



*Promoting optimal brain development  
for children from conception to three.*

## Center for Urban Child Policy

### **PARENTS' EDUCATION MATTERS FOR EARLY BRAIN DEVELOPMENT AND CHILD WELL-BEING.**

President Obama recently called upon America's youth to complete high school and commit to at least a year of post-high school training (*Christian Science Monitor*, 2009). Stopping with high school, the President argued, is "not just quitting on yourself, it's quitting on your country." It's also hard on children and families. In this policy brief we examine the relationship between parent's education levels, family resources, early brain development and child well-being in Memphis and Shelby County, where a third of children are born to mothers without a high school diploma and where a majority of these children grow up in poverty. For these children, poverty is more than financial hardship. Too often, they lack access to critical resources and opportunities that support optimal early brain development and childhood well-being. The brief concludes with information about state and local resources for parents seeking further education, as well as policy suggestions to help guarantee improved beginnings for vulnerable young children in our community.

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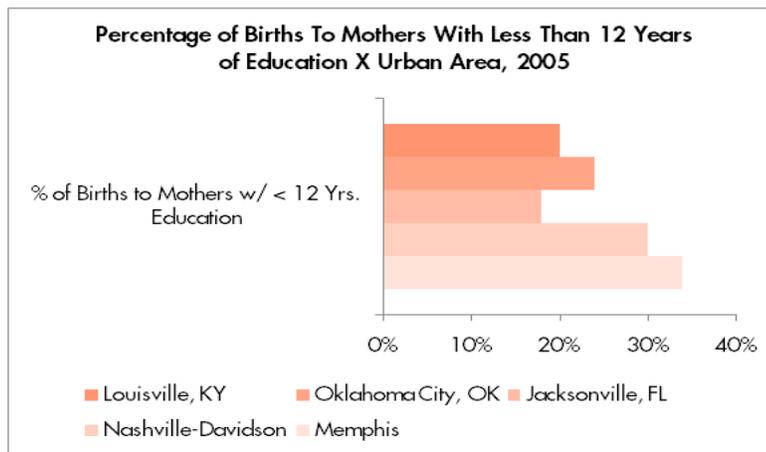
## IN MEMPHIS, A THIRD OF NEW MOTHERS (34%) LACK A HIGH SCHOOL DEGREE; THIS RATE IS ON THE RISE.

- » Between 2003 and 2005, the birthrate to mothers with less than 12 years of education rose 17% in the city of Memphis.
- » Across Tennessee, there has been a 10% increase as well.
- » The percentage of births to mothers without a high school degree in Memphis (34%) is higher than Nashville (31%), the state's 2nd largest urban area (Annie E. Casey Foundation).
- » Fathers are likely to have education levels similar to mothers (Connecticut Association of Human Services, 2005).

## Memphis has a higher percentage of births to mothers without a high school diploma than comparable southern cities.

34% of births in Memphis were to mothers without a high school diploma.\*

- » This is:
  - 42% higher than Oklahoma City, OK (24%).
  - 70% higher than Louisville, KY (20%).
  - 88% higher than Jacksonville, FL (18%).



## WHEN PARENTS HAVE MORE EDUCATION, FAMILIES HAVE HIGHER INCOMES.

According to the National Center for Children in Poverty (2006):

- » 80% of families headed by a parent without a high school diploma are low-income.



*Low-income families may lack access to the primary resources needed to provide a home environment that fosters optimal brain development.*

### **3 out of 4 Shelby County families in poverty are headed by a parent with no education beyond the 12th grade.**

- » In comparison, only 5% of families in poverty in Shelby County are headed by a parent with a college degree.
- » Over half (55%) of impoverished families in Shelby County are headed by single mothers with no education beyond 12th grade.

### **HIGHER LEVELS OF EDUCATION CONTRIBUTE TO FAMILY ENVIRONMENTS THAT PROMOTE HEALTHY BRAIN DEVELOPMENT IN INFANTS AND TODDLERS.**

**The higher a parent's education level, the more likely they are to:**

- » Spend time reading to their children (Bianchi & Robinson, 1997).
- » Display effective parenting skills (futureofchildren.org).
- » Enrich early childhood with developmentally stimulating experiences like visiting museums and zoos (LiteracyNow).

Perhaps the most telling reflection of the importance of parents' education for child development comes from studies of language acquisition. These studies suggest:

Children of professional parents hear three times as many words per year as children with parents on welfare (Hart & Risley, 2004).

Children whose mothers have college degrees perform better on measures of early speech and language than children whose mothers who have not completed high school (Dollaghan et. al, 1999).

