include Norfolk State University, Northern Virginia Community College, Patrick Henry Community College, Paul D. Camp Community College, Southside Virginia Community College, Southwest Virginia Community College, Tidewater Community College and Virginia Western Community College.

Student-parents participating in campus-based PAF programs are connected with resources and services that facilitate their ability to complete their schooling while balancing their paramount responsibilities as a parent. Student-parents can be referred to the OPPSS by a professor/administrator or may self-enroll. They are linked with resources and provided with enrollment assistance for a myriad of health, social, and educational programs and services. Student-parents' needs are assessed during an initial visit to an OPPSS, which is followed by an immediate referral to services and resources or a follow-up with staff as needed. Additionally, the OPPSS sites strive to meet the immediate or emergency needs of student-parents by providing access to "baby pantries" that stock typical baby care products and gas cards or transportation passes to get to and from school. Some sites also provide free professional and ongoing counseling services and emergency stipends that may assist in covering housing, food or childcare assistance.

To recruit, engage, and retain student-parents Virginia employs a variety of methods, including:

- Hosting program kick-off events to announce the establishment of a new student-parent support program and to recruit interested students;
- Participating in informal meetings and group activities designed to support the emotional needs of student-parents;
- Using peer mentors to assist in program marketing and participant recruitment; and
- Coordinating efforts with larger campus-based program activities.

The program reports a multitude of successes. Numerous student-parents have received assistance locating emergency housing, food, and childcare. Two sites have established lactation rooms to provide student-mothers safe and private breastfeeding locations. Each site has introduced at least one campus-based campaign per year to raise awareness of



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domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. Virginia also launched a statewide media campaign to promote each OPPSS. This included customized radio and TV ads aired in college service markets; development of posters, brochures and call cards; and the launch of an OPPSS website to provide additional information and resources.

In addition to the direct work with student-parents, the program has also built several key partnerships and community connections. Some examples include:

- Coordination with local and community-based partners to provide services conveniently on campus instead of students being referred out;
- Identification and provision of direct contacts to local family planning clinics, regional perinatal councils, and area health departments;
- Participation in free media promotions for OPPSS sites offered by local media and news outlets; and
- Solicitation of local funding through the partner colleges and universities to support program sustainability.

Efforts to monitor and track program efforts and success are also underway. The grantee developed and launched a quarterly student-parent program satisfaction survey and an online data collection platform for monitoring and tracking participant demographics and campus-based progress. Virginia is also creating an inventory of campus policies and procedures related to intimate partner violence and sexual assault incidents. Further, Virginia maintains an inventory of existing resources and services, by OPPSS service area, and has launched a mechanism for feedback on the program website.

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