**Guidelines to retain and support pregnant and parenting young people in education**

# Overview

As ‘pregnant and parenting young people are less likely to finish their education, less likely to find a good job, and more likely to end up as single parents and bringing up their children in poverty’ (Hay, 2010), schools play a vital role in improving these students’ employment and social outlook by supporting them to stay connected to education. These guidelines provide schools with strategies to retain and support pregnant and parenting young people in education.

# Legislative responsibilities of schools

# Principals have legislative responsibilities regarding pregnant and parenting students to enable equitable access to education. Principals are responsible for making meaningful and appropriate arrangements so that these students can gain the greatest benefit from education through participation in the school’s programs.

# Pregnancy and parental status are two attributes covered by the [*Anti-Discrimination Act (Queensland) 1991*](https://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/act-1991-085) (the Act). Principals and other managers need to be aware of the unlawful nature of discrimination against students who are pregnant and students who are parents and the implications for contravention of the Act through the vicarious liability provision.

# The Act makes provision for the Chief Officer of an organisation, e.g. principal of a school, to be held vicariously liable for the actions of the organisation’s workers or agents who contravene the Act in the course of work or while acting on behalf of the organisation. Therefore, in the event of a complaint against an educational authority, a proceeding may be undertaken against either the principal or staff member, or both, unless the respondent can show that on the balance of probabilities, all reasonable steps were taken to prevent the discrimination from occurring in the first place.

Principals and school staff should be aware of instances of [direct or indirect discrimination](#_Direct_and_indirect) which may occur against pregnant and parenting students.

# Strategies to support pregnant and parenting students

### Three key strategies, each with a range of suggested actions, dependent upon students’ immediate and long-term needs, have been identified as helpful for schools and regions to support pregnant and parenting young people to continue their education.

### They are to:

1. track and maintain contact with pregnant and parenting young people
2. promote awareness of the range of education pathways available to pregnant and parenting young people
3. establish a network of support services for pregnant and parenting young people.

# Suggested actions

## ***Tracking and maintaining contact***

* Promote the school as a place that welcomes and supports pregnant and parenting young people so that students feel safe to disclose their situation.
* Promote the school’s commitment to education for all and specify the ways in which the school will support students who are pregnant and students who are parents.
* Organise activities to raise awareness among staff, students, parents and the community to create a supportive school environment.
* Provide a range of access points for students to gain information about resources and services, such as student noticeboards, newsletters, guidance officers, the local hospital and health service. Develop and display posters with the name of a contact person in the school.
* Provide curriculum programs that enable all students from diverse backgrounds to understand how issues of gender, sexuality, cultural background, location, relationships, family planning, sexual abuse and domestic violence can impact on their own and others’ life chances.
* Establish a mentoring program, which may involve teachers, outside agencies, businesses or retirees to support students.
* Allocate a school support liaison for the student, for example, the guidance officer or a nurse attached to the local Queensland Hospital and Health Service, who can assist the young person in engaging in appropriate services outside of the school and to act as the advocate for the young person at the school.
* Closely monitor students’ attendance with an emphasis on early intervention.
* Maintain communication at key times including following the birth of the baby, illness of the parent or child, prior to exams, beginning of school terms and during any unexpected or sustained absences.
* Provide facilities, wherever possible, to accommodate the individual needs and circumstances of students, for example, access to a private space for breastfeeding and child care.
* Monitor peer behaviour towards pregnant and parenting students.
* Include pregnant and parenting students in the review and improvement processes of the school.
* Coordinate with community agencies (Centrelink, hospital and health services, birthing centres, young parents programs, antenatal clinics, doctors, child care centres) to develop a referral system for pregnant and parenting young people no longer in the education system to access advice on education options.
* Establish partnerships with local maternity wards to reinforce a non-judgemental approach towards pregnant students and maintain contact with community agencies to discuss education options for pregnant and parenting young people.
* Work with young parents to determine follow-up support services they may require at hospitals and birthing centres. The young parent may give permission for their contact details to be given by the school to the relevant agencies, including education services. A guidance officer, the local Queensland Hospital and Health Service or mentor can then arrange a time to discuss education pathways.
* Form strategic partnerships with community groups to support students’ needs, e.g. to explore transport options for students and their children, nappy services for students at school.
* Develop and distribute posters and brochures to provide information about opportunities for pregnant and parenting young people to re-engage with education.

