

A Statewide Policy Advocacy Intervention in California: The No Time for Complacency Initiative

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Abstract

California has made substantial progress since 1991 in reducing its teen birth rate, and its rate reduction now leads the nation. Yet more than 50,000 Californian teens continue to give birth each year, and many more became pregnant. And due to changing demographics and the recent reversal in the last decade's poverty rate declines, California's improvements are at risk. The No Time for Complacency (NTFC) initiative is a policy advocacy intervention designed to promote effective statewide teen pregnancy prevention policy and funding in California. This initiative employs legislative-district data analysis to provide a politically compelling organization of teen birth data, cost analyses to heighten the societal relevance of teen births, policy analysis to identify promising and effective state policies, and media advocacy to focus attention on these issues in all regions of the state. The process and results described show how it was possible to achieve impacts on state-level health policy and program funding.

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Introduction

California has made substantial progress since 1991 in reducing its teen birth rate. While all 50 states have experienced declining teen birth rates during this period, California's rate reduction leads the nation. In spite of these improvements, the teen birth rate in California remains high by international standards, in fact higher than the rates for every other industrialized country. In 2004, more than 50,000 teens gave birth in California – one out of 25 young women aged 15 to 19 – and many more became pregnant. And due to the changing demographics of the California adolescent population, combined with a recent reversal in the poverty rate declines of the last decade, California's improvements are at risk.

California has been a national leader in several important policy areas related to statewide teen pregnancy prevention. The only state to have consistently declined Section 510, Title V, abstinence-only-until-marriage federal funds, California avoids this program's matching funds

requirements and its prohibition of comprehensive sexuality education. In addition, the State of California has made substantial bipartisan investments in funding community- and school-based teen pregnancy prevention programs and services. Additional long-term investments have been made by several philanthropic foundations, led by The California Wellness Foundation. The estimated total state and philanthropic investment during recent years has been approximately \$60 million for programs and activities focused directly on teen pregnancy prevention. In addition, approximately \$68 million annually of combined state and federal funds comprise the 21% adolescent share of FamilyPACT, California's Medicaid demonstration project waiver to provide comprehensive reproductive health services to low-income women and men (more details on specific program characteristics and funding levels are provided in Constantine & Nevarez, 2003; 2006).

In 2002, an unprecedented state budget crisis was gathering steam. The governor's 2003 proposed budget included extensive cuts in teen pregnancy prevention program funding, and calls were growing for California to reverse course and accept federal abstinence-only-until-marriage funding. As a result, what we initially had viewed as a proactive opportunity to advocate for improved policy and expanded funding in California evolved into a more reactive need to ensure continuation of funding for key programs, and protection and clarification of positive legislation. During this time, the fragmented and inadequate implementation of comprehensive sexuality and HIV/AIDS prevention education in many California school districts was formally documented by two statewide school district surveys (Friedman et al., 2003; Burlingame, 2003), confirming in-the-field reports from California Department of Education district compliance reviewers (personal communication, Chris Berry).

Evidence-Based Policy Advocacy

Policy advocacy interventions increasingly have been recognized as essential strategies for public health (e.g., Brindis & Ott, 2002; Schwartz, Goodman, & Steckler, 1995). Defined by Altman et al. (1993) as "the active espousal of a cause or principle and actions that lead to a goal considered worthwhile by the people involved," advocacy offers promise to address some of society's most important public health challenges.

Research findings and data can provide a strong foundation for evidence-based policy advocacy. Although research results alone do not typically affect public policy directly, research can have a greater impact when it becomes part of advocacy for a preferred position (Weiss, 1991). Four kinds of research evidence have been identified as potentially impacting program and policy decisions – descriptive data, analytic information, evaluation, and policy analysis (Weiss, 2001). These types of evidence can be used individually or in combination, but for evidence to prevail in policy making it must be persuasively used. As Weiss advises, "Whispering in the ear of the powerful will no

longer be enough. Researchers and data providers of all types will need to alter their ideas about what it takes to get a hearing for evidence and to master the arts of communication to multiple audiences. Their findings will have to inform and convince a wide swatch of the public if policy is to be truly evidence-based." (2001, p. 291).

