EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

No Time for Complacency

Teen Births in California

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California's teen birth rate reduction now leads the nation, however now is not the time for complacency.

California has made considerable progress since 1991 in reducing its teen birth rate. In fact, California's teen birth rate reduction now leads the nation. This statewide trend has allowed California to drop below the national teen birth rate in 2001 for the first time in more than a decade (see figure 1).

While California's teens, families, communities, and policymakers should rightly be proud of this accomplishment, analysis of several important considerations indicate that now is not the time for complacency. In fact, a review of the latest population trends and economic factors that traditionally influence teen birth rates shows a serious threat to California's ability to maintain this achievement.

What has California been doing right? And what more needs to be done? To address these questions, this report examines trends of the last decade, together with statistical projections for the future. In addition, teen birth rates and cost estimates are provided by California legislative district. Finally, a variety of policy options are presented. This information is intended to enable policy makers to better understand these issues, and to better develop policies that proactively protect their constituents, their districts' financial health, and the overall well-being of the state of California.

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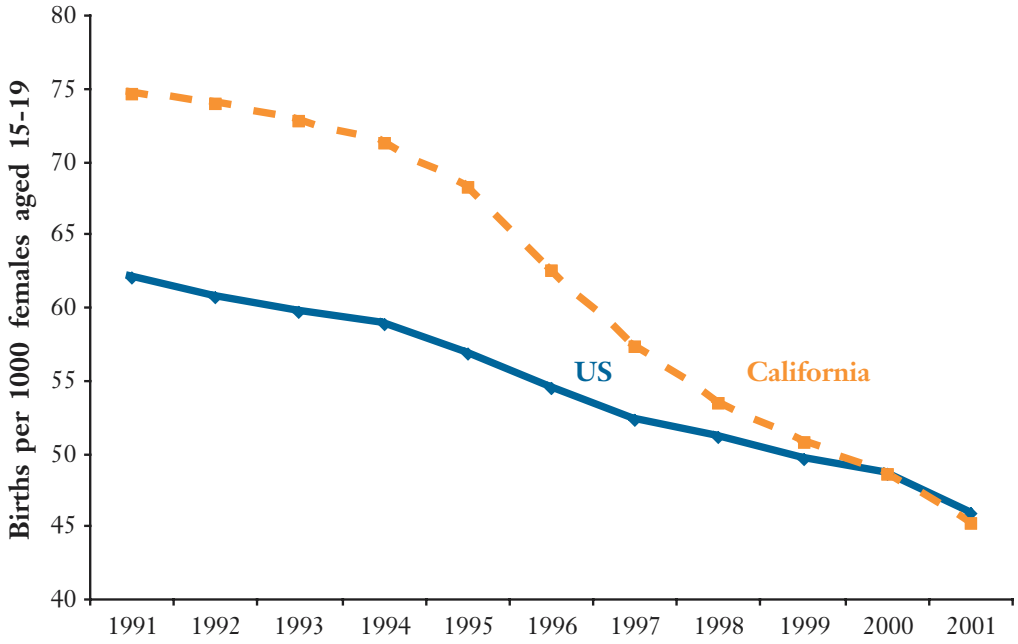

Figure 1. Teen Birth Rates for California and US, 1991 to 2001

Data from Martin et al., 2002; and Ventura et al., 2001

The Problem

Teen birth rates for both the US and California are higher than those for every other Western democracy in the world.

Despite recent improvements, California's teen birth rate is hardly exemplary. In 2001 more than 53,000 teens — nearly five percent of all teens aged 15 to 19 — gave birth in California, and many more became pregnant. In light of the economic, social, and societal costs associated with teen births, the state's average teen birth rate of 45.2 per thousand remains far too high. The tendency to use the rest of the United States as the comparative norm encourages policymakers and advocates to aim far short of the state's potential. Instead, it would be more illustrative for California to compare its teen birth rate to other developed countries (see figure 2). Teen birth rates for both the US and California are higher than those for every other Western democracy in the world. In fact, California teen birth rates are from 4 to 12 times higher than rates for France, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, and Japan.

