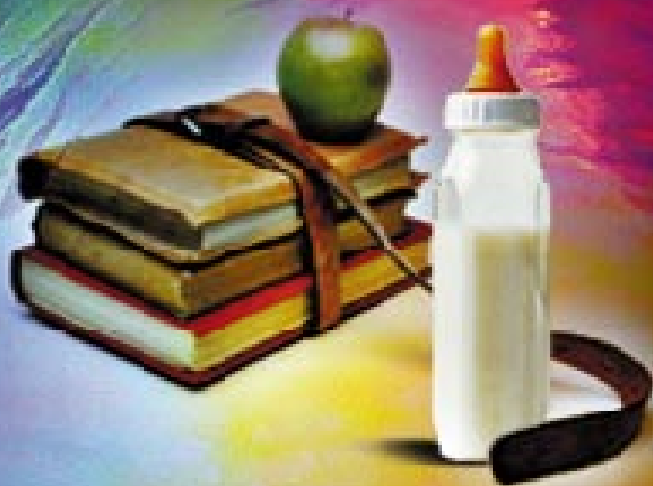


CHALLENGES...



AND CHOICES

*Keeping Teenage Mothers in School*





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# SPONSOR'S MESSAGE

Scotiabank is happy to be associated with the Ministère de l'Éducation in the publication of this brochure to encourage teenage mothers to stay in school.

In today's world, as we move into the new millennium, education is more than ever an absolute necessity. It opens the doors to a successful future and provides the means to realize one's dreams and ambitions. It is thus crucial to remember that our primary concern must be our children, and that we must find ways to better prepare them for adult life.

Our hope is that every adolescent who is about to start a family, or who is already a mother, will receive all the help necessary for her and her child to reach their full potential.

This brochure will have achieved its objectives if it helps everyone who has the future of these young families at heart understand the importance of encouraging teenage mothers to stay in school and of giving them the support they need to do so.

Guy Bisailon  
Senior Vice-President  
Québec Regional Office  
Scotiabank

# THE CHALLENGE OF EDUCATION

Being pregnant and a teenager is not easy. Furthermore, deciding to become a mother is an enormous challenge that affects all aspects of a young woman's life: her personal, family, social and school life. To meet the challenge, she must have a great deal of courage and ambition, but what she needs most is help. The future of both the mother and her baby depends on it.

To help these young women fully come to terms with their motherhood, we must offer them ways of continuing their education, which is crucial to their becoming independent. Only by staying in school will they acquire the qualifications they need to enter the job market, where, increasingly, the demand is for skilled workers.

This brochure is designed primarily for parents and key staff working in education, and in health and social services. Its purpose is to increase awareness of the difficulties faced by teenage mothers, while emphasizing the need for preventing teenage pregnancy. The brochure also provides information about existing services that may help these young women continue their education and indicates improvements that should be made. Finally, the brochure closely examines the challenges posed by this social phenomenon—teenagers will be able to better judge the full scope of the obstacles to be overcome in order to carry their pregnancy to term and succeed at school.



Girls are getting pregnant  
at an increasingly younger age.

# 1. Background

Here are some statistics on teenage pregnancies in Québec, along with a portrait of the young mothers. The information which follows is taken from surveys whose results were published and from observations made by people working with these teenagers.

## From Pregnancy to Motherhood

In Québec, there are more teenage pregnancies today than 15 years ago. Between 1980 and 1995, the pregnancy rate among adolescents under 18 years of age rose from 12.6 to 18.5 per 1 000. Thus, in 1980, 3 068 adolescents under 18 became pregnant and in 1995, this number increased to 3 629.

*Rate and number of pregnancies in teenage girls under 18,\*  
1980 versus 1995*

	Rate per 1 000	Number under 14 years old	Number 15-17 years old	Total number under 18 years old
1980	12.6	178	2 890	3 068
1995	18.5	267	3 362	3 629

\* Age at term of pregnancy

Source: Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux du Québec, September 1997. *Taux de grossesse à l'adolescence Québec, 1980 à 1995, régions sociosanitaires de résidence, 1993-1995 et d'autres groupes d'âge*, tab. 1, p. 24, by M. Rochon.

Data on teenage pregnancy outcomes shows an important change between 1980 and 1995: in 1980, 45% of pregnant adolescents under 18 years of age gave birth; since 1985, less than one third (30% on average) of adolescent girls under 18 have done so. In 1995, Québec registered 1 057 births by mothers under 18 years of age.

