

Children's  
Educational  
Well-Being

Education

# Educational Well-Being



“The education of children shapes their own personal development and life chances, as well as the economic and social progress of our Nation.”

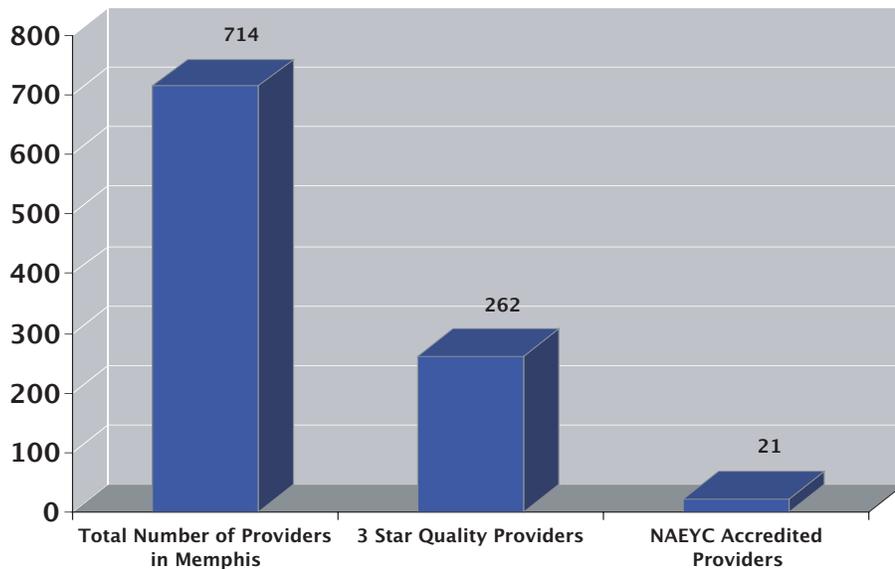
America’s Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being

*Sources: The academic statistics in this section are drawn from the Tennessee Department of Education website (<http://www.state.tn.us/education/>). Other sources are cited as used.*

**The child-care business in Memphis includes nearly a thousand providers. Only one in four has earned a “superior” quality rating.**

- Memphis is served by nearly one thousand child care providers. About one fifth of the total providers are licensed by the State of Tennessee.
- Only about one in four providers has earned the superior quality rating of three stars under the state’s Star-Quality Child Care Program. The program is voluntary, and participating providers are awarded zero to three stars based on criteria such as director qualifications, parental involvement and class size.
- In addition, less than three percent of child care providers in Memphis have earned accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), a voluntary program dedicated to the evaluation and improvement of the nation’s pre-schools, kindergartens and early education centers.

**Child Care Providers In Memphis**



## **According to the Developing Skills Checklist, children entering Memphis City Schools are under-prepared for kindergarten.**

- Children entering kindergarten in Memphis scored in the 16th and 19th percentiles in math and language. This means that 80 percent of children entering kindergarten in the U.S., are better-prepared than children entering kindergarten in Memphis City Schools.
- The bad news does not end there. Thirty-six out of 112 Memphis elementary schools reported scores of entering kindergarteners that are below 10 percent in at least one of these two subjects.

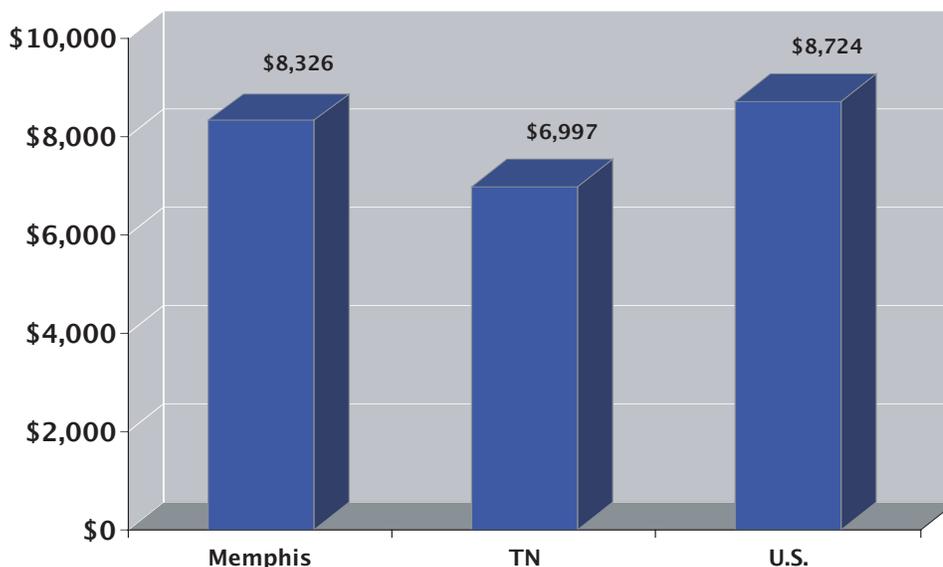
## **Memphis is the largest school district in Tennessee.**

- The Memphis City School District (MCS) is the largest in Tennessee and 21st largest in the U.S. It is made up of 191 schools, including 112 elementary, 25 middle, four junior, and 31 high schools. The system serves more than 119,000 students. The Shelby County system (SCS) is made up of 46 schools and serves over 46,000 students.
- In Memphis, 97 percent of black children attend public schools, compared to only 62 percent of white students.

