

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND HUMAN RESOURCES**

**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

**PREGNANT STUDENT POLICY AND  
PROCEDURES**

*Revised July 2011*

## 1.0. CONTEXT

Prevention of pregnancy during schooling is of primary importance to the Department of Education. To minimize its occurrence, two main strategies are in place:

- Provision of Personal and Social Education in primary and secondary schools which has as its goal to “empower students to make appropriate decisions for their personal well being and that of others, to develop their personal and social skills to cope constructively with challenges and personal stress and to prepare for transition from school to the world of work”
- Provision for counselling services at school level and the Student Support Services Section of the Department of Education.

Despite the strategies in place, there are learners who do become pregnant. This places great strain on their studies to the extent of their dropping out of schooling as well as considerable strain on the education.

Education incurs high costs. The cost to the Government to ensure free and compulsory primary and secondary education for all cannot be overemphasised. Therefore, learners becoming pregnant and the resulting dropping out or discontinuation of schooling is a considerable loss to the system.

In its effort to ensure that teenage mothers are not deprived of their schooling, in 1995 the Ministry of Education initiated support for teenage mothers through the introduction of a policy. The thrust of the policy was the provision of opportunity for teenage girls who get pregnant during schooling to return to complete their education after the delivery of their baby (Ministry of Education, 1995).

In 2005, the policy was reviewed with the aim of providing ‘...procedures, guidelines and regulations to be followed by schools, the Students Services Section in the Ministry of Education and Youth and the parents to assist in decision making and providing support for students who become pregnant before completing the formal education cycle’ (2005: 1). The 2005 policy document is at **Annex 1**.

This document is the outcome of a review of the 2005 policy. Its purpose is two-fold:

1. It outlines policy regarding female learners who become pregnant
2. It details procedures arising from the policy.

## **2.0. RATIONALE**

The problem of pregnancy among teenage learners is a major concern in many countries and a constraint in the elimination of gender disparities in education. The importance of education has long been cited as a critical factor in the development of nations and in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (2000). The value and benefit of knowledge and learning cannot be argued. Education allows children to learn the skills they need to negotiate an increasingly technical and technological world.

It is also important to remember that pregnancy is not an illness and is therefore not a reason for exclusion from education. Besides 'there is no evidence to suggest that keeping a pregnant girl or school age mother in school will encourage others to become pregnant' (Guidance on the Education of School Age Parents-DFEs/0629/2001).

The starting point of the right to education irrespective of gender is the Seychelles Constitution which makes provision for "compulsory education, which shall be free in State schools, for such minimum period, which shall not be less than ten years, as may be prescribed by law". This provision is echoed in the Education Act (2004) which stipulates that "Every child shall attend school from the beginning of the school calendar in the school year until the child has completed the compulsory school age"

Further, the principle of Equity of the Policy Statement 'Education for a Learning Society' (2002) encapsulates the following concepts:

- Equality of access to education
- Equal opportunity/creating conditions for optimum achievement, according to ability and career options

- Ensuring that the context, content and medium of education are equally favourable to boys and girls

Seychelles has ratified the Convention of Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa which both highlight the rights to education irrespective of gender.

Studies of teenage pregnancy carried out have revealed that the problem of teenage pregnancy persists although the incidence of teenage pregnancy remains fluctuated throughout the years. **Annex 2** provides statistics on teenage pregnancy and teenage abortion cases.

Research has established that the single mothers trying to raise children without stable support are at higher risk of the following: poverty, poor housing conditions, malnutrition, unemployment, physical, sexual and psychological abuse, neglect, lower school achievement for the children, to name a few (UNFPA 1995). This is accentuated in the case of single mothers who are still of school age (Popenoe, 1998) since the majority drop out of school.

### **3.0. POLICY**

The policy ascertains that all learners, including pregnant learners, should have the right to equal access to educational opportunities so that they become well informed, educated, reliable, responsible, self sufficient and caring citizens.

As such educational establishments need to ensure that the rights and development of all learners are not curtailed and that supportive measures are taken in respect of pregnant female learners.

### **4.0. PROCEDURES**

When it is evident that a learner is pregnant, the matter must be treated with **great sensitivity and confidentiality**. The following procedures will apply:

- 4.1. The pregnant learner will be allowed to continue with her studies until 4 months pregnant. **[in the 2005 policy it is the first 6 months of pregnancy]**

- 4.2. During the time at the educational establishment, the Ministry of Education will not be held liable for any pregnancy related problems that may occur.
- 4.3. During the time at the educational establishment, the school counsellor or designated person will:
  - inform the Student Support Services Section of the student who is pregnant
  - provide guidance and counselling.
- 4.4. After the birth of the baby, the teenage mother will be reintegrated into schooling and:
  - she may return to the same school, or,
  - she may be transferred to another school.

If the student is reinstated in the same school, the school management will ensure that the other students and staff are prepared so as to avoid harassment or stress.

The school management will also ensure that the student is supported without prejudice.

