Enhancing the Resilience of Young Single Mothers of Color: A Review of Programs and Services

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Within the last decade, births to unmarried women in the United States have risen dramatically, presenting challenges for young women to complete high school and attend college. This article presents a review of programs and services designed to support single mothers in completing high school and accessing postsecondary education. We highlight both problematic and effective aspects of these programs with particular attention to whether they support the educational access of Latinas and African American single mothers.

One of the most pressing social issues in the United States today is single motherhood among young women of color between the ages of 15 to 24 years. According to the Center for Disease Control (2009), in 2007, nearly 4 in 10 births were to unmarried women, compared to about 3 in 10 in 2002. This increase has been attributed to high out-of-wedlock birth rates among women in their 20s, with 6 out of 10 births occurring for women between the ages of 20 and 24. Although teen births account for a smaller proportion of birth rates overall, the overwhelming majority of births are among unmarried women: over 84% for adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 years (Hamilton, Martin, & Ventura, 2009). Compared to White women, out-of-wedlock birth rates are highest for Latina women, followed by African American women (Hamilton et al., 2009).

We highlight these trends because a large proportion of single mothers and their children live in poverty. Among single-parent families, about 44% of African Americans and 33% of Latinos live below the poverty threshold (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). More than 75% of all unmarried teen mothers receive public assistance within five years of the birth of their first child (National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 2007). Moreover, adolescent mothers are significantly less likely than women who delay childbearing to go on to college (Hofferth, Reid, & Mott, 2001), a factor associated with low-wage employment (Zhan & Pandey, 2004). Single mothers who lack a high school degree are much more likely to be on welfare than women who have a high school degree or more (e.g., Bane & Ellwood, 1994; Jayakody, Danziger, & Pollock, 2000).

Given statistics showing that education is a main predictor of living in poverty (e.g., Nichols, Elman, & Feltey, 2006), we seek to identify the challenges that single mothers experience in
achieving educational success and the protective factors that buffer them from potential negative outcomes. The overall goal of this article is to review programs and services designed to support single mothers’ high school completion and access to postsecondary education. We highlight both problematic and effective aspects of these programs with particular attention to whether they support the educational access of Latinas and African American single mothers from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds; these groups comprise a large majority of adolescent mothers today in the United States. We focus on key initiatives within community colleges and private four-year colleges that appear particularly promising. The approaches within community colleges are particularly important to examine, given the high levels (60%) of low-income students who begin postsecondary education in these institutions (Shaw, Goldrick-Rab, Mazzeo, & Jacobs, 2006). Despite community colleges’ open admissions policies and relatively low fees, encouraging students—particularly low-wage workers, single mothers, dropouts, and underprepared students—to enroll, persist, and complete education and training programs remains a major challenge (Richburg-Hays, 2008; Weismann et al., 2009). Identifying best practices in both community colleges and private liberal arts colleges is critical to enhance the institutional support system for single mothers, a group that is most at risk of living in poverty or working in jobs that pay below subsistence levels.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Critical to the enterprise of understanding how to empower single mothers to pursue their educational goals is to move beyond a negative, pathological “social problems” view of young single motherhood. The developmental assets framework (Benson, Mannes, Pittman, & Ferber, 2004) takes into consideration that external (e.g., schools, communities, and family members) and internal factors (e.g., self-efficacy, commitment to learning) can reduce health-compromising behaviors (e.g., sexual risk behavior) and increase such thriving behaviors as school success among youth (Benson & Leffert, 2001). The greater the number of developmental assets

![FIGURE 1](Environmental and psychological assets predicting thriving behavior among young single mothers.)
possessed by young mothers, the more resilient they can become and the greater the likelihood of their educational success.

Benson (1997) proposed 40 assets that predict resiliency and thriving behavior among youth. With respect to the challenges confronting single mothers, nine external and internal assets, or protective factors, specifically buffer adolescent mothers from potential negative risk. Figure 1 outlines these relevant factors. Caring adults—family members, teachers, and mentors—as well as internal assets—achievement motivation, school engagement, a sense of purpose, and positive views of one’s personal future—contribute to positive youth development among single mothers.