The No Time For Complacency Initiative

The No Time for Complacency (NTFC) initiative employs legislative district data analysis, cost analysis, policy analysis, and media advocacy to educate policy makers and others to support effective statewide adolescent sexual health promotion policy and funding in California. NTFC is part of the California Adolescent Sexual Health Policy Project (CASHPP), first funded by The California Wellness Foundation in 2002, and subsequently re-funded through 2007. Other components of CASHPP include a qualitative study of community support in California for comprehensive sexuality education (Constantine, Slater, & Carroll, in press), an explanatory case study of the state's teen birthrate decline, and a statewide telephone survey of parental support for comprehensive sexuality education across five California social-geographic regions. This article describes the process and results of the initial 2002-2003 phase of the NTFC initiative.

The primary message of this initiative can be summarized as "no time for complacency." This message has three parts, and is challenging to work with due to its complexity. The first part is that California has been doing something right. Appendix A shows the dramatic decline in California's teen birth rate during the decade from 1991 to 2001 (these were the most recent data available at the time of the 2003 release). This improvement in rates becomes more compelling when compared to the more modest national decline, and to the anemic decline in Texas, a state with many shared socio-demographic and population characteristics but dramatically different prevention policies and funding levels.

The second part of the message is that in spite of its considerable improvements, California needs to do more. A comparison of California and U.S. teen birth rates to rates for other industrialized countries was employed to illustrate this need. Historical teen birth rates for developed countries were compiled by Singh and Darroch (2000). Across the 45 countries for which recent data were available, teen birth rates for 1995 ranged from a low of 3.6 in Japan to a high of 56.2 in Armenia (see [Appendix B](#)). The comparative U.S. rate (for 1995) was 54.4, second highest after Armenia.

The last part of the message is that if more isn't done, there will be negative consequences and costs. Due to demographic shifts among the adolescent population as well as other factors, the progress of the last decade is at risk. [Appendix C](#) shows actual numbers of teen births for each year of the decade up to 2001 on the left, and California Department of Finance (CDOF) projections for the following decade on the right. (These were the most recent data available in 2003, CDOF projections have since been reduced, and a less dramatic reversal over time is now projected.)

Data analyses, including legislative-district teen birth data analyses and cost analyses, provided an empirical foundation for the initiative's message (all analysis methods are detailed in Constantine & Nevarez, 2003). California's 40 state senate districts were mapped to zip codes, and senate district teen birth rates and counts were computed using zip-code level teen birth counts provided by the California Department of Health Services, together with U.S. Census Zip Code Tabulation Area (ZCTA) population data. Cost analyses employed a rigorous algorithm developed by Maynard and colleagues (1997), adapted to California and adjusted for inflation. This allowed for estimation of taxpayer and societal costs associated with adolescent child bearing in California. Finally, as presented in [Appendix D](#), the legislative district data analyses were combined with the cost analyses to yield cost estimates by legislative district. (A similar births and costs analysis was completed for California's 80 assembly districts.) Comparing these district data to the international data

provided in [Appendix B](#) further illustrated that every one of California's 40 state senate districts had higher teen birth rates than, for example, Japan (3.6), Netherlands (5.8), Italy (6.9), France (10.0), Germany (13.2), and Ireland (15.0).

An integrated set of professionally designed and produced materials provided a primary vehicle for the NTFC message. This included the 40-page policy report (Constantine & Nevarez, 2003), an eight-page executive summary, individual fact sheets for each of 40 state senate districts, supplemental charts, and two websites - one public and one password-protected for media use during the pre-release embargo (all materials are currently available on the public-use web site, <http://teenbirths.phi.org>). The policy report examined consequences and costs of adolescent childbearing, trends of the last decade, statistical projections for the future, and California policies and program investments, and included a detailed set of policy recommendations. A press release was developed, as part of a press kit also containing an NTFC fact sheet, spokespersons list, key findings summary, recommendations, and other related information.

