



Local Teen Pregnancy Rate Falls, But Above US Average

More than 30 teens from across the city joined with Mayor Julián Castro and other officials Wednesday to proclaim good news: Teen pregnancy is down in San Antonio.

But the celebration came with a caveat: The local teen pregnancy rate still is 46 percent higher than the rest of the nation, and much remains to be done.

“All our hard work is paying off, but we still have a ways to go,” Castro said. “We must continue to invest in our efforts, so that young men and women can stay in school, graduate on time, go to college and reach their dreams.”

Put on by Metro Health’s Project WORTH program, the event marked the National Day to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, when cities across the nation focus their attention on the consequences of too-early pregnancy and strategies to avoid it.

The local event featured 10 posters created by teens who participate in Project WORTH or a handful of other programs that try to prevent teen pregnancy.

Jane Emma Barnett, 14, stood before a poster she created with fellow Saint Mary’s Hall student Reagan Naylor, also 14.

It outlined the various aspects of a “Dream Teen Clinic,” where teens would find the sort of health care they need to stay safe.

On the list: Confidential care, where teens can speak openly to health care providers without parents in the room. Low-cost or no-cost access to family planning. Access to the vaccine that prevents cervical cancer.

“A lot of parents don’t really want it for their kids, thinking it encourages us to have sex earlier,” Barnett said. “But studies have proven that’s not true. This vaccine saves lives.”

Other posters relayed different messages — that teens need medically accurate information when it comes to sex, that parents play a critical role in helping kids avoid pregnancy, that sex education should be based on methods that work.

Mario Martinez, program manager for Project WORTH, said the poster project allows youths to speak with “one voice.”

“This is really about getting the message out — about what we’re doing here in San Antonio that is working and about what we need to do more of,” he said.

Dr. Thomas Schlenker, director of public health for the city, delivered the positive numbers: In 2012, there were 2,713 teen births — 1,025 fewer than in 2008. In the past four years, births to teens in all racial and ethnic groups have decreased by 27 percent, and a whopping 43 percent among Hispanic teens ages 15 to 17.

“This is a winnable battle,” Schlenker said.

Experts attribute the decline to two factors: Younger teens are delaying the first time they have sex, and sexually active teens have greater access to birth control.

The posters will be on display at the Central Library through Friday.