HIGH SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY PROGRAM SERVICES

Too often, adolescents are blamed for the conditions that led to the circumstances that compromised their education (Waller, Brown, & Whittle, 1999). Young single mothers from low-income neighborhoods are more likely to attend low-performing schools that do not provide a learning environment that prepares them for higher education (Kirby, 2002). It is not surprising that, prior to becoming pregnant, many adolescent mothers were disengaged from school (Hofferth et al., 2001; Stephens, Wolf, & Batten, 1999). Through specialized programs for this population, schools and community organizations can enhance the resiliency that pregnant and parenting adolescents need to overcome the challenges that might keep them from completing high school and aspiring to higher education.

Research suggests that such programs are well-received by adolescent mothers. For many adolescents, the transition to motherhood can strengthen their determination to succeed. In an ethnographic study that explored the resiliency of adolescent mothers, one motivating factor for the young women to finish school and become financially independent was the “rebellious determination to prove she was not doomed to failure” (Carey, Ratliffe, & Lyle, 1998, p. 347). Pregnant and parenting adolescents report that their drives to succeed are inspired by their desire to be good examples for their children (Shanok & Miller, 2005). Feelings of responsibility and protectiveness over their children also motivate some pregnant and parenting adolescents to avoid risk behaviors, such as substance use (Kaiser & Hays, 2005; Shanok & Miller, 2005). Many adolescents adapt their aspirations to incorporate their motherhood status, or, as one teen mother said, “This is just another obstacle but it doesn’t have to stop you” (Camarena, Minor, Melmer, & Ferrie, 1998, p. 132). Findings such as these counterstereotypical images of decreased ambition and low self-esteem among young single mothers, and refute that such young mothers are doomed to lives of unfulfilled dreams (Camarena et al., 1998). Instead, many adolescent mothers manage to find ways to stay in school despite adverse circumstances (Clemens, 2003).

An increasing number of public school programs have been developed to try to help adolescent mothers successfully juggle the dual roles of student and mother. A common solution for many school districts is to reassign pregnant and parenting adolescents to an alternative high school or program that serves all students who are on the verge of school dropout (Aron, 2003). The goal of these programs is to provide students who have academic and conduct problems with the additional attention and academic support they may not receive in the traditional school system. Alternative schools typically provide flexible class scheduling and instructional practices (e.g., individualized learning contracts) to facilitate school attendance. Flexible scheduling can help prevent academic disengagement among adolescent mothers who may need to miss
Some school districts provide a combination of home schooling, tutoring, and make-up assignments to afford adolescent mothers the time to manage parenting and health issues. Although pregnant and parenting students are expected to benefit from flexibility in the school day and from receiving more individualized instruction, there are potential drawbacks to attending these alternative school environments. Most students who attend these programs are not there by choice, but rather because they have been placed there in accordance with school district policies recommending their segregation from their mainstream peers (Martin & Brand, 2006). Moreover, school districts with large racial-ethnic minority student populations and high poverty rates are more likely than other districts to have alternative education programs comprised of youth who are there for disciplinary reasons and chronic academic problems (Aron, 2003). Aggregating single mothers with low-performing youth who have behavioral and academic difficulties and separating them from the general school population limits adolescent mothers’ acquisition of social capital. Social capital—understood roughly as those “connections to individuals and to networks that can provide access to resources and forms of support” facilitates educational goals, academic achievement, and engagement” (Stanton-Salazar, 2004, p. 1). One aspect of social capital is adolescents’ relationships with peers. Structurally, alternative school environments restrict the opportunities for adolescent mothers to interact with academically oriented peers, which, in turn, can negatively affect their self-efficacy and motivation to succeed.

A more optimal solution for meeting the needs of pregnant and parenting adolescents is for schools to integrate comprehensive programs that tap into a variety of community resources. The California School Age Families Education (Cal-SAFE) program, administered by the California Department of Education, is one example. The Cal-SAFE program model encourages schools to form collaborative partnerships with community agencies to help adolescent mothers manage the roles of single parent and student. This program offers a holistic approach within local high schools with vocational counseling, community health services, and classes that lead toward a high school diploma. Adolescent mothers use on-site childcare centers where they also get hands-on, supervised experience in caring for children. Findings from a recent program evaluation of approximately 30,000 expectant and/or parenting students (mostly Latinas) showed that over 75% left the Cal-SAFE Program having completed their high school education, with the majority planning to enroll in a local community college (California Department of Education, 2005). Moreover, less than 3% of the students were expecting another child when they enrolled or exited the program. This finding is critical, given that adolescent mothers are at high risk for experiencing multiple pregnancies during adolescence (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1998), a factor that is likely to reduce their chances of achieving their educational goals.