Impact On Teen Mothers And Families

Because teens who give birth tend to have preexisting disadvantages in many respects compared to those who do not, the perceived consequences of teen births have been subject to considerable debate, and are sometimes exaggerated. Nevertheless, most experts agree that credible research evidence has demonstrated direct negative consequences of teen childbearing in several areas:

- Adolescent women who become mothers tend to exhibit poorer psychological functioning, lower levels of educational attainment and high school completion, more single parenthood, and less stable employment than those with similar backgrounds who postpone childbirth (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1998).
- Teen mothers spend more of their parenting years as single mothers than do older mothers. They also have higher divorce rates (Bennett et al., 1995).
- Relative to older mothers, teen mothers tend to experience more pregnancy-related problems and have less healthy infants, although these differences overall are small (Scholl et al., 1994; Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1998).
- Of all age groups, pregnant teens are most likely to smoke during pregnancy, and unlike other age groups, smoking rates for pregnant teens have increased over the last five years (Mathews, 1998). Smoking during pregnancy directly increases the risk of spontaneous abortion, stillbirth, placental abruption, low birth weight, preterm delivery, and other maternal and infant health problems.

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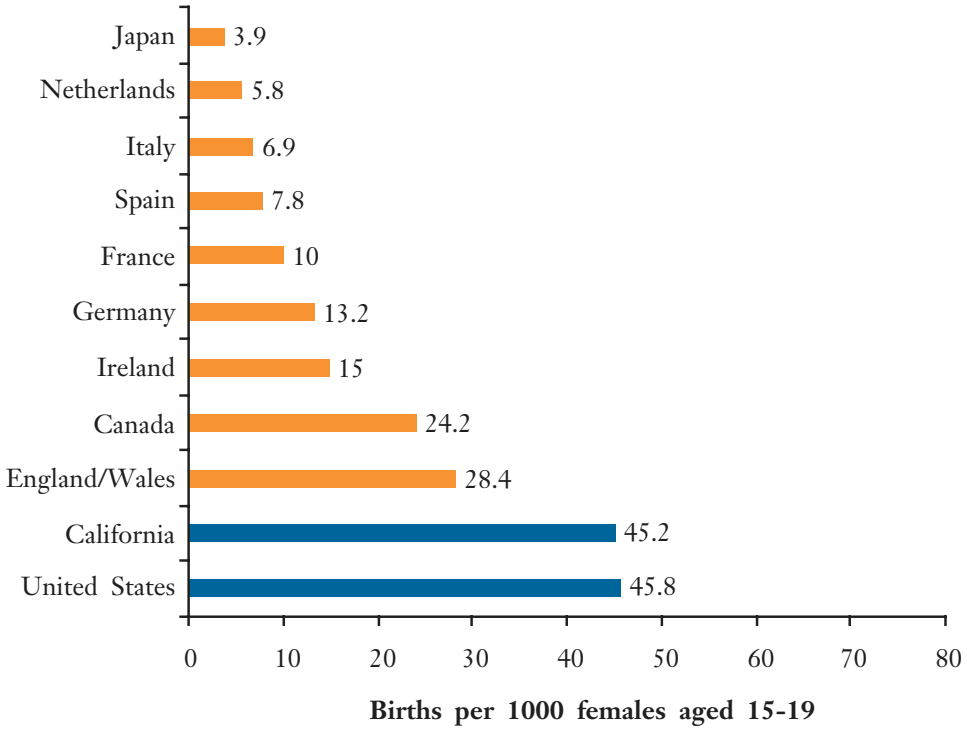

Figure 2. Teen Birth Rate Comparisons for California, US, and Selected Countries

International data are for 1995/96, from Singh and Darroch, 2000; California and United States data are for 2001, from Martin et al., 2002

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- Smoking among pregnant and parenting teens appears to be closely linked to stress resulting from the pregnancy and early parenting, and is especially resistant to successful cessation. Even teen mothers who successfully quit smoking during pregnancy tend to relapse immediately or shortly after birth (Constantine et al., 2002). Exposure to environmental tobacco smoke directly increases an infant's risk of bronchitis, asthma, pneumonia, reduced lung capacity, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), and middle ear disease and infections.
- Preschool children of teen mothers tend to show some delay of cognitive development as well as more behavior problems and more aggressive behavior than children of older mothers, while adolescent children of teen mothers experience higher rates of grade failure, delinquency, and early sexual activity (Furstenberg et al., 1987; Moore et al., 1997; Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1998).
- Children of teen mothers are more likely to experience abuse and neglect, and to be placed in foster care (George & Lee, 1997).
- Fathers to children of teen mothers tend to achieve less education and lower earnings over time than their non-parenting peers, most likely due to the to early focus on working at the expense of education (Brien & Willis, 1997; Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1998).

