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Editorial: 46%

That's how much a bold initiative aims to cut births to teen mothers in Milwaukee — necessary to break the cycle of poverty to which teen pregnancy contributes.

From the Journal Sentinel

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It is no small thing to set a goal - if you're committed to meet it.

That's why Milwaukee should be impressed with one particularly significant goal set this week - decreasing births to teen mothers here by 46% by 2015.

This is setting the bar high. More important, it's clear from both the people involved and the approach that the intent is genuine.

Milwaukee Health Commissioner Bevan Baker, co-chair of a United Way committee that will oversee the effort, announced the "metric" on Wednesday at the Women's Initiative Luncheon at the Italian Community Center. Betsy Brenner, president and publisher of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, is the other co-chair.

Among the other serious folks sitting on the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Oversight Committee are representatives from groups currently active in preventing teen pregnancy and those with clear roles to play, among them Milwaukee Public Schools.

But the other sign that the effort is serious is the approach. It focuses on nine recommendations made in United Way of Greater Milwaukee's 2006 report, "If Truth Be Told: Teen Pregnancy, Public Health and the Cycle of Poverty."

Among them: "Focus resources and project efforts on programs that have been proven effective through research and evaluation."













This is key. The initiative will focus on Milwaukee's fourth-graders, a good audience because most are not yet indulging in risky behaviors. But MPS must ensure that more of its students than now are exposed to evidence-

based reproductive health studies. And the state should consider making such instruction mandatory, providing the funding to make it possible.

Make no mistake: This 46% goal is huge. It will save the tax dollars now spent on teen moms and their children. It isn't the silver bullet that will end all of Milwaukee's economic woes. But such a reduction would do much to break the city's infamous cycle of poverty. The statistics are clear on the children of teen mothers becoming teen parents themselves and for them to suffer much of the same economic inequities as a result.

All of Wisconsin must get behind the effort.

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