Other districts rely on school-based clinics to help adolescent mothers navigate the obstacles associated with acquiring a high school diploma. The Second Chance Club is one example. Pregnant and parenting adolescents participate in weekly group meetings focused on parenting, career planning, and group support (Key, Barbosa, & Owens, 2001). Medical care for the adolescent and the infant are provided through a linked university-based clinic, as well as the school-based clinic. A unique aspect of this particular program is that the adolescents are required to take part in community service projects that provide mentoring for at-risk middle-school girls. Although the developmental assets framework highlights the benefits of adolescents becoming involved in community activities (Benson, 1997), it is not clear to what extent...
community service constitutes a constructive use of time for busy single mothers. The program has also been criticized for its reliance on peer support groups for preventing repeat pregnancies. Nonetheless, Key et al. (2001) reported positive results with respect to this outcome. In a study conducted with 50 African American single mothers, the researchers found that only 6% of adolescents who had participated in the program experienced a repeat pregnancy, compared to 44% of a control group of adolescents who did not participate.

A similar program for pregnant and parenting teens is the Laurence Palquin School Program in Baltimore, MD. The program provides adolescents attending regular high schools with educational and employment counseling services and childcare assistance. Adolescent mothers are also provided with information, counseling, and services for family planning through a local hospital. In a systematic evaluation of this program, participants were less likely to desire additional children; moreover, they increased their current contraceptive use compared to the nonparticipant control group (Amin & Sato, 2004).

Another promising program is the Family Growth Center and the Program Archive on Sexuality, Health, and Adolescence (PASHA) in Pittsburgh, PA (Lehr, Johnson, Bremer, Cosio, & Thompson, 2004). A key aspect of this program is the involvement of extended family members. Grandmothers, aunts, siblings, and other relatives are recruited to help the mother adjust to the new parenting role. Social workers conduct regular home visits to strengthen their social support networks. Results from a longitudinal program evaluation showed that program participants had significantly lower rates of repeat pregnancies, as well as a significantly higher rate of school completion (lower dropout rate) when compared to adolescent mothers who had not received any intervention.

The focus of the Family Growth Program on enhancing social support from family members is critical for the educational aspirations of single mothers. Camarena and her associates (1998) found that young women’s aspirations facilitated their adjustment to early childbearing if they also received support from people who cared (e.g., family members, mentors, support staff). The person most frequently named as a source of support for their future aspirations was their own mothers (the baby’s grandmother). Research indicates that economic and emotional support from mothers is associated with lower depression, higher levels of life satisfaction among adolescent mothers, and, most important, less difficulty attending school (e.g., Hess, Papas, & Black, 2002; Leadbeater, 1996; SmithBattle, 2006). These findings point to the importance of supporting programs that incorporate services to build and maintain positive family relationships.

As specified by the developmental assets framework, family members are an important source of support for adolescent mothers, but so are school personnel. Adolescent mothers benefit if they perceive that their teachers, counselors, and school psychologists are available and supportive (Kalil, 2002). For example, in one high school, teachers and school counselors were paired up with a pregnant or parenting adolescent (mostly African American) for an entire school year (Wright & Davis, 2008). The teachers were asked to describe the adolescent mothers’ concerns and to give an example in which they felt they had a positive influence on the student. The teachers reported that the adolescents confided a number of worries to them, for example, having to pay bills, care for younger siblings, exposure to violence in their neighborhoods, depression because of the absence of the father or concern about their children growing up without a father, and future dating experiences. Some teachers responded by encouraging adolescents to not give up; moreover, they provided tutoring and advice about going on to college. Others spent time
with the adolescent after school or even visited with their families. In general, teacher-mentors provided the young women with hope that their educational aspirations were within their reach. Including mechanisms that develop hope among adolescent mothers is critical and associated with positive educational outcomes, which underscores the need to train teachers on how to foster caring relationships with adolescent mothers.

In addition to teachers, nonrelated adults in the community can provide needed social support. In one study, adolescent mothers took part in a parenting intervention that was largely administered by community volunteer mentors (Turner, McGowan, Culpepper, & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2007). Prior to the onset of the intervention, community volunteers underwent a training program (Parenting for School Success) that helped them develop facilitator skills such as leading group discussions and developing active listening skills for working one-on-one with adolescents. The mentor training sessions also included instruction on child development and effective caretaking practices. As part of their program evaluation, the researchers asked the adolescent mothers what they liked most about the program. Social support was perceived positively by adolescent mothers as evidenced by their responses that talking to their individual mentors was the activity they enjoyed best. The researchers speculated that mentors played a role in helping to reduce the stress associated with infant caretaking.