Economic Impact On Society

In addition to the personal challenges and lost opportunities faced by teen mothers, the significant economic costs to society associated with teen births cannot be ignored.

A comprehensive and rigorous series of cost analyses on teen pregnancy and parenting was conducted by a group of nationally prominent researchers from the fields of economics, demographics, family policy, and health policy, led by Rebecca Maynard (1997). Integrating the series of studies conducted by these researchers, Maynard employed conservative assumptions and estimated net costs, adjusted for estimated costs in these same categories had the teen mother delayed her birth until after age 20. The most directly attributable costs were used, including lost tax revenue based on mother's and father's income and consumption, public assistance costs (welfare and medical assistance), costs for increased foster placement and incarceration of children, and tax revenue losses based on children's incomes and consumption when they reach young adulthood.

Maynard's resulting estimate of net costs to taxpayers was $2,831, or adjusted to year 2000 dollars, $3,108 per year per school-aged teen birth. When births to older teens (ages 18 and 19; representing about two thirds of all

teen births) are included, the age-weighted average annual cost to taxpayers associated with each teen birth becomes $2,129, in year 2000 dollars.

In addition to taxpayer costs, Maynard estimated total costs to society, which also included estimated changes in earnings of the teen mothers, fathers, and children when they reached young adulthood, and privately paid medical costs. Societal costs were estimated to be approximately two and one third times the taxpayers' costs, yielding $4,750 across ages 15 to 19, in year 2000 dollars.

Applying these rigorous cost estimates to California yields an annual net cost to taxpayers of $1.5 billion and an annual total net cost to society of $3.3 billion[1].

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The Looming Reversal

The improvements in California's decreasing rate of teen births could easily lure Californians into a sense of complacency. A closer look at conditions that shape teen birth rates in California, however, shatters that picture.

Based on a conservative estimate of the changing demographics of California's youth population, the California Department of Finance projects that the recent teen birthrate declines will soon reverse and that the number of teen births in California will begin to accelerate rapidly by 2005. These projections do not assume a teen birth rate increase in any race/ethnicity subgroup, but are based primarily on the growth of the Latina teen population relative to other groups (because the Latina teen birth rate is substantially higher than the overall state rate).

Although the DOF projects small increases in teen birth rates initially, these small rate increases result in substantial increases in teen births as the teen population base grows. Within five years, by 2008, the annual number of teen births in California is projected to exceed 66,000. This represents approximately 12,500 more teen births than in 2001 — a phenomenal 23% increase.

Among the best predictors of teen birth rates are poverty rates — the higher the poverty rate one year, the higher the teen birth rate tends to be the following year. Because a steep seven-year decline in California poverty rates abruptly ended in 2001, and is likely to have reversed course in 2002, California's decline in teen birth rates is further threatened. The above two methods of prediction, by demographic projections, and by

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[1] These estimates are based on year 2000 birth numbers applied across 13 yearly cohorts of teen births in the pipeline, as per Maynard's (1997) methodology. See the full report for more details.

prior year poverty rates, are potentially additive. This means that even without the increase in poverty rates, demographic projections alone predict increasing teen birth rates. Similarly, even without the demographic changes, the end of the poverty rate decline predicts, at best, the end of the teen birth rate decline. And if both projections are correct, then teen birth increases will be even greater than predicted.

Senate District Analysis

…every one of California's 40 state senate districts had higher teen birth rates than Japan, the Netherlands, Italy, France, Germany, and Ireland.

To accentuate the local and political relevance of these data, teen birth rates for the year 2000 were analyzed by California senate district. (An analysis by assembly district also is provided in the full report, together with the methodology for these analyses.) This analysis helps address the question of whether the problem is limited to a few geo-political areas, or is more widespread.