Throughout the initiative, the focus was kept on our primary audience, state legislators, and our supporting audience, policy influentials such as legislative staff, journalists, and advocates. The print news media was used extensively with the help of a media communications firm. This involved making personal contacts and providing press kits and other content and logistical support to individual journalists to promote wide coverage in every newspaper market in California. Similarly, personal contacts were made directly with legislators and their staff. For example, on the day before the media release, each of the 40 state senators' offices were personally visited and provided with copies of the executive summary, the district fact sheets for their district, and the web site address for further information. Among other benefits, this helped ensure that policy makers would be prepared to respond to the media questions that began the following day.

Critical partners were recruited and supported at both the local and state levels. Local community partners were primarily advocates associated with community-based agencies. These were key to providing community perspectives for local journalists, as well as providing grass-roots advocacy and legislator support within their own legislative districts. Local partners were provided with media training, conference calls, web-based support materials, referrals, and opportunities for networking. State partners were also recruited, including several legislators' offices and caucuses, and statewide advocacy groups such as Planned Parenthood Affiliates of California, American Civil Liberties Union, Hispanas Organized for Political Equality, and California Alliance Concerned With School-Aged Parenting and Pregnancy Prevention.

Results

The project achieved all of its intended intermediate outcomes together with several longer-term policy impacts. Intermediate outcomes included wide-spread media coverage, extensive use by advocates, and considerable attention by policy makers and others. The coordinated release of the 2003 NTFC report and associated legislative district fact sheets was covered in 22 newspaper articles and editorials across large and small media markets throughout the state, with a combined circulation of more than 4.5 million, and readership of more than nine million (see [Appendix E](#)). Most articles were written around a local connection to the NTFC message, and many provided in-depth coverage of the issues. Unanticipated national media coverage was obtained in the *Washington Times*, and *Latina Magazine*. The report's findings and recommendations also was covered by national and California health policy daily reports, such as the *Kaiser Daily Reproductive Health Report*, and the *California Healthline*.

Various state and local agencies and community-based groups extensively redistributed NTFC materials and used excerpts in their own materials. For example, the California Department of Health Services, Office of Family Planning, reported the following use of materials during spring 2003:

1. Distributed over 350 copies at the Office of Family Planning Leadership Conference for community leaders and OFP staff;
2. Distributed to Department of Health Services employees and Capitol employees at Public Health Week Fair;
3. Distributed to and employed by California Alliance Concerned with School Age Parenting and Pregnancy Prevention members at various CACSAP meetings;
4. Distributed and studied at four California Elected Women's Association for Education & Research policy roundtables in San Diego, Sacramento, Los Angeles, and Fresno, and discussed the NTFC policy recommendations at each roundtable;
5. Studied by Community Action Network members at an advocacy training meeting to develop speaking points for upcoming meetings with policymakers; and
6. Distributed to policymakers (school boards, city councils, county boards of supervisors, etc.) throughout California in conjunction with agencies contracted with the Office of Family Planning to conduct pregnancy prevention activities in their communities.
7. Quoted and cited in several widely distributed Department publications, and linked from the Department's website.

As an example from a community-based agency, Planned Parenthood of Orange and San Bernardino Counties reported use of NTFC materials at the following eight meetings during spring, 2003: (1) Planned Parenthood Capitol Day; (2) Santa Ana Teen Pregnancy Prevention Roundtable; (3) Planned Parenthood of Orange and San Bernardino Counties Community Action Fund Board of Directors; (4) Planned Parenthood of Orange and San Bernardino Counties Board of Directors; (5) Orange County Clergy for Choice "Sex Education: The Role of the Faith Community" training; (6) Latina Voices for Reproductive Choices Symposium; (7) Advocates for Choice meeting; and (8) lobbying visits with state legislators, where NTFC materials were included in lobby packets during visits with 17 legislators.

Eight California legislators went on the record with quotes about the study. This included the

late Marco Firebaugh, at the time Assembly Majority Floor Leader and Chair of the California Latino Legislative Caucus, who stated “This study gives every legislator a definitive picture of the impact that teen pregnancies are having on their districts and their constituents. This is an issue that all legislators must continue to take seriously.”