Up to this point, we have not discussed the role of the baby’s father as part of the adolescent mothers’ support system. There is some evidence to suggest that social support from a male partner is related to mothers’ positive parenting attitudes (e.g., Samuels, Stockdale, & Crase, 1994), highlighting the need to offer services that strengthen these relationships. Yet a growing body of research suggests that there are high rates of abuse and violence against young adolescent women from their intimate partners (Leadbeater, Way, & Harmon, 2001; Schwartz, McRoy, & Downs, 2004). One reason, perhaps, is that approximately half of all live births to young adolescent girls involve an adult male (Landry & Forrest, 1995). This age differential creates an unequal power balance between an adult and a minor, which contributes to young adolescents’ vulnerability to abuse in the relationship, especially if they are financially dependent. Moreover, being married or living with an older partner leads to repeat pregnancies. In one study, researchers found that adolescent mothers who lived with a husband or boyfriend after the birth of their first child were more likely to have a second teen birth compared to adolescents who lived with at least one of their parents (Manlove, Mariner, & Papillo, 2000). Further research is needed on fathers’ roles regarding adolescent mothers’ well-being, especially given current welfare policies (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families; TANF) that encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families as a means of transitioning adolescent mothers off of public assistance.

**COLLEGE SUPPORT PROGRAMS**

Welfare reform policies can aggravate the challenges young adult single mothers face to access and succeed in postsecondary education. Program data on TANF reveals that women make up the vast majority of the nation’s welfare recipients; moreover, 87% of welfare recipients are single parents (Acks & Loprest, 2007). To receive benefits, TANF single-parent recipients are required to engage in some form of employment or community service (commonly known as “workfare”) for 20–30 hours weekly. For adolescents, satisfactory secondary school attendance
counts toward the work requirement; however, in many states, time spent toward a postsecond-
ary education degree, including the Associate Degree, does not qualify alone or must be com-
bined with work hours to meet TANF work requirements. As such, it is difficult, if not im-
possible, for many low-income single mothers to attend or complete degree programs at a
community college or a four-year college or university and reconcile both their significant fam-
ily responsibilities and the high levels of required work hours.

Difficulty in attending college is compounded by the lack of affordable and quality daycare.
In 2002, only 25% of degree-granting postsecondary institutions offered on-campus daycare.
Among public two-year community colleges that enroll the largest proportion of low-income
adults, only 26% provided daycare (Cook, 2004). The lack of daycare, coupled with a work-first
approach to social welfare policies, undercuts the goal of helping single mothers with low
educational backgrounds become self-sufficient by restricting their opportunities to access and
be successful in higher education (Shaw et al., 2006). Another huge barrier is the 18- to
24-month time limit wherein education can be used to satisfy the TANF work requirement
and the five-year overall lifetime limit for TANF benefits.

How welfare reform and TANF are implemented vary by state. In 1997, the California legis-
lature created CalWORKS (California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids). CalWorks
requires all adults to work or participate in welfare-to-work activities to remain eligible for a
maximum of 60 months during their lifetime. About 47,000 CalWorks recipients enrolled in
the community colleges in 2000–2001 (Mathur, 2002). CalWorks students are more likely to
be women of color and single mothers. Twice as many CalWorks students do not have high
school diplomas as community college students in general. In the community colleges, CalWorks
participants often access other programs such as Extended Opportunity Programs and Services
(EOPS), Disabled Students Program and Services (DSPS) and, for single heads of household with
children under 14 years old, Cooperative Agencies Resources for Education (CARE).

Many young single mothers who are able to attend college experience institutional barriers to
pursuing higher education while juggling work, classes, and family. Research on CalWorks reci-
pients who have attended community colleges demonstrate that the more units they complete,
the greater their increase in earnings. CalWorks students who do not complete certificates or
degrees, however, are disadvantaged in the labor market. Despite the positive relationship
between higher levels of education and earnings, many single parents are neither encouraged
or supported to finish an Associate’s degree, which typically takes between 3 and 3.5 years
to complete (Mathur, 2002).

