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## Giving our kids something to say 'yes' to

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As we reflect on the close of Teen Pregnancy Prevention Month in May, there is much to celebrate as a nation, a state, and a community. Nationally, rates of teen pregnancy, teen births, and teen sexual activity have all been declining since the early 1990s. Here in Connecticut, teen pregnancy rates are below the national average and the teen birth rate has declined an impressive 27 percent between 1991 and 2001. Closer to home, New Britain's vital and nationally-known Pathways/Senderos program is recognizing 10 years of helping local young people one life at a time.

Pathways/Senderos gives young people from fifth grade through high school lots to say "yes" to, including homework assistance, individualized tutoring, college tours, job shadowing and experience in the work world, community service opportunities, and the establishment of personal savings accounts. By simply helping young people grow up in an environment that expands their awareness of the opportunities life offers and training in how to empower themselves to make good choices, students at Pathways/Senderos have a 97 percent "pregnancy-free rate" and a 100 percent school graduation rate.

Because of the efforts of the Pathways/Senderos and other organiza-

tions nationwide, the United States has made impressive strides in reducing teen pregnancy. Still, despite this progress, it remains the case that our nation has the highest rate of teen pregnancy and teen births among comparable countries. And just last month, the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy reported that one in five adolescents has sex before age 15 and one in seven of those become pregnant. Clearly, the challenge remains!

As a leader of the campaign's bipartisan congressional advisory panel, I have fought hard for funding for teen pregnancy prevention programs to strengthen families. I have worked for better educational opportunities for women working their way off welfare dependence and wrote the first bill to provide fathers with career development support and parenting skills.

Pathways/Senderos is just one program working in one community in a very large nation. Clearly, if we are to make continued and lasting progress as a nation, we need to support more programs like Pathways/Senderos, get the word out about their success, and encourage others to model their efforts. That is why I am supporting legislation that would create a National Teen Pregnancy Prevention Resource Center, and I am urging my colleagues in Congress to do so as well.

The center would support programs and individuals across the country that work to prevent teen pregnancy, and through sharing our experiences, we

can improve our ability to help children see why they would want to say "yes" to opportunities to grow and succeed before having kids.

In addition to providing information and technical assistance about "what works," the center would support parents – both moms and dads – in their essential roles in preventing teen pregnancy by giving them information and resources to promote and strengthen communication with their children. It would also help change the national conversation about teen sex and pregnancy. Willing producers and publishers of teen-oriented television shows, magazines, and Web sites can access good information about teen pregnancy through the center and help enlarge young peoples' understanding of the choices and opportunities around them.

May was Teen Pregnancy Prevention Month, but let us resolve to help our young people grow throughout the year. As parents we need to communicate early and often with our children about sex, love, and relationships, as well as the value of education, practice, and teamwork. As members of the New Britain community, we can continue to support Pathways/Senderos and express our pride in the "yes" choice of its young participants. As a nation, while we celebrate the impressive declines in teen pregnancy, we must continue to better understand this issue and its dream-destroying consequences for so many.