The initiative’s ultimate impact on state policy was substantial. As recommended in the NTFC report and emphasized in the initiative, and at the height of the California state budget crisis, approximately \$27 million of proposed cuts were restored to the state budget for school- and community-based teen pregnancy prevention programs. In addition, California’s FamilyPACT program, providing reproductive health services to low-income women and men, was continued with combined federal and state matching funds of approximately \$380 million - of which approximately 21 percent (\$80 million) was expected to serve adolescents. The NTFC materials were extensively used by state and local stakeholders in advocating for protection or restoration of these funding lines, and the initiative has been widely credited as a key factor in these funding successes.

Four legislative bills were affected by NTFC, including the California Comprehensive Sexual Health and HIV Prevention Education Act (SB 71, enacted October, 2003), designed to strengthen and consolidate California’s disparate and often confusing sexuality education code. NTFC materials and recommendations were used by sponsors and proponents of SB 71, and proponents or opponents of three other related legislative bills in 2003 (SB 267, AB 661, and AB 178), including citing the policy report during legislative hearings, inserting text from the report into bills, arranging for NTFC staff to draft and review bill language and to testify at legislative committee hearings, and extensively quoting, reproducing, and distributing NTFC materials. As a result of these successes, NTFC was awarded the 2003 Compass Award by the Public Relations Society of America as the best public relations campaign in Northern California.

Challenges Faced

The NTFC experience provided abundant challenges. Perhaps most salient was the experience of struggling for the delicate balance required to focus maximum attention on the issue of teen births, without exaggerating or sensationalizing the problem and without reinforcing harmful negative stereotypes about adolescents (see, e.g., Gillian & Bales, 2001). Inevitably, this balance was not always found, with some newspaper stories as well as supportive legislators broadly over-attributing many of California’s financial and other societal problems to parenting teens.

The variable level of conclusiveness of evaluation results associated with the numerous state-funded programs was another challenge to work with. The largest program, FamilyPACT, had been rigorously studied, with compelling evidence of effectiveness presented (Brindis & Darney, 2000; and more recently Brindis et al., 2004; Foster et al., 2004). Other state-funded programs are more challenging to evaluate and generally did not yield such compelling evidence of effectiveness. Another delicate balance was required to acknowledge the existence of these evaluations and at the same time their limitations, and to avoid over-interpreting inconclusive results.

The complexity of working effectively with the media to support the initiative’s goals presented a third challenge. Addressing this challenge demonstrated the critical value of partnering with a professional media communications firm early in the initiative. In spite of these and other challenges, the NTFC experience demonstrated the potential power of a statewide public health policy advocacy intervention combining legislative data analysis, cost analysis, policy analysis, and media advocacy.

Current Activities

The primary goals of NTFC have shifted to implementation and protection. This includes helping ensure that the provisions of SB 71 are fully communicated, understood, and implemented, monitoring the threats to SB 71 from potential ballot initiatives and new legislation, monitoring and analyzing state

funding trajectories for teen pregnancy prevention programs, and promoting the integration of teen pregnancy prevention with adolescent HIV/STI prevention.

As part of this process, a working partnership has been formed with the California Adolescent Sexual Health Workgroup. This is a standing workgroup composed of program managers from the California Department of Education and California Department of Health Services who are committed to working more effectively to address the sexual and reproductive health of adolescents in California. The Workgroup's vision is "to create a coordinated, collaborative, and integrated system among government and non-governmental organizations to promote and protect the sexual and reproductive health of youth in California." The Workgroup has agreed

to serve in an advisory capacity to this project, and to facilitate the provision of contributed services, such as incidence data access and customized reports.

Specific current activities for 2006-2007 include providing SB 71 implementation support to state and local agencies and community groups, producing a series of bi-annual policy reviews on the adolescent sexual health policy environment in California (see, e.g., Constantine & Nevarez, 2006), producing a new NTFC report focusing on STI rates and costs by California counties, and conducting and publicizing a representative statewide survey of parental support for comprehensive sexuality education and services across five California regions.