- 4.5. Upon reintegration into schooling the student will repeat the year she was in when she left whether she is reintegrated in the same school or is transferred to another school. This is due to the fact that she would not have covered enough of the curriculum content to be promoted.
- 4.6. If the student becomes pregnant in the third term of Secondary 5, she will have the opportunity to complete her studies and sit the final examinations that she has been registered for.
- 4.7. Should it be known or established that a male learner at the school is the father, he will be provided with the necessary guidance and counselling so as not to make the same mistake.

## **5.0. REINTEGRATION PROCEDURES**

- 5.1. Re-instatement will be after three months following delivery.

- 5.2. The parent/guardian/student will inform the Principal Secretary for Education in writing of the date for resuming of schooling.
- 5.3. The Principal Secretary will communicate the outcome to the Student Support Services Section who will liaise with the school/s concerned.
- 5.4. The Student Support Services Section will meet with the parent/guardian, the school counsellor and student to finalise reinstatement.
- 5.5. The Student Support Services Section, in liaison with relevant agencies and NGOs, will organize for the provision of services to the student and parent(s)/guardian(s) before and after reinstatement. Services shall include financial support, legal issues, counselling and parenting education.

## **6.0. RESPONSIBILITIES**

- 6.1. The female learner
  - informs parents/guardian(s) and the school management of her pregnancy
  - discusses possible options for re-instatement with school management and Student Support Services Section
  - attends appropriate agencies as recommended by the Student Support Services Section
- 6.2. The Parent/legal guardian
  - informs the school management of the student's pregnancy as soon as this is confirmed.
  - attends counselling and other support services organized by Student Support Services Section
  - discusses possible reinstatement options with school management and Student Support Services Section
  - informs the Principal Secretary for Education in writing of the date that the student intends to resume schooling.
- 6.3. The School Management

- convenes a meeting with the learner and her parent(s) or legal guardian(s) to:
  - a) gain an understanding of how she and her parent(s) or guardian(s) intend dealing with the matter;
  - b) provide them with information concerning the options available to her to continue her education after delivery.
- facilitates the reintegration of the student in the school should the decision be for her to return to the same school after delivery.

#### 6.4. The School Counsellor or designated person

- informs the head of school of the pregnancy
- informs the parent/guardian of the student's situation if the student has problem communicating with the parent/guardian
- informs the Student Support Services Section of the pregnancy as soon as it has been confirmed by the parent/student
- prepares other students and staff to avoid discrimination and harassment
- prepares other students and staff for reinstatement if student opts to return to the same school after delivery
- provides counselling and guidance to the student and parent(s)/guardian(s).

#### 6.5. The Student Support Services Officer/Section

- offers counselling to student and parent(s)/guardian(s)
- advises parent/guardian and student on possible reintegration options
- makes arrangements for student to sit formal examinations centrally or at school as is required and appropriate.
- facilitates re-instatement procedures
- assists school management in preparing other students/staff for student's reinstatement
- liaises with relevant agencies according to needs.

### 7.0. CONCLUSION

This policy and procedures herein adopts a holistic approach that ensures that teenage girls who fall pregnant during schooling are given all opportunities to their right to education. It places emphasis on support rather than punishment. It is through the provision of support

structures for the vulnerable students that equity in education is promoted.

To ensure consistent and effective implementation, the content of this document will receive wide dissemination, including its integration in the Personal and Social Education programme of schools, and the sensitization of relevant partners.



## **Annex 1: 2005 Policy**

## Annex 2: Statistic relevant to teenage pregnancy 2005 - 2010

The total number of abortions (terminations and miscarriages) is on the increase between 2006 and 2010 (range 443-562 per year), with 58.8% of all abortions in the women aged 20-34 years.

**Table 1: The total number of reported abortions by age 2006-2010**

Age Groups	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
10– 14	3	5	6	6	9
15 – 19	71	69	81	90	122
20 – 24	98	92	79	83	105
25 – 29	99	108	77	102	100
30 – 34	90	86	93	73	112
35 – 39	56	54	68	74	88
40 & above	26	32	49	43	26
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>443</b>	<b>446</b>	<b>453</b>	<b>471</b>	<b>562</b>

Source: Epidemiology and Statistics Section

**Table 2: Key indicators of teenage reproductive behaviour in Seychelles 2005-2010**

Indicator	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
% of 15- 45 year old were teenagers	15.0	15.1	14.2	14.4	14.6	14.5
% of all births to teenage mothers	14.8	14.5	15.4	15.1	15.7	13.8
% of all first births to teenage mothers	31.1	28.5	29.8	27.8	32.2	24.1
% of all second births to teenage mothers	5.8	4.2	4.8	4.6	3.2	4.6

% of all abortions (spontaneous/induced) to teenagers	17.4	16.7	16.6	19.2	20.4	23.3
% of all known pregnancies to teenagers	15.4	15.1	15.6	16.0	16.8	16.4
% of all contraceptive users who were teenagers	2.8	9.2	4.2	4.1	4.6	4.6
% of adolescents who tested HIV positive out of the total population tested positive	6.7	11.9	4.6	11.4	7.7	3.0

*Source: Epidemiology and Statistics Section*

The above table indicates that the incidence of teenage pregnancy remains fluctuated throughout the years.