Recent data suggests that Worcester adolescents are facing some troubling trends. 
• Teen birth rates in Worcester are consistently higher than teen birth rates in Massachusetts as a whole.
• In 2010, Worcester teen birth rates increased and health care and youth development providers believe the numbers have continued to climb.
• In 2010, Worcester experienced a jump in its ranking of the twenty-five Massachusetts communities with the highest teen pregnancy rates.
• Worcester was one of only four communities to experience an increase in this ranking.
• Teen STI rates in Worcester are consistently higher than those in Massachusetts as a whole.
• Although teen birth rates have decreased in Massachusetts over the last ten years, birth rates remain much higher in vulnerable minority populations.
• According to the Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey, the percentage of Massachusetts adolescents having sexual intercourse is decreasing. However, the percentage of those who used condoms during their last sexual intercourse is also decreasing.
• Worcester Public Schools do not administer the questions on sexual health in the Youth Risk Behavior Survey to their students, so it is unknown whether city trends mirror state trends.

Clearly, a teen pregnancy has a significant impact on an individual. However, it also has an substantial effect on the community. These are a few examples of effects of a high teen birth rate on Worcester.
• Trends show that pregnant teens are less likely to receive adequate prenatal care than pregnant women overall. Further, Worcester pregnant teens are far less likely to receive adequate prenatal care than Massachusetts pregnant teens. Inadequate prenatal care may lead to complications, which can have an deleterious effect on community hospitals.
• Teen pregnancy is correlated with increased rates of high school dropouts. Worcester Public Schools have a higher dropout rate than Massachusetts overall, reflecting badly on the public schools in the community.
• The economic impact of teen pregnancy is incredible. Taxpayers shoulder this burden through public health care and child welfare, increased rates of incarceration in those born to teen mothers, and loss of tax revenue due to decreased earnings and spending.

In order to determine the state of sexual health education and reproductive health services in Worcester schools, data was gathered from conversations with principals and sexual health educators at 4 public high schools and 2 public middle schools and from conversations with health providers at 2 school-based health centers.

Sexual Health Education
Sexual health education was found to be incredibly variable across various public middle and high schools. 
• Sexual health courses reach a variable number of students. At some schools, all students take a health class during their education. At other schools, health is an elective that students may choose to take if they desire. This will be further exacerbated now that WPS have adopted the MassCore curriculum, which does not require students to take a health class in order to graduate.
• The time devoted toward sexual health fluctuates widely. Some health educators spend a great deal of time on sexual health, while others spend a short time with the topic.
• The content delivered is not standardized. Each health educator is required to cover established teaching objectives. Yet, some teachers cover the bare minimum on sexual health and others delve far deeper into the topic. Within the given framework, teachers have the ability to teach abstinence-only education or comprehensive sex education.

Reproductive Health Services
Reproductive health services were found to be restricted in the Worcester Public Schools.
• Many schools have community-based health centers located within their walls. However, both school nurses and health center staff cannot utilize their full scope of practice in this setting.
• Providers in school-based health centers are instructed not to:
  - Screen for sexually transmitted infections
  - Test for pregnancy
  - Offer counseling on issues related to sexual health
  - Provide students with condoms

### Strategic Action Plan

WISH is in the process of developing a strategic action plan for impacting sexual health in Worcester. The current draft has four major goals, each with their own intended outcomes and strategies.
1. Mobilize the community
2. Raise public awareness about teen sexual health
3. Improve access to fact-based sexual health education and clinical services in Worcester schools and community programs
4. Support educators, youth services providers, parents, and other caring adults to become informed and approachable regarding sexual health

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