### **INCREASED PARENTAL EDUCATION LEADS TO IMPROVED EARLY EXPERIENCES AND OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN.**

**When parents have more education, children do better in school. Children of college educated parents are more likely to have:**

- » Higher educational expectations for themselves.
- » A positive attitude toward school (LiteracyNow).
- » Stronger test scores (Carneiro, Meghir, & Parey, 2006).



## WHEN WE INCREASE PARENTAL EDUCATION AND INCOME WE ARE ALSO SUPPORTING CHILD HEALTH.

The higher a parent's education level, the more likely their children are to have:

- Good nutrition (Wachs et al, 2005).
- Up to date vaccinations (Racine & Joyce, 2007).
- Lower levels of drug use in adolescence (Miech & Chilcoat, 2005).

## WORKING-POOR PARENTS HAVE LITTLE TIME, ENERGY OR RESOURCES TO FINISH SCHOOL.

What does this mean for public policy?

- » Whether through college, vocational training, or an apprenticeship, parents need more education to secure the living-wage jobs they need to support their families.
- » When parents finish school, the odds are better that their children will experience stable and enriching childhoods - *improving their cognitive, social and emotional brain development.*
- » Teens need to believe that there are meaningful advantages - **both for themselves and ultimately for their children** - in delaying parenting until after finishing school.
- » Policy-makers, in turn, need to evaluate prospective social policies and investments in terms of the gains that accrue to individuals and to society from higher rates of graduation as well as from reductions in teen-parenting. These gains should be projected to increase both over individual lifetimes and across generations.

## AVAILABLE RESOURCES

### Local Support for Parents Enrolled in Educational Programs

The Adolescent Parenting Program (Grades 7-12) is an academic and vocation curriculum designed to help parenting and pregnant teens meet state requirements for graduation, as well as provide the skills needed to cope with the realities of adult living. The Pyramid School provides affordable onsite child care and transition services such as non-tuition summer school, career counseling and job placement opportunities. For additional information contact Principal John White at 901-416-4400.

Southwest Tennessee Community College (SWTCC) offers multiple sources of financial aid to help undergraduates pay for their education, such as the Federal Pell Grant Program for low-income students. SWTCC participates in a U.S. Department of Education program called CCAMPIS (Child Care Access Means Parents in School). The CCAMPIS grant allows Pell Grant eligible students to receive discounts on child-care costs at the Campus Childcare Centers. For more information, contact Jacquelyn Holt at 901.333.4500.



## TN Child Care and Development (CCDF) Subsidies for Parents Enrolled in School

The state of Tennessee offers a Teen Child Care Assistance program for eligible high school or middle school mothers. The mothers must be enrolled in school in order to receive child care assistance. For information, visit <http://www.tennessee.gov/humanserv/adfam/ccfa.html>.

The state of Tennessee policy information regarding parental education and training for low-income residents can be viewed at [http://www.nccp.org/profiles/TN\\_profile\\_10.html](http://www.nccp.org/profiles/TN_profile_10.html). School attendance is sufficient to fulfill the work requirement if activities total at least 40 hours per week. Participants are not eligible for CCDF while pursuing post-graduate degrees (limited to bachelor's degree).

**For more information on the well-being of children in Memphis and Shelby County, please visit The Urban Child Institute and The State of Children in Memphis & Shelby County: Data Book.**

**The Urban Child Institute (TUCI)** promotes optimal brain development for children from conception to age three. TUCI's Center for Urban Child Policy supports that mission by building our understanding of inputs to - and implications of - early brain development in our community.

Demographic Data included in this policy brief are the independent estimates created by the Center for Urban Child Policy at **The Urban Child Institute** utilizing 2006 State Health Department birth certificate data, the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Kids Count and Right Start Census Data Online, 2007 American Community Survey data, or information from the Tennessee Department of Education unless otherwise specified. The Annie E Casey Foundation's Kids Count Data Book can be found at <http://www.kidscount.org/datacenter> or <http://www.kidscount.org/cgi-bin/cliks.cgi>. American Community Survey data can be found at [factfinder.census.gov](http://factfinder.census.gov) and the Tennessee Department of Education Report Card can be accessed at [www.k-12.state.tn.us](http://www.k-12.state.tn.us).

\*Beginning in 2003, the adoption of the revised birth certificate in several states produced changes in question wording and sources for information; therefore, data from the state of Tennessee is not comparable to all 50 states and the major urban areas (Annie E. Casey Foundation).



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