Two conclusions can be drawn from these figures. On the one hand, we may presume that teenage pregnancy prevention strategies have been effective for most students, especially given that more teenagers are sexually active. On the other hand, for some groups, these strategies have not been effective. So, who are these teenage girls under 18 years of age who are not using the prevention strategies endorsed by parents and encouraged in their sex education classes at school?



## Overview of Current Prevention Strategies

In our society, sexuality is less and less a taboo subject and young people often talk about it among themselves, based on what they know, or think they know. Their information comes from the media, their families and the school.

Such openness should encourage parents to be the first guides for adolescents as they learn about sexuality. In addition to the fact that parents play an essential role in the transmission of values and in the conveying of information about birth control, they are in the best position to ensure ongoing support for their children, by encouraging them to talk as freely as possible about their budding sexuality and, if applicable, their sexual relations.

Sex education has been part of Québec's compulsory secondary school curriculum since 1986 and complements the information received at home. The primary goal of courses on sex education is to help young boys and girls adopt responsible sexual behaviour, and to weigh the consequences of being sexually active. Moreover, the courses encourage students to delay sexual activity and give information on reliable methods of contraception.

The courses also deal with the prevention of early pregnancy. The program stresses that boys should act responsibly and use protection every time they have sex because, if the girl becomes pregnant, it is she, in the end, who must make a decision.

The program, *Sexprimer pour une sexualité responsable, un projet de prévention des grossesses à l'adolescence* is designed for Secondary III and IV students and teaches parents how to talk about sexuality with their teenage sons and daughters. In the schools where this program has been implemented, the results have been deemed very positive.

The impact of the sex education that is given in the schools is difficult to assess with any kind of precision, but we can certainly advance the hypothesis that, if these courses did not exist, the pregnancy rate and the other numerous problems related to sexual relations at an early age would likely be more widespread than they are at present.

**Rate and number of pregnancies per 1 000 teenage girls under 18,\*  
by social and health services region of residence in 1995**

		Number	Rate per 1 000
Québec		3 623	18.5
01	Bas-Saint-Laurent	62	9.2
02	Saguenay – Lac-Saint-Jean	109	10.7
03	Québec	197	11.5
04	Mauricie – Bois-Francs	220	15.3
05	Estrie	152	18.6
06	Montréal-Centre	1 023	26.5
07	Outaouais	182	22.5
08	Abitibi-Témiscamingue	106	21.7
09	Côte-Nord	93	28.6
10,17,	Nord-du-Québec, Nunavik,		
18	Terres-cries-de-la-Baie-James	81	59.3
11	Gaspésie – Îles-de-la-Madeleine	46	14.6
12	Chaudières-Appalaches	141	11.6
13	Laval	147	16.6
14	Lanaudière	192	18.4
15	Laurentides	214	18.5
16	Montérégie	658	17.9
10	Nord-du-Québec	14	
17	Nunavik	35	
18	Terres-cries-de-la-Baie-James	32	

\* Age at term of pregnancy

Source : Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux du Québec. Septembre 1997. *Taux de grossesse à l'adolescence Québec, 1980 à 1995, régions sociosanitaires de résidence, 1993-1995 et d'autres groupes d'âge*, tab. 6, p. 29, by M. Rochon.



## A Portrait of Teenage Mothers

Through data and observations emerging from studies on the issue, it is possible to identify a number of characteristics of adolescents who become pregnant at an early age. Most come from economically disadvantaged communities and often they are daughters of single parents. Statistics on teenage pregnancies by region show wide discrepancies among Québec's regions: the number of teenage pregnancies is the highest in the distant regions of Northern Québec and disadvantaged urban communities.

### *Economically Disadvantaged, Single-Parent Families*

Pregnancy rates are highest among teens from single-parent families who have experienced poverty. For some of these girls, motherhood represents an acceptable solution that would compensate for a life of psychological, moral, family and social hardship. On the other hand, young women from privileged families have been observed to refuse motherhood if they become pregnant, because it is incompatible with their plans for the future—which include a job and a planned family life. They count on their education to fulfil these dreams.

### *School Drop-outs*

Many of these teenage mothers have been experiencing difficulties at school and their motivation to stay in school is already weak. Some see pregnancy as a reason to quit and put an end to their repeated failures at school. Encouraging these young women to continue their schooling is very difficult, but all the more important because they are likely never to return to school again.

