



Helping Adolescent Parents Meet their Summer Work Activities Under MFIP

Late this spring the MN Department of Human Services reminded counties and MFIP agencies that adolescent parents have to be in school or specific work activities to count in the state's work participation rate. That reminder has caused some confusion and concern. Our two organizations want to make sure everyone understands the policies – and to use this time to think creatively about how to engage adolescent parents in activities that can help them stabilize their lives and prepare for a promising future.

The difference between what counts for the work participation rate and what a participant is required to do can be confusing. The first part of this memo walks through the difference. The second part focuses on some ideas about activities that may be appropriate and helpful for young parents – and that count in the welfare work participation rate.

Background:

Being clear about the difference between what counts and what can be required

What does the state require adolescent parents to do?

Going to high school is the work activity required of adolescent parents younger than 18. Going to school is an option for 18 and 19 year old parents without a GED or high school diploma. If 18 and 19 year olds choose the education option, then going to school is their work activity just like the younger parents.

State laws says that an adolescent parent on MFIP meets "attendance requirements when the school is not in regular session, including during holiday and summer breaks."

<https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/statutes/?id=256J.54>. Therefore, an adolescent parent, for whom high school completion is their work activity, cannot be sanctioned for not attending school in summer:

- If she or he does not qualify for summer school;
- If the local district does not offer summer school; or
- If summer school is not in session.

The dilemma is that the federal government will subtract young parents from the state's work participation rate when they are in the situations listed above. The work participation rate is a process measure that counts how many parents on welfare are participating in activities that the federal government officially recognizes as "work activities". If a state's work participation rate is too low, the federal government penalizes the state by reducing its federal welfare-to-work block grant.

The best situation is when an activity is both appropriate for a young person on MFIP and also counts toward the state's participation rate.

What activities count as MFIP work activities that are appropriate for adolescent parents?

- Attending high school or GED classes.
- Working
- Doing unpaid work (community service)
- Looking for work or preparing for work (for up to four weeks in a row or six weeks total in a 12-month period)

How many hours does a young parent have to put into those activities for them to count in the work participation rate?

■ **School:**

As long as the adolescent parent meets the secondary school attendance requirements, even **one hour of attendance per week** makes the whole month count.

■ **Other activities:**

At least **87 hours** a month for a parent **with children younger than six**

At least **130 hours** a month for a parent **whose children are all six or older**

(The hours can be all in one activity or a combination of the activities listed above.)

Does this reflect a new policy?

No. It is a reminder about existing policy.

Why is this coming out now? I don't remember hearing about this sort of instruction from the state before.

At the end of 2005, Congress changed parts of the formula the federal government uses to measure state welfare-to-work performance, making it much harder for states to reach their performance targets. In this environment, the MFIP system is strongly focused on getting as many parents (including adolescent parents) as possible into activities that the federal government counts as work.

What if summer school is not available to all adolescent parents or is not available for all three of the summer months? What if an adolescent parent not in summer school is too young to legally work?

Then the young parents cannot be sanctioned. They are doing what they are supposed to be doing – it is just that the state will not get credit in its work participation rate during those months.

What about childcare?

Federal rules do not allow states to require parents to participate in a work activity if childcare is not available. Available childcare has to be: **appropriate** – including able to meet any of the child's special needs; language-specific if necessary; within a **reasonable distance** – no more than a two-hour roundtrip; show that they meet the **legal and safety standards** that apply to legal, non-licensed providers if the care is informal care; and **affordable** – does not exceed the maximum rate that the state will reimburse through the childcare assistance program.

Adolescent parents who use school-based childcare when in school may be particularly challenged to find appropriate childcare for their children during the summer. Unless, they are in sanction, they should be able to access childcare assistance during the summer, though they may need help identifying [quality childcare providers](#) in their communities.

Activity Ideas:

What matters the most --- Preparing adolescent parents for successful adults lives and helping them give their children a promising start in life

Given that the summer is already here, there isn't time for full program development this year. However, there are opportunities for creative programming that both count in the federal work participation rate and that offer adolescent parents valuable training/experiences during the summer months. Below are some ideas for possible programming to supplement your current plan. They are probably not new to many adolescent parent program or MFIP employment service providers but are offered as reminders of what the rules allow and the value they can offer to the adolescent parents you serve.

MFIP providers can offer opportunities other than school to adolescent parents with high school/GED education plans – but they cannot require participation in those activities. This is a good opportunity to help the young parent think about and choose activities that offer them meaningful possibilities.