The table on page 8 provides teen birth rates, births, and birth rate rank for each California's 40 senate districts. Across all districts, teen birth rates ranged from a high of 94.8 (in the 16th district) to a low of 17.0 (in the 35th district). Of the 40 districts, 18 had teen birth rates higher than the year 2000 California average of 48.5. While all regions of the state have high teen birth rate districts, these are most frequently found in Los Angeles County (districts 20, 22, 24, 25, 26, 27, 30, and 32), the Central Valley (districts 12, 14, and 16), and the Imperial Valley (districts 37 and 40).

Comparing these to the international data displayed in figure 2, further illustrates that every one of California's 40 state senate districts had higher teen birth rates than, for example, Japan (3.6), the Netherlands (5.8), Italy (6.9), France (10.0), Germany (13.2), and Ireland (15.0).

These comparisons illustrate the opportunity for improvement across the entire state and in all types of communities and locations, as well as the special need in certain high rate areas. They demonstrate the need for a holistic approach that starts at the impacted community level and percolates up to the state and national level.

Another useful comparison is to examine the differences between racial/ethnic groups within California, and for the U.S. as a whole. The most recent federally compiled race-specific data that are available by state are for 1999. Figure 3 compares the 1999 U.S. and California birth rates for the largest racial/ethnic groups. This figure illustrates that:

- in California the Latina teen birth rate was more than three times higher than the white non-Latina and Asian/Pacific Islander rates;
- in California the African-American teen birth rate was more than two times higher than the white non-Latina rate and Asian/Pacific Islander rates; and

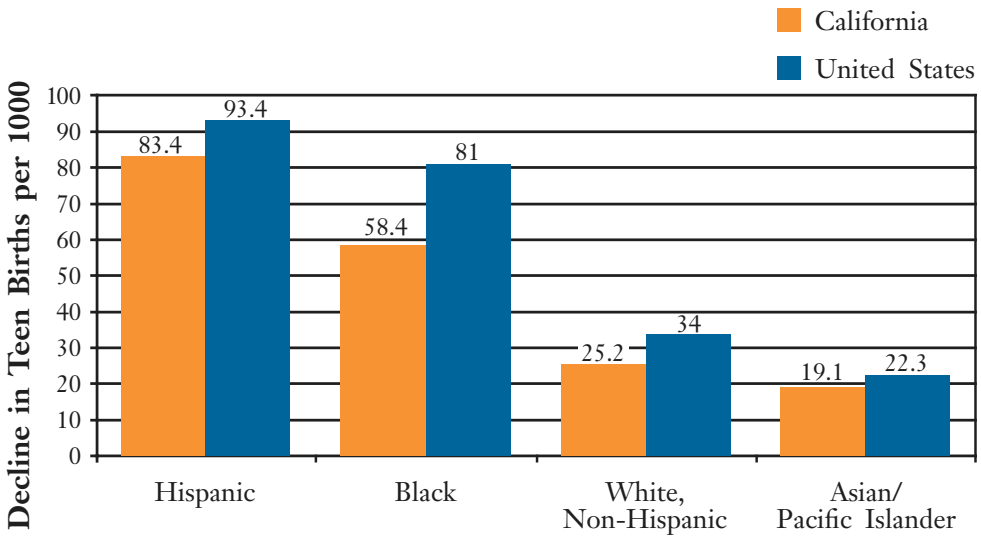

Figure 3. California and US Teen Birth Rates by Race/Ethnicity, 1999

Data from Ventura et al., 2001

- although 1999 U.S. teen birth rates were higher than the California rates within every racial/ethnic group, the same relative pattern held nationally: the Latina rate was highest, followed by African-American, white non-Latina, and Asian/Pacific Islander, with approximately the same relative proportions across groups.

The Solution

It would be naive to assume that there is any single solution to resolve the complex issue of teen childbearing. However, there can be little doubt that California's unprecedented investment in teen pregnancy prevention has contributed to California's achievement over the last decade of the largest decline in teen birth rates of all 50 states.

During the past decade, California has been the national leader in focusing on and investing in research-based policies and programs for positive adolescent development and teen pregnancy prevention. This leadership spans the administrations of two governors, one Republican and one Democratic. California's leadership is evidenced in several areas: (1) refusal to participate in the federal abstinence-only education program; (2) state-funded reproductive health programs administered by the California Department of Health Services; (3) state-funded teen pregnancy prevention programs administered by the California Department of Health Services and the California Department of Education, and (4) program and policy grant initiatives funded by philanthropic foundations in California, led by the California Wellness Foundation.