The groups of young women at risk are quite well targeted and the problems they experience are deep-rooted. Motherhood is all the more likely to have dire consequences for their future.



## 2. The Trap of Isolation

One of the first problems these young mothers face is caused by their decision to quit school: they are very quickly caught in the spiral of economic and social dependence.

### Dropping Out of School: First Step Toward Exclusion

Apart from these young women's weak motivation to stay in school, many factors compound their problems and contribute to their decision to leave school during their pregnancy. On the physical level, these young women must face the changes occurring in their bodies and the discomforts associated with their pregnancy, which makes them different from other young people and less available to attend classes. On the psychological level, they must also adapt to their new situation and rapidly acquire maturity, judgment and a sense of responsibility. However, having to mature quickly is incompatible with the activities of the other teenagers in their group and very soon their social life is in an upheaval. Their group activities end and they feel that they no longer fit in at school. They shut themselves off from others and their quality of life is diminished.

Often, too, these pregnant teens must confront the negative reactions of their fellow students and the school staff. Whether these reactions take the form of disapproving glances or unkind remarks, some girls experience rejection, which pushes of them to stay away from school. Other teens, however, quit school because of pressure from the school administration or staff. The fear that the pregnant teen will set a bad example for the other students, or even tarnish the school's image is at the root of this attitude.

Once the baby has arrived, all these young mothers must face the problems of having to organize their new life, along with the numerous restrictions inherent in raising a child. They must learn to manage their time and to determine their availability; they have to deal with financial difficulties and work around daycare schedules. Managing their role as mothers while simultaneously meeting the demands of school becomes an obstacle course that is almost impossible to negotiate without help and special services. Even if the young women stay in school until they give birth, they often lose heart and drop out after the birth of their baby.

Apart from raising the problem of undereducation for these teenage mothers, leaving school greatly contributes to excluding them from their regular life and usually has long-term effects on their ability to live in society. Adolescents who drop out of school take the first step toward social exclusion, isolation and dependence.

**Pregnant teens drop out of school  
much more often than teenage girls  
of a similar social group.**

## Problems of Young Families

Undereducation and social isolation lead these young mothers almost certainly to job insecurity and unemployment. Very often, they are forced to depend on social assistance in order to survive. The following are some typical features as observed in these young families.