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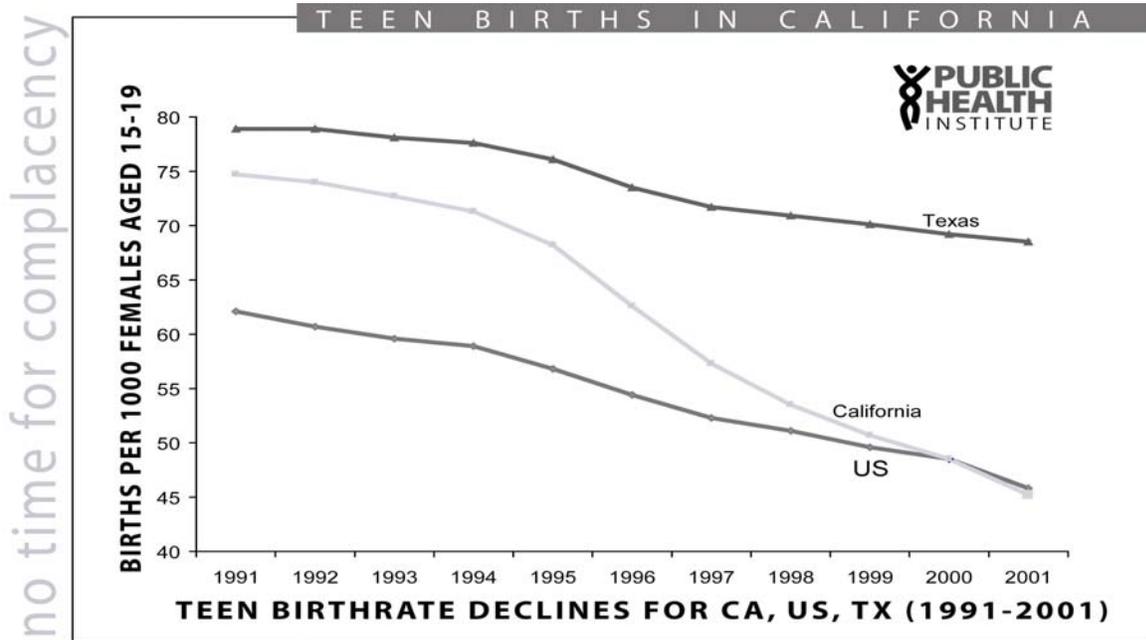
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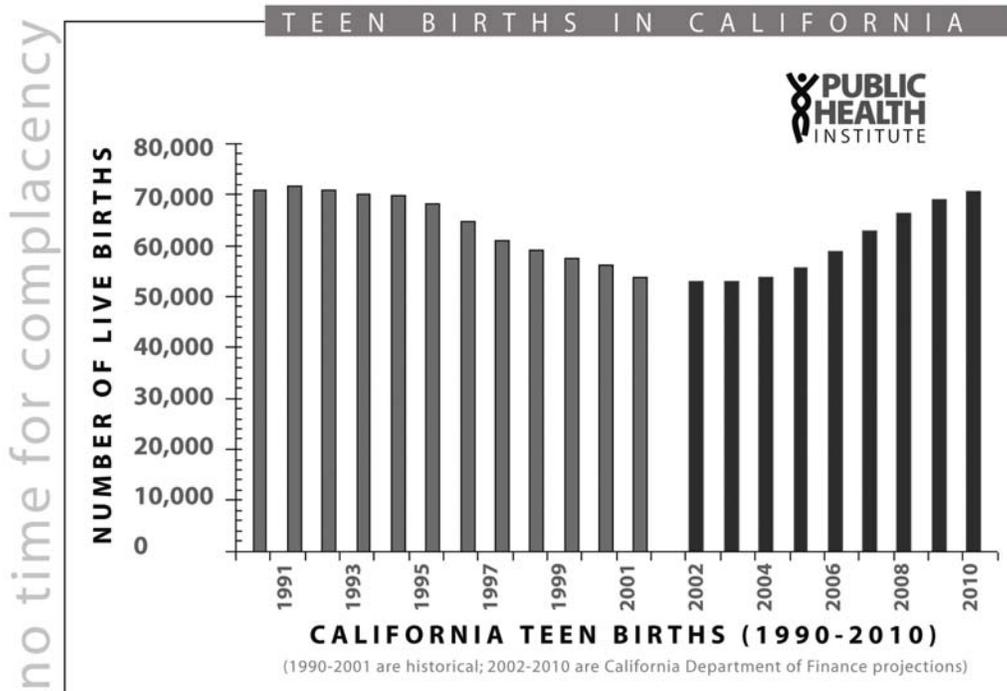
Appendix A
Teen birthrate declines for CA, US, and TX, 1991-2001
(from Constantine & Nevarez, 2003)