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DISTRICT	SENATOR	COUNTIES IN DISTRICT	TEEN BIRTHS	TEEN BIRTH RATE (PER 1000)	TEEN BIRTH RATE RANK	EST'D ANNUAL TAXPAYER COSTS*	EST'D ANNUAL SOCIETAL COSTS*
1	Thomas "Rico" Oller (R)	Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, El Dorado, etc.	603	23.6	37	$17,000,000	$37,000,000
2	Wesley Chesbro (D)	Humboldt, Lake, Mendocino, Napa, etc.	1,039	36.4	26	$29,000,000	$64,000,000
3	John Burton (D)	Marin, San Francisco, Sonoma	480	27.8	31	$13,000,000	$30,000,000
4	Samuel Aanestad (R)	Butte, Colusa, Glenn, Placer, etc.	1,258	39.2	23	$35,000,000	$78,000,000
5	Michael Machado (D)	Sacramento, San Joaquin, Solano, Yolo	1,679	48.1	19	$46,000,000	$104,000,000
6	Deborah Ortiz (D)	Sacramento	1,570	53.7	13	$43,000,000	$97,000,000
7	Tom Torlakson (D)	Contra Costa	645	24.8	35	$18,000,000	$40,000,000
8	Jackie Speier (D)	San Francisco, San Mateo	418	19.4	39	$12,000,000	$26,000,000
9	Don Perata (D)	Alameda, Contra Costa	1,255	48.7	18	$35,000,000	$77,000,000
10	Liz Figueroa (D)	Alameda, Santa Clara	806	31.3	28	$22,000,000	$50,000,000
11	Byron Sher (D)	San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz	615	24.5	36	$17,000,000	$38,000,000
12	Jeff Denham (R)	Madera, Merced, Monterey, San Benito, etc.	2,217	64.6	6	$61,000,000	$137,000,000
13	John Vasconcellos (D)	Santa Clara	1,312	51.3	16	$36,000,000	$81,000,000
14	Charles Poochigian (R)	Fresno, Madera, Mariposa, San Joaquin, etc.	1,391	49.9	17	$38,000,000	$86,000,000
15	Bruce McPherson (R)	Monterey, S. Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, etc.	1,097	38.3	24	$30,000,000	$68,000,000
16	Dean Florez (D)	Fresno, Kern, Kings, Tulare	3,104	94.8	1	$86,000,000	$192,000,000
17	W. "Pete" Knight (R)	Los Angeles, San Bernardino, Ventura	1,332	43.2	21	$37,000,000	$82,000,000
18	Roy Ashburn (R)	Inyo, Kern, San Bernardino, Tulare	1,984	63.5	7	$55,000,000	$123,000,000
19	Tom McClintock (R)	Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, Ventura	816	27.6	32	$23,000,000	$50,000,000
20	Richard Alarcón (D)	Los Angeles	1,747	57.7	11	$48,000,000	$108,000,000
21	Jack Scott (D)	Los Angeles	524	26.4	33	$15,000,000	$32,000,000
22	Gilbert Cedillo (D)	Los Angeles	1,873	74.4	2	$52,000,000	$116,000,000
23	Sheila Kuehl (D)	Los Angeles, Ventura	647	30.1	29	$18,000,000	$40,000,000
24	Gloria Romero (D)	Los Angeles	1,872	60.2	9	$52,000,000	$116,000,000
25	Edward Vincent (D)	Los Angeles	1,596	62.1	8	$44,000,000	$99,000,000
26	Kevin Murray (D)	Los Angeles	1,359	59.5	10	$38,000,000	$84,000,000
27	Betty Karnette (D)	Los Angeles	1,623	53.1	14	$45,000,000	$100,000,000
28	Debra Bowen (D)	Los Angeles	783	36.8	25	$22,000,000	$48,000,000
29	Bob Margett (R)	Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino	660	23.1	38	$18,000,000	$41,000,000
30	Martha Escutia (D)	Los Angeles	1,665	57.6	12	$46,000,000	$103,000,000
31	James Brulte (R)	Riverside, San Bernardino	1,327	41.1	22	$37,000,000	$82,000,000
32	Nell Soto (D)	Los Angeles, San Bernardino	2,632	73.9	4	$73,000,000	$163,000,000
33	Richard Ackerman (R)	Orange	608	25.1	34	$17,000,000	$38,000,000
34	Joseph Dunn (D)	Orange	2,100	71.9	5	$58,000,000	$130,000,000
35	Ross Johnson (R)	Orange	434	17.0	40	$12,000,000	$27,000,000
36	D. Hollingsworth (R)	Riverside, San Diego	774	29.1	30	$21,000,000	$48,000,000
37	Jim Battin (R)	Riverside	1,504	52.6	15	$42,000,000	$93,000,000
38	Bill Morrow (R)	Orange, San Diego	1,177	45.4	20	$33,000,000	$73,000,000
39	Dede Alpert (D)	San Diego	865	33.1	27	$24,000,000	$53,000,000
40	D. Moreno Ducheny (D)	San Diego, Imperial, Riverside	2,284	74.1	3	$63,000,000	$141,000,000