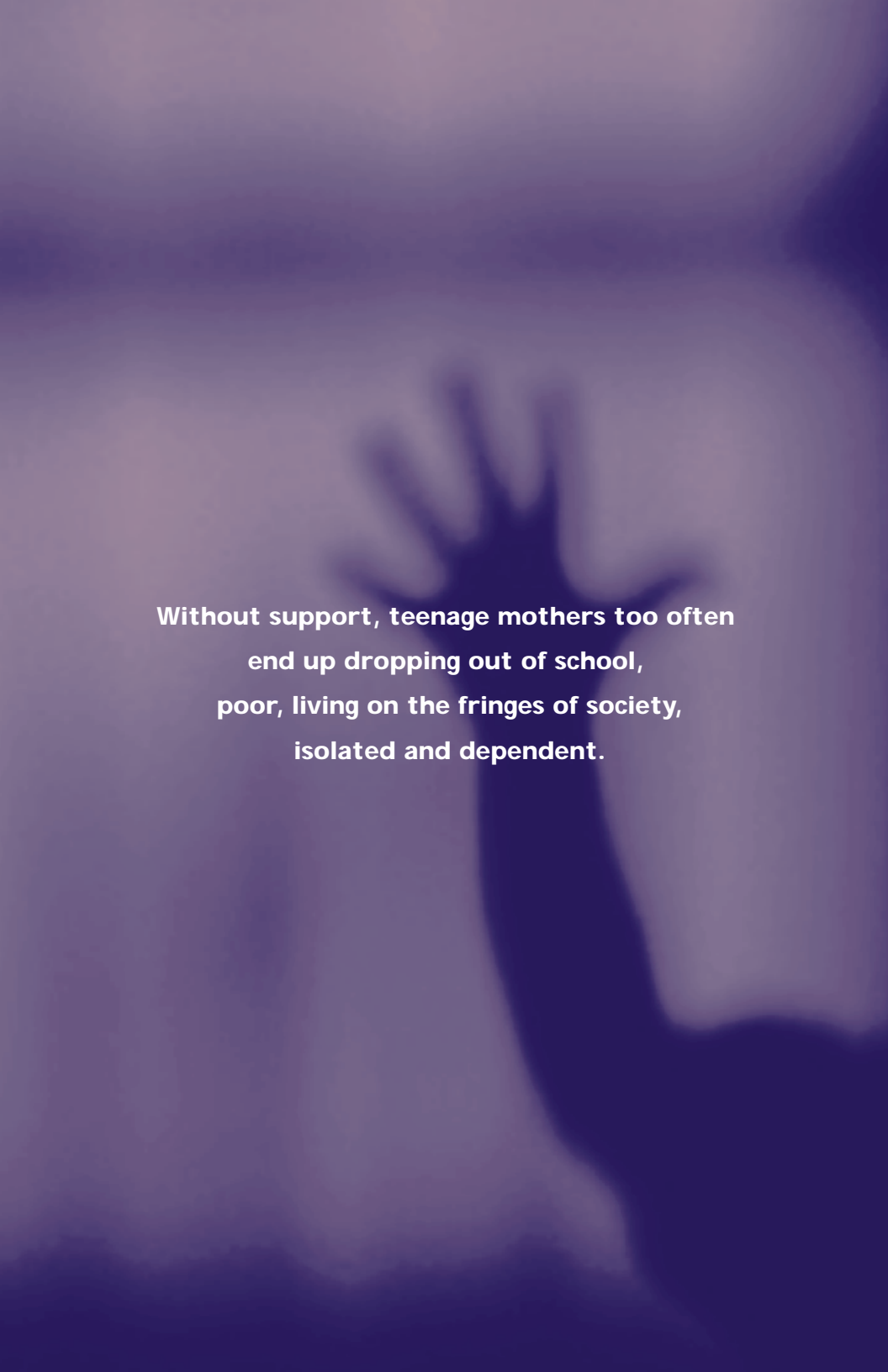
### *Single-Parent Families*

Most of these young mothers assume their family responsibilities alone, since the fathers have most often left prior to the birth. With no support or concrete commitment from their father, most children born to single-parent families will grow up in a family model that is unfortunately too familiar to teenage mothers.

### *Poor and Dependent on Social Assistance*

There are very few choices open to teenage girls with no diploma, trade or occupation and with a child to look after. As a result, for many teenage mothers, social assistance is the only recourse and many teenage mothers become welfare recipients. It is estimated in fact that 95% of single mothers under 25 years of age are poor. Moreover, if they do not return to school, they are extremely likely to remain poor.

**There is a close correlation  
between dropping out of school,  
early pregnancy and poverty.**

A blurry, purple-tinted background image of a person's hand raised, with text overlaid.

Without support, teenage mothers too often  
end up dropping out of school,  
poor, living on the fringes of society,  
isolated and dependent.

The young age of these mothers and the absence of the father, coupled with the factors of poverty and dependence, sap parental coping abilities and create distressful situations that may even lead some young mothers to neglect or abandon their child. Another dramatic consequence is often observed: the rapid arrival of a second or even a third child. Indeed, it is known that if adolescent women do not become committed to a life plan, such as continuing their schooling or getting a job, the risk of finding themselves pregnant once again is higher. Perhaps they believe that by doing so they are escaping from their emotional isolation and financial problems.

### ***Problems Passed on from One Generation to the Next***

The problems posed by teenage motherhood affect not only the young mothers, but their children as well. While the teenage mothers are more at risk of being undereducated, single parents and poor than other young women their age, their children also often experience problems associated with developmental disorders, learning or behavioural disabilities and delinquency. These connections between poverty and intergenerational problems have been confirmed by several studies which state that children who suffer from poverty at a young age are much more likely to drop out of school. Not to mention that the daughters of such families in turn risk duplicating the model of teenage pregnancy.

**A cycle of chronic dependence is created.**

On top of these disastrous personal and family consequences are the very high long-term economic and social costs. The poverty endured by these teenage mothers is very costly for society as a whole for a long time.

Given these complex problems, preventing young mothers from dropping out of school becomes an objective of the utmost importance. A large part of the solution lies here. The rising pregnancy rate, particularly among the youngest girls, calls for more aggressive support measures because of the time they must still spend in school before obtaining a proper education.