## ***Educational pathways***

* Advise pregnant or parenting students of the school’s [enrolment](https://ppr.qed.qld.gov.au/pp/enrolment-in-state-primary-secondary-and-special-schools-procedure) requirements and procedures to enable [exemptions from compulsory schooling](https://ppr.qed.qld.gov.au/pp/exemptions-from-compulsory-schooling-and-compulsory-participation-procedure).
* Discuss [altering](https://ppr.qed.qld.gov.au/attachment/alteration-to-a-students-education-program.docx) the student’s educational program. This may include flexible organisational arrangements such as part-time attendance, flexible timetabling, flexibility in assessment and submission of assignment work, and a flexible education program to obtain a qualification over a longer period of time.
* In collaboration with other education and training providers, make comprehensive information and advice about the range of educational and vocational pathways available to students to enable decision-making about future options, including:
* at their mainstream school with flexible arrangements in timetabling, attendance, uniform and child care
  + through distance education by enrolling in courses via a number of institutions on a correspondence or online basis
  + at an alternative education centre that provides on-campus support in the form of a child care centre, or designated areas where parents can study and care for their babies
  + in a course offered by a tertiary institution.
* Advise pregnant or parenting prospective students who are over 18 years old of the conditions for [mature age student applications](https://ppr.qed.qld.gov.au/pp/mature-age-student-applications-procedure) and the additional time required prior to enrolment acceptance.
* Provide support through a guidance officer, the local Queensland Hospital and Health Service or teacher for informed decision-making.
* Advise students of [work experience](https://ppr.qed.qld.gov.au/pp/work-experience-placements-for-school-students-procedure), [vocational placements](https://education.qld.gov.au/careers/apprentices-and-trainees/vet-in-school) or [school-based apprenticeships and traineeships](https://ppr.qed.qld.gov.au/pp/school-based-apprenticeships-and-traineeships-procedure).

## ***Establish a network of support services***

* Establish coordinated interagency links to facilitate easy access to local services that respond to immediate issues or long-term difficulties affecting pregnant and parenting students’ capacity to fully participate in education.
* Identify and establish links with local agencies that offer services in health, counselling, financial support, parenting skills, child care, transport, housing, and legal advice (see [Online resources](https://education.qld.gov.au/students/inclusive-education/pregnant-and-parenting-students/resources))
* Contact the local Department of Health [Public Health Unit](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/system-governance/contact-us/contact/public-health-units/default.asp) for advice on contagious conditions (e.g. listeria, influenza, measles, chicken pox) and precautions schools should take to minimise infection transmission to pregnant students.
* Arrange for community agency staff to come to the school for appointments with students.
* Negotiate with students for time off school to attend appointments.

NB. The suggestions provided above are not exhaustive and schools in consultation with their local community will develop appropriate local approaches to support pregnant and parenting young people.

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# Direct and indirect discrimination

**Direct discrimination** occurs when a pregnant or parenting young person is treated less favourably than other students.

The following are examples of direct discrimination and therefore are unlawful.

* Refusing to enrol a young person because they have a baby or young child.
* Directing a young person to enrol in a school of distance education as a result of their pregnancy, without exploring whether that option is the most appropriate.
* Providing details of a pregnant student’s personal circumstances or relationships that are not directly relevant to their schooling without the young person’s permission.
* Advising or encouraging the parent/s of a pregnant or parenting student to withdraw their child from school on the basis of their pregnancy or parental status.
* Excluding a young person because they become pregnant.
* Failing to address incidents of harassment related to sexuality, pregnancy and parenting.

**Indirect discrimination** relates to situations where there may be less favourable treatment because of an unreasonable rule or condition being imposed on the pregnant or parenting young person.

The following are examples of indirect discrimination and therefore are unlawful.

* Insistence on wearing school uniform.
* Requirement to participate in inappropriate activities.
* Lack of flexibility in the timetable.
* Refusal to recognise and address the possible needs arising for young parents who must accommodate child care arrangements into their school day routine.
* Not acknowledging the needs of breastfeeding parents in time off and assessment extensions.
* Lack of flexibility regarding out of hours involvement in assessment tasks and extra curricula activities.