One daunting structural barrier that single mothers face is uneven access to educational
information and advocacy; that is, many report receiving inconsistent advice from county
caseworkers and community college counselors. Findings from a series of focus groups with
low-income parents in California’s community colleges found that many county caseworkers
lacked awareness of the educational programs that are eligible for the work participation require-
ments of TANF. Instead, caseworkers often encouraged students to enroll in short-term
vocational training classes that lead to jobs that may be easier to access but are usually
low-paying. County caseworkers often discouraged students who wished to enroll in longer
term, degree-granting educational programs that can lead to better paying jobs (Nelson &
Pernell, 2003).

groups involving 131 low-wage workers, mostly mothers, across six community colleges,
including one in California. They found that students need ongoing on-campus academic and personal support rather than the intermittent advice they receive, which limits their awareness of college or community-based resources. Numerous students require remediation, but there are few bridges between remedial courses and the kinds of courses that allow students to earn credit towards degrees and credentials.

Single mothers often have a difficult time seeking resources given time constraints, childcare needs, and financial hardships. Mothers often express ambivalence about leaving their children in daycare too long. Other mothers feel guilty about any time spent studying and attending classes, away from their children. One mother expressed, ‘‘I felt so guilty one day that I wanted to drop out of school. That day was just like any other school day in that I had to be gone most of the day and night with work and school’’ (Bruns, 2004, p. 2). And when children become ill, single mothers often miss classes.

Community colleges have developed a number of programs to address the needs of low-income students, many of whom are single mothers of color. Richburg-Hays (2008) analyzed the Opening Doors Project in Louisiana, a program involving predominantly single mothers of color with children below the age of 18 with family incomes 200% below the poverty level. Participants received $1,000 for each of two semesters in increments of $250 at the beginning of each semester, $250 after the mid-term with a C average, followed by $500 after they passed all classes. This scholarship supplemented other financial aid. Opening Doors students were also provided with enhanced student services. Richburg-Hays (2008) found that participants were more likely than nonparticipants to reregister, attempt more courses, pass more courses, and earn more credits. Along with enhanced student services, the financial incentives attached to well-defined educational milestones resulted in a large positive effect on academic achievement among single mothers facing multiple barriers to complete college.

Research points to the need for community colleges to integrate academic and student support services. One such initiative, the Student Support Partnership Integrating Resources and Education (SSPIRE) involved nine California community colleges who received as much as $250,000 from 2006–2009. The nine SSPIRE colleges considered four basic approaches to integrating student services with instruction: learning communities, a drop-in study center, a summer math program, and case management programs (Weismann et al., 2009). Five colleges, including Santa Ana College in California, which has a large proportion of Latino students, implemented learning communities in which student cohorts took two or more courses that were modified to incorporate student services such as counseling and study skills development. Learning communities led to modest increases in course pass rates. Case management programs designed to support Latino students were implemented at two community colleges. SSPIRE counselors and advisors worked with less than 200 students at any time, compared to non-SSPIRE counselors, whose caseload was approximately 1,000 students. The high levels of personalized attention offered critical support to students but appeared less conducive to being continued without significant increases in funding, given high staff costs. Programs that integrate academic and student support services and provide systematic feedback to young single mothers of color who struggle to meet the often-competing urgencies of family, work, and education are essential and will likely yield more positive outcomes as they become institutionalized.

CARE is a state-funded program in the California community colleges designed to recruit and assist CalWorks single parents. Nearly all of the CARE single parents are women heading households, most of whom are racial-ethnic minorities. There are 110 CARE programs in all
community college districts. The FY 2007–2008 budget appropriation for CARE was $15.5 million. The California Community College Chancellor’s Office report argued that CARE (and EOPS) “offer the helping hand and personal encouragement that lends itself to individual achievement and success” (California Community Colleges, Office of the Chancellor, 2002, p. 1). This is operationalized through coordinated support services including three mandatory counseling contacts per term and an educational learning plan that outlines the sequence of required coursework each student needs to achieve her certificate, degree, or transfer goals. CARE offers a range of supplementary support such as book allowances, personal and academic advising, tutoring, and peer support networks. The program also has an “early alert” monitoring system to keep track of student progress and intervene if the student stumbles academically. CARE students are more likely to persist from term to term than other EOPS students; moreover, they earn Associate’s degrees and other certificates at higher rates than EOPS students, albeit with lower transfer rates (18.2%). The community colleges argue that fewer CARE students transfer to four-year colleges or universities because of the pressures of single parenthood and the time limits and work requirements of CalWorks/TANF.