## **Adjusting for family income, Memphis spends roughly the same amount per pupil as Shelby County Schools.**

- In Memphis, approximately \$8,326 is spent to educate a student for a year, roughly \$500 less than the national average of \$8,724 per student. Per pupil spending for the Shelby County schools is \$6,479, over \$2,000 below the national average.
- The federal government has determined that it costs 40% more to educate a low income student than a middle income student. Nearly three in four students in Memphis are from low-income families, while one in five SCS students is from a low-income family.
- Differences in family income between MCS and SCS account for almost all the difference in school spending-per-pupil. If per-pupil spending figures are adjusted to eliminate the effects of low income, the averages are the same, virtually, in Memphis (\$6,366) and Shelby County schools (\$5,996), a difference of six percent.

Per Pupil Expenditures



**TCAP tests are the chief means of comparing MCS students with students across the state.**

- The principal tool used to assess the performance of public schools in Tennessee is the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) and the Gateway End-of-Course Tests.
- TCAP is mandated for Grades 3-8 (schools may test earlier grades as well) and includes tests in reading, language arts, math, science and social studies. The Gateway tests, given in Grades 9-12, cover English, math and biology. Their successful completion is required for students receiving a regular diploma. TCAP scores are used to measure the compliance of schools in Tennessee with the dictates of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).
- The TCAP exam is a criterion-referenced exam, meaning that students who have mastered a grade-appropriate body of knowledge should receive high marks on the TCAP exam for that grade. In other words, the TCAP measures students' mastery of a skill set. Scores on the TCAP are categorized as Advanced, Proficient and Below Proficient.

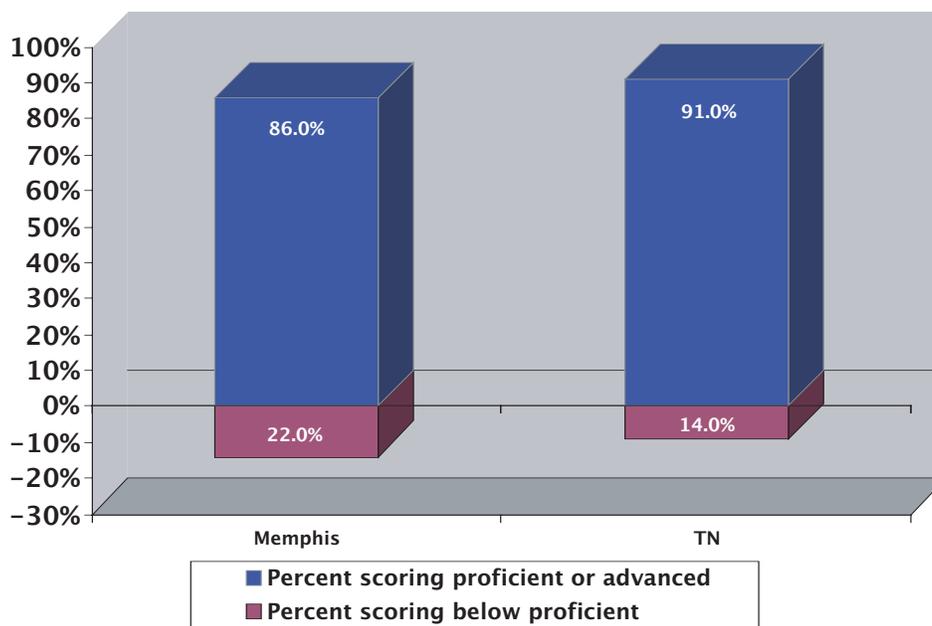
## MCS students score slightly below the state average in reading.

“Perhaps the most important task of elementary schools is to teach students to read well. Strong reading skills are the key to later success both in school and in life.”

--Education Watch

- Slightly fewer students in Grades K-8 in Memphis achieved scores of Proficient and Advanced on the reading TCAP exam than students across the state.
- Ninety percent of high school students in Memphis received scores of Proficient or Advanced, while 93 percent of students across Tennessee received similar scores.

