

School Chief Doubts Stunning Story

June 23, 2008

By Greg Toppo

A supposed “pregnancy pact,” which drew worldwide attention to eight teen girls at a Massachusetts high school, may be fiction, says the city’s school board chairman, adding that none of the girls have confirmed any pact on the record.

“My gut feeling is that there may have been some sort of pact after the fact -- you know, two girls who are pregnant say they’ll stick together,” Greg Verga, chairman of the Gloucester, Mass., school committee, said Sunday.

Reporters took notice of the fishing community last week after reports that 18 girls at Gloucester High School -- more than four times last year’s total -- learned they were pregnant this spring.

Principal Joseph Sullivan told Time magazine that eight of those girls had agreed “to get pregnant and raise their babies together.”

Ray Lamont, editor of the Gloucester Daily Times, says his reporters did not find any pact.

Time reporter Kathleen Kingsbury, who originally wrote that the girls believed to be in the pact “declined to be interviewed,” later told National Public Radio that she had spoken to many of the girls, but all were unwilling to be identified.

She told NPR the girls “really didn’t have a strong life plan and decided, essentially, to make their own plan and take control of the situation.”

Experts say the Gloucester pregnancies and a recent rise in the rate of teen pregnancies nationwide show that many teens still don’t understand, or don’t want to understand, the burdens of pregnancy.

“This is not a story about sex education,” says Sarah Brown of the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. “These girls could have had condoms distributed in their living rooms, and they still would have gotten pregnant.”

Nancy Redd, author of the self-help book “Body Drama,” blames the news media’s “obsession” with pregnant celebrities coupled with incomplete information from adults about the realities of pregnancy. AP