Appendix B
 Teen birth rates per 1,000 by country, 1985 and 1995, and percent change
 (Data from Singh & Darroch, 2000)

Country	1985 Teen Birth Rate (per 1K)	1995 teen Birth Rate (per 1,000)	Percent Change 1985 - 1995
Japan	4.0	3.9	-4.0
Switzerland	6.7	5.7	-15.0
Netherlands	6.8	5.8	-15.0
Italy	12.7	6.9	-46.0
Sweden	11.0	7.7	-30.0
Spain	18.5	7.8	-58.0
Denmark	9.1	8.3	-9.0
Belgium	12.6	9.1	-28.0
Slovenia	41.3	9.3	-77.0
Finland	13.8	9.8	-29.0
France	16.9	10.0	-41.0
Greece	36.4	13.0	-64.0
Germany	12.1	13.2	9.0
Norway	17.8	13.5	-24.0
Ireland	16.6	15.0	-10.0
Austria	24.4	15.6	-36.0
Israel	26.1	18.0	-31.0
Australia	22.7	19.8	-13.0
Croatia	38.4	19.9	-48.0
Czech Republic	53.3	20.1	-62.0
Portugal	33.0	20.9	-37.0
Poland	35.1	21.1	-40.0
Iceland	33.7	22.1	-34.0
Northern Ireland	28.7	23.7	-17.0
Canada	23.2	24.2	4.0
Latvia	42.6	25.5	-40.0
Scotland	30.9	27.1	-12.0
Czechoslovakia	52.8	27.5	-48.0
England and Wales	29.5	28.4	-4.0
Hungary	51.5	29.5	-43.0
Yugoslavia (Federal Rep)	48.4	32.1	-34.0
Slovak Republic	51.8	32.3	-38.0
Estonia	43.9	33.4	-24.0
New Zealand	30.6	34.0	11.0
Lithuania	22.1	36.7	66.0
Belarus	32.8	39.0	19.0
Romania	57.3	42.0	-27.0
Macedonia	47.5	44.1	-7.0
Russian Federation	46.9	45.6	-3.0
Bulgaria	77.4	49.6	-36.0
Georgia	49.1	53.0	8.0
Moldova	42.6	53.2	25.0
Ukraine	51.7	54.3	5.0
United States	51.0	54.4	7.0
Armenia	57.0	56.2	-1.0

Appendix C
California teen birth trends and projections
(Constantine & Nevarez, 2003)



Appendix D
Year 2000 Teen Births and Estimated Annual Costs by State Senate Districts
 (Constantine & Nevarez, 2003)

