

Successful Student Parent Programs Will Be Terminated

What is Cal-SAFE? The California School Age Families Education (Cal-SAFE) is a high school-based program supporting expectant and parenting students with academic and support services (including transportation) and high quality child care and development services for their children. The goals for students are graduation from high school, transition to college or work, decreased dependency on welfare, improved parenting skills, and fewer repeat births by teen mothers. The goals for the babies are healthy birth weights, health screenings and immunizations, and enhanced school readiness. Supported by Proposition 98 funds, the program funding in FY2007-08 was \$58,395,000.

As of June 2007, Cal-SAFE served over 72,000 students and 42,000 babies at 590 school sites in 44 of California's counties.¹ Its 2005 evaluation² found that over 75% of the students graduated from high school, with most planning to enroll in a local community college. Ninety-four percent of the babies were up-to-date on immunizations and benefiting from developmentally appropriate learning and play.

What is the problem? In 2000, three former teen parent-baby programs were merged into the Cal-SAFE program.³ The consolidation had the consequence of shifting this program into the K-14 Mega-Categorical budget item.

The recent Budget Deal made a 15% across-the-board reduction⁴ to fifty-three K-14 categorical programs, totaling \$944 million.⁵ Simultaneously, the enabling legislation gave local school administrators flexibility in the use of funding for the lowest tier programs. The "flexibility language" permits all local programs in the lower tier to "be deemed to be in compliance with the program and funding requirements contained in statutory, regulatory, and provisional language" until FY 2012-13.⁶ The Cal-SAFE program is in the lowest tier and, therefore, subject to the local flexibility funding option and its related standards waiver.

The impact on Cal-SAFE programs is already being felt. It is only two months since the above became law and already nine schools are closing their student parent programs as of 2009-10 and eighteen more are considering termination. Given local education

¹ The student and baby totals are duplicated counts.

² California Department of Education, *The California School Age Families Education (Cal-SAFE) Program: A Report to the Legislature*, Independent review by Branagh Information Group, 2005. "Data collected ... showed positive outcomes, benefits, and cost effectiveness of the program."

³ The three were the Pregnant Minor Program (PMP), School Age Parenting and Infant Development (SAPID), and the Pregnant and Lactating Students (PALS) programs. The consolidation also moved the baby portion from the Child Development Division (and its separate Budget line item) to the Learning Support and Partnerships Division (and the Revenue Limits Budget item). And, the consolidation shifted this program into a Mega-Categorical item.

⁴ 15% cut this year and 5% cut next year.

⁵ SB X3 4.

⁶ *Ibid.* Section 15 (2) (d).

shortfalls, it is likely that programs will end in most schools statewide (certainly by FY 2013).

Why should Cal-SAFE programs be saved? This is a very unique program focused on two vulnerable children: an expectant or parenting student (females and males) and their baby. Unlike most educational programs, Cal-SAFE is a financial “two-for-the-price-of-one.” Here are some other reasons to save this program:

- Successful outcomes. Independent research has found significantly higher graduation rates, exceptionally low second birth rates, babies with low birth weight at half the national rate, and baby immunization rates at nearly 100%.
- Focus on Achievement Gap. The Superintendent is concentrating on closing the Achievement Gap. His strategy focuses on (1) early education (preschool), and (2) targeted remediation and assistance. Cal-SAFE successfully attacks the Achievement Gap at both ends.
- Focus on graduation. California’s high school graduation rate is approximately 60% and the rate for low income and minority students is often below 50%. Cal-SAFE students maintain a 75% graduation rate, with most planning to attend community college. This far exceeds the traditional 20% graduation rate for non-supported teen mothers.
- Second births avoided. The second pregnancy rate for California teenagers in these demographics is 25%. Cal-SAFE interventions have cut that rate to 1% for its students while enrolled in the program. With teen pregnancy rates on the rise, this is no time to eliminate or reduce this school support program.
- Minority and low income students are the major beneficiaries. Given higher incidences associated with disadvantage and at risk, Cal-SAFE helps break generational cycles of teen pregnancy, welfare, poor parenting, lack of school readiness, and delinquency.

Consequences of Inaction. Here are some of the possible consequences of the failure to remedy this situation:

- Expectant and parenting students could be forced to drop out of school.
- Flexibility would permit Cal-SAFE programs to operate without requiring compliance with state regulations and standards. Babies are now experiencing unlicensed and unregulated child care, instead of the State’s highest quality, early care and education. CDE is now supervising child development programs with two sets of standards: Child Development and Preschool contracts with high quality (Title 5 and Title 22) standards and Cal-SAFE programs with no standards.
- Schools and school districts may be subject to Title IX and Special Education noncompliance and civil rights lawsuits.
- Schools are already choosing to eliminate or reduce program elements – such as transportation, child care, and reproductive health counseling – which are essential to the program’s success.

- Data collection and reporting by programs and LEAs will cease or be interrupted. Vital information will not be available to decision-makers in the future.

Options. There are several approaches which could resolve this problem. Here are three:

- Remove Cal-SAFE from the Tier Three list.
- Make an exception for unique programs (e.g., direct service programs or “Two-fer” programs) in Tier Three.
- Modify the deeming language in the local flexibility provision.

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