Table. Senate District Teen Births, Birth Rates, Ranks, and Estimated Annual Costs, Year 2000

** Costs represent estimates of annual outlays and losses for 13 yearly cohorts of teen births in the pipeline at any given time. Cost analysis methods are described in detail in the full report.*

While the cost of these investments have not been small — the estimated combined total state and philanthropic investment during the 1998–1999 budget year was approximately $60 million for programs and activities focused directly on teen pregnancy prevention. Yet the 40% reduction in California's annual teen birth rate over the last decade represents 35,000 fewer teen births in 2001 than the 89,000 that would have occurred had the rate remained at its 1991 level. Translated into annual costs, this represents an annual savings to taxpayers of $968 million, and a total annual savings to society of $2.2 billion.

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To build on California's successes — to maintain the progress of the last decade, to accommodate new challenges, and most ambitiously and importantly, to increase these levels of success by further decreasing teen birth rates — requires courage, wisdom, and persistence in a time of both severely limited state funds, and the increasing drift of federal support away from effective research-based strategies. Yet the enormous need, and tremendous expected return on investment, is abundantly clear from our experiences of the last decade.

Coupled with the reality that demographic changes and poverty rates are combining to drive up teen births and birth rates, it is essential that California support existing programs with proven track records and investigate additional ways to move its teen birth rate to meet the potential shown by other Western democracies.

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Key Recommendations

All levels of government are facing unprecedented challenges that are forcing them to examine their priorities. At this time, the prevention of births to teen mothers is more important than ever. Investments in this area are productive for their immediate payoff in terms of decreased health and welfare costs as well as their contribution to the stability of the social fabric and to California's economic future. In this light, the Public Health Institute and the Center for Research on Adolescent Health and Development provide the following recommendations in the areas of programs, leadership, educational policy, and schools and communities. A more detailed set of specific recommendations is provided in main report.

California Programs

- At a minimum, maintain all program funding aimed at reducing teen pregnancies and births.
- Continue to decline participation in and contribution of matching funds for the federal abstinence-only-until-marriage education program.

- Continue to fund effective school- and community-based programs that provide education, outreach, and services to support teens in delaying childbearing.

California Leadership

- Elected officials step up to the plate and initiate community dialogues by bringing together parents, adolescents, and other school and community stakeholders to address the issue of high teen birth rates and to determine what additional steps can be taken.

California Educational Policy

- Provide for enforcement of existing education standards that require medically accurate information to be taught in school-based sexuality education programs.
- Revise and strengthen California Education Code to clarify and consolidate the minimal standards for comprehensive sexuality education instruction.
- Begin discussion and development of a legislative mandate for California public middle schools, high schools, and alternative schools to teach research-based comprehensive sexuality education.
- Support reliable and complete school-based survey research that will elicit scientific understanding of teen health risk behaviors, including sexual risk behaviors.

California Schools and Communities

- Provide multi-level comprehensive sexuality education and youth development programs, with school, parent, youth, and community components working in synergy.
- Review and monitor school polices and curricula to assess compliance with California Education Code, and to bring these policies and curricula into compliance as necessary.

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The full report *No Time for Complacency: Teen Births in California* is available at http://crahd.phi.org

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