## 3. Resources

### Motivating Young Mothers

To encourage these teenage mothers to continue their education, we must create conditions that will encourage them to map out a plan and set a goal for themselves and their child. They must first be able to transform an academic track record marked by failure into one of repeated success. To this end, the observations made to date are encouraging: in fact, many of the girls who have been able to benefit from the special services offered in the school system have managed to change their perception of school and have made the efforts necessary to accomplish their ambitious plan. Becoming aware of their responsibilities and wanting the best for their child are great motivators for them to continue their schooling. We must, therefore, work with the young mothers to develop a plan that reflects their preferences, interests and aptitudes by proposing practical ways to implement it.

### Providing Teenage Mothers with Access to Services

Despite their common situation, not all pregnant teens and teenage mothers have the same needs. Though some decide to stay in school in their familiar social environment, others do not. Whereas some can and want to continue their schooling in the regular education system, others need specially adapted instruction and guidance tailored to their needs.

It is important that these teenagers be informed of all the resources and options available to them so that they can find the best environment in which to continue their studies and to implement their plan. This is the school's prime role: to welcome each young mother, to listen to her needs and to propose realistic, motivating solutions.

## ***Services Offered by Schools***

Some secondary schools and school boards offer interesting, effective services. The following are examples of initiatives taken in schools or school boards.

### **Resource Persons in School**

Resource persons, including nurses, social workers or psychologists working in health services meet with the young women at the beginning of their pregnancy to provide information and guidance. Depending on the resources, the young women are given assistance with pregnancy tests, guidance in making decisions concerning the pregnancy and supervision during their pregnancy. In accordance with different formulas selected with the cooperation of the health and social services network, the young women are directed to available consultation services, pre- and post-natal care, and babysitting and daycare services. According to observations made in the field, the blend of the different services offered by the school and other organizations may have a great impact on the women's wish to continue their schooling. The young women learn who, where and how to ask for help. Their needs are met quickly and easily.

### **Appropriate Guidance Services**

Guidance personnel help the teenagers formulate their education plan and assess the various options that are available to help them continue their schooling. The counsellors direct the young women to the appropriate programs. They pose realistic challenges and provide favourable conditions for success.

### ***Special Teaching in Regular Classes***

Current data tends to show the advantages for some teenage mothers-to-be of remaining at school, insofar as the school environment is supportive and meets their needs. Furthermore, according to students, the presence of a teen mother in the school would discourage them from entertaining an unrealistic idea of motherhood. Indeed, the limitations of pregnancy and parental responsibilities would greatly increase the other students' awareness of the extent of the challenge to be met. It is also possible that the girls and boys who are friends with these young women might become more responsible if they decided to become sexually active.

## Individualized Teaching

Some teenage girls may receive individualized teaching, either at school or at home. Home teaching for students who must be absent from school for long periods of time has proven successful when tested with pregnant teenagers.

## Special Schools

Some school boards run special schools that support young women during their pregnancy and following their delivery. These schools have multiprogram classes in which individualized teaching takes place. The option to register in these schools at any time during the year enables each young woman to adjust her school timetable to the progress of her pregnancy. The staff is experienced and provides students with valuable emotional, moral, educational and material support.

In Montréal, students from any school board in Québec may attend École Rosalie-Jetté and young English-speaking women may attend Elizabeth High School. In Québec City, teenage mothers from the region may attend École Joseph-François-Perrault. In Sherbrooke, Villa Marie-Claire, a rehabilitation centre for mothers with problems, offers educational services under the auspices of the Centre d'éducation aux adultes Saint-Michel.

## *Counselling and Support at School*

One of the major conditions for all these support measures to be successful is to create a supportive school environment in order to find solutions to each young woman's problems. The school staff may help these young women in many ways: first, by recognizing their difficulty in reconciling school, pregnancy and motherhood; then by identifying the actions to take with the close cooperation of the CLSCs in order to meet their needs.

In order to increase awareness in the schools and other institutions affected by these issues, the Ministère de l'Éducation has produced two videos describing the difficulties faced by these young mothers and giving examples of services offered to help them.

## Two Videos to Raise Awareness

- *Sac à couches et sac d'école*,  
which is aimed at school personnel and students
- *Enceinte . . . j'ai encore ma place à l'école*,  
for school board administrators and school personnel

Young mothers are interviewed: they relate their experiences and their aspirations. Resource people describe their role in a supportive and caring manner. Students describe their relationships with their friends who are pregnant and mothers. Some fictional scenes clearly illustrate the numerous restrictions and responsibilities of motherhood.