Finding ways to reconcile the competing urgencies of motherhood and education within the parameters of welfare reform is being tackled by both private and public institutions. The Wellesley Center for Research on Women examined a sample of 21 college preparatory programs, Associate Degree programs, and Bachelors degree programs nationwide (Marx, 2002). They found that the most successful programs developed programmatic mechanisms to address the fears and needs of low-income single mothers, including enhancing effective ways to navigate both welfare and higher education bureaucracies and providing extra academic and personal assistance to help women who fear they can’t fit in, have low academic self-concept, and experience personal relationship stress. Mentoring and peer support were also critical components of effective programs. One program, Women in Community Development (WICD), a joint venture between the Women’s Institute for Housing and Economic Development and the University of Massachusetts at Boston, offers a model of community/university partnership. WICD specializes in developing leadership among low-income single parents in Massachusetts (largely African American or Latina) who are also interested in careers in human services. Although this program is small (12 participants), the congruence between the personal goals of participants and those of the WICD program contribute to its success as measured by rates of retention and college graduation.

Private, liberal arts four-year colleges are participating in innovative ways to support the postsecondary educational aspirations of low-income single mothers. The Higher Education Alliance For Residential Single Parent Programs (HEARSPP)1 is a coalition of colleges and universities that offer residential degree programs. In addition to the academic support and financial assistance these colleges offer, they also provide on-campus community housing in which mothers and their children live. Many of the colleges also offer childcare or provide help securing childcare in the local community. The colleges offer some flexibility in the curriculum

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1Higher Education Alliance for Residential Single Parents Programs (HEARSPP) members include Baldwin-Wallace College in Berea, OH; Berea College in Berea, KY; College of St. Mary in Omaha, NE; Endicott College in Beverly, MA; Misericordia University in Dallas, PA; St. Paul’s College in Lawrenceville, VA; and Wilson College in Chambersburg, PA.
and have enjoyed success among program participants. As one participant at Wilson College’s Women with Children Program stated:

I will have my education for life and no one can take that away from me. Employers should be able to see the discipline I have had to complete my college education and have the ability to raise my child at the same time. This discipline will show them that I can be successful. (Wilson College, 2005)

CONCLUSION

Our review of the literature finds that high school districts are grappling with the challenge of developing programs to meet the multiple needs of adolescent mothers within regular school sites. Programs that are more successful in supporting the educational aspirations of adolescent mothers foster collaborations with community agencies to provide comprehensive services through service integration. These services include (on-site) quality child care, parenting classes, educational and vocational counseling, reproductive health services, and programs to strengthen mothers’ social support networks (family members and non-related adults such as teachers or mentors). What is striking is that many programs offer two or three of these key features, but the most successful programs enhance the resiliency of adolescent mothers by providing a comprehensive approach that integrates family, school, and community supports. One limitation of such programs, however, is a lack of longitudinal data on the long-term benefits of these programs beyond adolescence.

Community colleges and four-year institutions have also developed programs designed to strengthen the education and job training of young single mothers. Programs are limited, however, by the work requirements and time limits established by TANF and by a lack of integration and feedback between support services and academic instruction. Unless TANF requirements are modified to allow students time to complete postsecondary degrees, their earnings will remain at the poverty level.

The educational programs with the most positive outcomes provide case management and regular feedback to students, financial scholarships attached to educational milestones, extended childcare hours, and referrals to community agencies. In addition, housing support, which is offered only in a few sites, has direct positive benefits to women’s educational outcomes. Without these forms of assistance, many single mothers are forced to stop their coursework or drop out of school (Nelson & Purnell, 2003).

An important limitation in the literature related to developing effective approaches is the lack of rigorous evaluation of existing programs. Many of the programs reviewed here did not utilize an experimental design with an adequate control group or a representative sample. Moreover, it is not clear which particular aspects of these programs have the greatest impact on the educational outcomes of young single mothers, or for which populations. Without good data on how program features contribute to the educational attachment of specific subgroups (e.g., Latinas, African Americans), we are left with a one-size-fits-all model. Such a general approach disregards diversity among single mothers and gives rise to programs that cannot adequately meet the specific needs of any one group. Programs need to build upon the beliefs, values, and practices of the populations they are serving to enhance the resiliency and determination of young single mothers to succeed.
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