Dist.	Senator	Counties in District	No. of Teen Births	Teen Birth Rate (per 1K)	Teen Birth Rate Rank	Est. Annual Taxpayer Costs (mil.)	Est. Annual Societal Costs (mil.)
1	Thomas Oller (R)	Alpine, Amador, Butte, Calaveras, six others	603	23.6	37	\$17	\$37
2	Wesley Chesbro (D)	Humboldt, Lake, Mendocino, Napa, two others	1,039	36.4	26	\$29	\$64
3	John Burton (D)	Marin, San Francisco, Sonoma	480	27.8	31	\$13	\$30
4	Samuel Aanestad (R)	Butte, Colusa, Glenn, Sacramento, seven others	1,258	39.2	23	\$35	\$78
5	Michael Machado (D)	Sacramento, San Joaquin	1,679	48.1	19	\$46	\$104
6	Deborah Ortiz (D)	Sacramento	1,570	53.7	13	\$43	\$97
7	Tom Torlakson (D)	Alameda, Contra Costa	645	24.8	35	\$18	\$40
8	Jackie Speier (D)	San Francisco, San Mateo	418	19.4	39	\$12	\$26
9	Don Perata (D)	Alameda, Contra Costa	1,255	48.7	18	\$35	\$77
10	Liz Figueroa (D)	Alameda, Santa Clara	806	31.3	28	\$22	\$50
11	Byron Sher (D)	San Mateo, Santa Clara	615	24.5	36	\$17	\$38
12	Jeff Denham (R)	Fresno, Madera, Mariposa, Merced, four others	2,217	64.6	6	\$61	\$137
13	John Vasconcellos (D)	Santa Clara	1,312	51.3	16	\$36	\$81
14	Charles Poochigian (R)	Fresno, Kern, Tulare	1,391	49.9	17	\$38	\$86
15	Bruce McPherson (R)	Monterey, San Benito, Santa Clara, one other	1,097	38.3	24	\$30	\$68
16	Dean Florez (D)	Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Tulare	3,104	94.8	1	\$86	\$192
17	W. "Pete" Knight (R)	Inyo, Kern, Los Angeles, San Bernardino	1,332	43.2	21	\$37	\$82
18	Roy Ashburn (R)	San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Ventura	1,984	63.5	7	\$55	\$123
19	Tom McClintock (R)	Los Angeles, Ventura	816	27.6	32	\$23	\$50
20	Richard Alarcón (D)	Los Angeles	1,747	57.7	11	\$48	\$108
21	Jack Scott (D)	Los Angeles	524	26.4	33	\$15	\$32
22	Gilbert Cedillo (D)	Los Angeles	1,873	74.4	2	\$52	\$116
23	Sheila James Kuehl (D)	Los Angeles	647	30.1	29	\$18	\$40
24	Gloria Romero (D)	Los Angeles	1,872	60.2	9	\$52	\$116
25	Edward Vincent (D)	Los Angeles	1,596	62.1	8	\$44	\$99
26	Kevin Murray (D)	Los Angeles	1,359	59.5	10	\$38	\$84
27	Betty Karnette (D)	Los Angeles	1,623	53.1	14	\$45	\$100
28	Debra Bowen (D)	Los Angeles	783	36.8	25	\$22	\$48
29	Bob Margett (R)	Los Angeles	660	23.1	38	\$18	\$41
30	Martha Escutia (D)	Los Angeles	1,665	57.6	12	\$46	\$103

Dist.	Senator	Counties in District	No. of Teen Births	Teen Birth Rate (per 1K)	Teen Birth Rate Rank	Est. Annual Taxpayer Costs (mil.)	Est. Annual Societal Costs (mil.)
31	James Brulte (R)	Riverside, San Bernardino	1,327	41.1	22	\$37	\$82
32	Nell Soto (D)	Los Angeles, San Bernardino	2,632	73.9	4	\$73	\$163
33	Richard Ackerman (R)	Orange	608	25.1	34	\$17	\$38
34	Joseph Dunn (D)	Orange	2,100	71.9	5	\$58	\$130
35	Ross Johnson (R)	Orange	434	17.0	40	\$12	\$27
36	D. Hollingsworth (R)	Riverside, San Diego	774	29.1	30	\$21	\$48
37	Jim Battin (R)	Imperial, Riverside, San Diego	1,504	52.6	15	\$42	\$93
38	Bill Morrow (R)	Orange, San Diego	1,117	45.4	20	\$33	\$73
39	Dede Alpert (D)	San Diego	865	33.1	27	\$24	\$53
40	D. Moreno Ducheny (D)	San Diego	2,284	74.1	3	\$63	\$141

Appendix E
2003 Newspaper Coverage of NTFC

1. Contra Costa Times
2. Daily Review
3. Fresno Bee
4. Latina Magazine
5. Long Beach Press Telegram
6. Los Angeles Daily News
7. Los Angeles Times
8. Mountain View Voice
9. Orange County Register
10. Pasadena Star-News
11. Sacramento Bee
12. San Bernardino County Sun
13. San Gabriel Valley Tribune
14. San Ramon Valley Times
15. Santa Barbara News Press
16. Sunday Contra Costa Times
17. Sunday SF Chronicle
18. The Argus
19. Tri-Valley Herald
20. Valley Times
21. Washington Times (Washington, DC)
22. West County Times