# PREVENTION, COURAGE, AMBITION

If parents, educators and health and social services personnel combine their efforts to provide maximum support to teenage mothers so that they will stay in school, it is very possible that the young women can accomplish their ambitious plan and that their babies will be happy and will ultimately become full-fledged citizens.

This concerted action is necessary because the phenomenon of teenage pregnancy is linked to several other social problems which affect the family, the school and the community.

Teenage pregnancy is a social problem that government departments and organizations have resolved to address. To this end, in order to follow up the *Programme d'action 1997-2000 pour toutes les Québécoises*, the Ministère de l'Éducation has joined the interdepartmental working group for the prevention of teenage pregnancy and support of teenage mothers. This team is responsible for finding the means of better organizing and offering all services designed for teenage mothers. Resource persons from the education community, who are well aware of the real problems these teenagers must face, have joined in the search for solutions.

Making it easier for teenage mothers to continue their schooling requires efforts of organization and cooperation as well as financial support, all of which cannot help but be profitable in the short, medium and long term. A lack of action would be much more costly to society and the economy.

One important concern remains at the heart of all these services: extreme vigilance must continue to be exercised so that the entire school population is fully aware of means of prevention. It is essential to encourage boys to make an insightful evaluation of the immense responsibility implied by fatherhood, and it is equally important for girls, even the youngest girls, to be aware of the risks to their future if they agree to unprotected sex. Prevention is an indispensable guarantee and an excellent advantage for all of the love and life plans boys and girls may contemplate.



# USEFUL INFORMATION AND REFERENCES

## INFORMATION DOCUMENTS

Bouchard, C., V. Labrie and A. Noël. March 1996. *Chacun sa part—Rapport de trois membres du comité externe de réforme de la sécurité du revenu*. Montréal, Québec.

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———. Sept. 1997. *Taux de grossesse à l'adolescence. Québec, 1980 à 1995. Régions sociosanitaires de résidence, 1993-1995, et d'autres groupes d'âge*, by M. Rochon.

———. March 1991. *Un Québec fou de ses enfants. Rapport du groupe de travail pour les jeunes*, by C. Bouchard et al.

# SCHOOLS AND ORGANIZATIONS

## School Boards

School boards can provide information on educational services for pregnant teens and teenage mothers.

## Services Offered by the Health and Social Services Network

Various establishments in each region's health and social services network can assist people who request help and can direct them to a community organization including the following:

- CLSCs and their youth clinics
- youth centres
- hospitals

## Special Schools

The persons responsible for educational services in the special schools may be reached at the following telephone numbers:

- Commission scolaire de Montréal, École Rosalie-Jetté  
Tel.: (514) 596-4240
- English-Montréal School Board, Elizabeth High School  
Tel.: (514) 488-6529

## Special Education Services

- Commission scolaire de la Capitale, École Joseph-François-Perrault  
Tel.: (418) 525-8169
- Commission scolaire de la Région-de-Sherbrooke, Villa Marie-Claire  
Tel.: (819) 563-1622

## Videos from the Ministère de l'Éducation

The videos *Sac à couches et sac d'école* and *Enceinte . . . j'ai encore ma place à l'école* may be obtained from the government's video library:

Vidéotheque

Services gouvernementaux

1056, rue Louis-Alexandre-Taschereau, rez-de-chaussée

Québec (Québec)

G1R 5A6

Telephone: (418) 643-5168

Fax: (418) 646-8132

To obtain copies of this brochure or additional information, please write to:

Coordination à la condition féminine

Ministère de l'Éducation

1035, rue De La Chevrotière, 26<sup>e</sup> étage

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Fax: (418) 646-7592

Internet: [condition.feminine.meq@meq.gouv.qc.ca](mailto:condition.feminine.meq@meq.gouv.qc.ca)

This brochure is available at the following internet address:

<http://www.meq.gouv.qc.ca>

*Being a teenager,  
a mother and a student  
is no easy task!*

*Staying in school and obtaining  
a diploma are the keys to providing  
pregnant teens and teen mothers  
with the independence required  
to manage a family.*

*Creating an environment  
that will encourage teen mothers  
to continue their studies requires the  
coordination and cooperation  
of the different resources  
that offer services to young people.*