Remember, federal rules require all activities to be documented and the hours verified to count towards the participation rate.

1. Supplement summer school with limited programming in August.

Many summer school programs end in July, with no specific programming planned for August. It is important to note, however, that any month an adolescent parent attends summer school counts as a full month of activities.

Ideas:

- To make this limited school offering more meaningful, it can be supplemented by summer reading assignments, take-home packets, computer-based curricula, etc.
- For lesson ideas related to pregnancy prevention, reproductive health or infant mental health, contact MOAPPP at marilyn@moappp.org.

Reminder: Summer school participation must be documented. The MFIP provider or the County must verify the adolescent parent is actually attending school/completing a learning activity.

2. Offer job search and job readiness assistance.

MFIP recipients may receive *six weeks of job search and job readiness assistance per year*. According to the federal rule, this can include preparation to seek or obtain employment, including life skills training. It can also include mental health or chemical dependency treatment.

Preparation to seek or obtain employment

Though jobs are difficult for teenagers to find in most parts of Minnesota this summer and some adolescent parents are too young to legally work, summer can be a good time for job preparation activities - the core service of MFIP employment service providers.

Ideas:

- MFIP employment service agencies could offer their adolescent parents a four week program focusing on the basics of looking for and getting a job – resume writing, interview skills, looking for a job, filling out an application, how to think about jobs as ways to try out career ideas, how success in high school makes job searches more successful, etc.
- Offer life skills training. Life skills training includes a variety of activities that help parents master basic skills necessary for self-sufficiency and parenting. Life skills training is recognized as preparing for employment.
 - Partner with other organizations who offer life skills training/education, e.g. adolescent parent programs or other community organizations that offer life skills training/education can connect with MFIP providers to coordinate their services.
 - Check with your local Child Care Resource and Referral Agency to see if they can provide classes in how to choose quality childcare, how to manage a working relationship with your childcare provider, etc. [Link here](#) for contact information to the Minnesota Child Care Resource and Referral network on a child care resource and referral agency in your region.
 - Some counties are supporting young parents in enrolling in driver's education during the summer.

When combined, these would be good job readiness/life skills training activities that could count in the work participation rate.

Mental health or chemical dependency treatment

Research shows that adolescent parents experience a high rate of mental health problems and family violence. Time away from school may be a good time for a young parent to put more focus on healing. For treatment to count as an approved activity, it must be prescribed by a physician or a licensed mental health professional.

Idea:

- Work with a young parent's medical or behavioral health provider to identify support groups or other activities that are available and could count.

Note: The treatment provider must submit or fill out a signed form every two weeks describing the activities and verifying that the adolescent parent participated at least 22 hours a week.

3. Refer to a structured community service program.

The federal rules define community service as "structured programs in which individuals perform work for the direct benefit of the community." Community service learning is a method of teaching and learning that connects meaningful community service with academic learning, personal growth and civic responsibility (*Wyman Teen Outreach Program*).

Ideas:

- For information on service learning in general, go to the [National Youth Leadership Council's website](#). For specific community service opportunities go to [Volunteer Match](#).
- For service learning ideas related to pregnancy prevention, contact MOAPPP at marilyn@moappp.org.

4. Enroll adolescent parents in paid work experience programs.

This will allow them to learn about the world of work and get a paycheck.

If you have questions about whether your planned activities will qualify, contact your local county MFIP program manager. If you don't know who that is, contact Deborah Schlick at deborah@affirmativeoptions.org

Please share creative and promising practices.

If your agency has found constructive ways to help young parents meet their MFIP requirements while working toward stabilizing their lives and building a promising future, please share them with others through the MOAPPP Adolescent Parent Network. Please send your ideas to Marilyn Colby Rivkin, marilyn@moappp.org who will post them on the [MOAPPP website](#).

Looking to the future...

Affirmative Options Coalition and MOAPPP propose to address the challenge of helping MFIP agencies and youth serving agencies to serve young parents. Some ideas include:

- Hold networking forums to share program ideas.
- Share science-based strategies for employment readiness, preventing subsequent pregnancy, enhancing parent-child relationships and promoting adolescent sexual health.
- Work with our members to identify policy proposals that create a constructive environment for adolescent parents on MFIP.
- Examine MFIP legislative recommendations that enhance teen parents opportunities to complete post secondary education programs.

Please let us know if you have other ideas for how we can be helpful to you and the young families you serve. Contact Deborah Schlick at deborah@affirmativeoptions.org or Marilyn Colby Rivkin at marilyn@moappp.org.