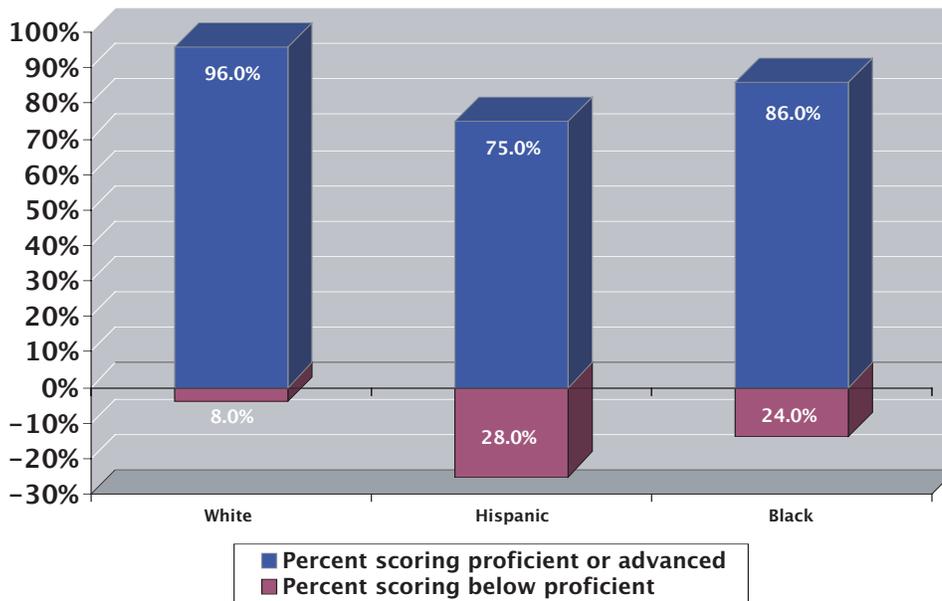
Comparing Memphis and Tennessee Reading TCAP Performances, 2005



## There are significant gaps in performance in reading between ethnic groups.

- Across the U.S., persistent achievement gaps correlate with both family income and ethnicity. As Richard Rothstein of the Economic Policy Institute notes, “The black-white gap is partly the difference between the achievement of all lower-class and middle-class students, but there is an additional gap between black and white students even when...[they] come from families with similar incomes”.
- No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation is designed to improve the academic performance of all groups of Americans and to reduce achievement gaps between ethnic groups. The law requires schools to isolate test results by ethnic category where there are 45 or more students in an ethnic group.
- Eighty-seven percent of Memphis City Schools students are black, and nine percent are white. Average TCAP and Gateway reading scores of black students consistently fall below those of white students. The average scores for Hispanic students, meanwhile, fall below the scores of both black and white students.
- The same trend appears in the results for the Gateway test. Average scores were 97 for white, 89 for black, and 81 for Hispanic students.

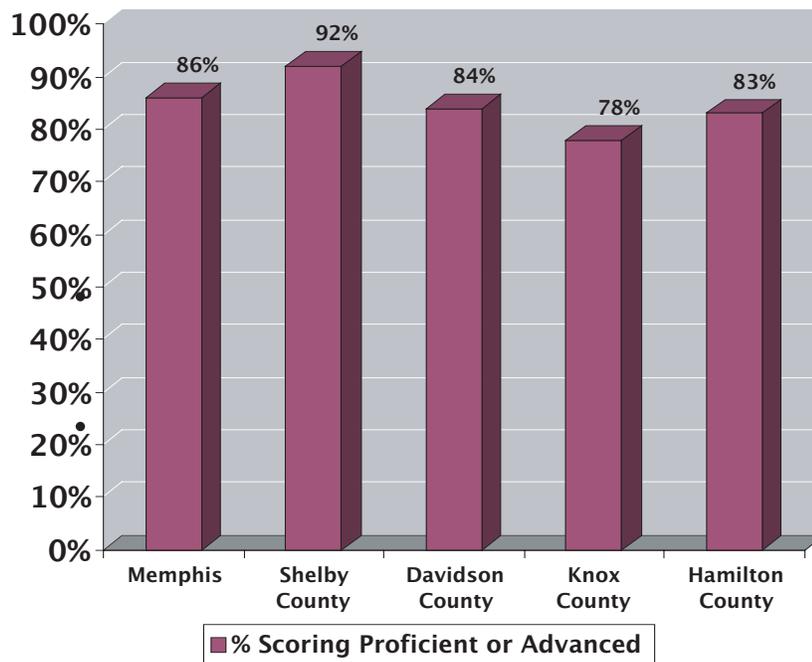
2005 TCAP - Memphis City Schools Reading Performance by Ethnic Category



## Performance of black students in MCS is comparable to that of black students across Tennessee.

- The three largest metropolitan areas in Tennessee after Memphis are Nashville (Davidson County), Knoxville (Knox County), and Chattanooga (Hamilton County). Average scores of black students in these areas are similar.
- Shelby County Schools report higher scores for black students, but also have the lowest percentage of economically disadvantaged students of all five areas.

Average Scores on TCAP Reading for Black Students Across TN



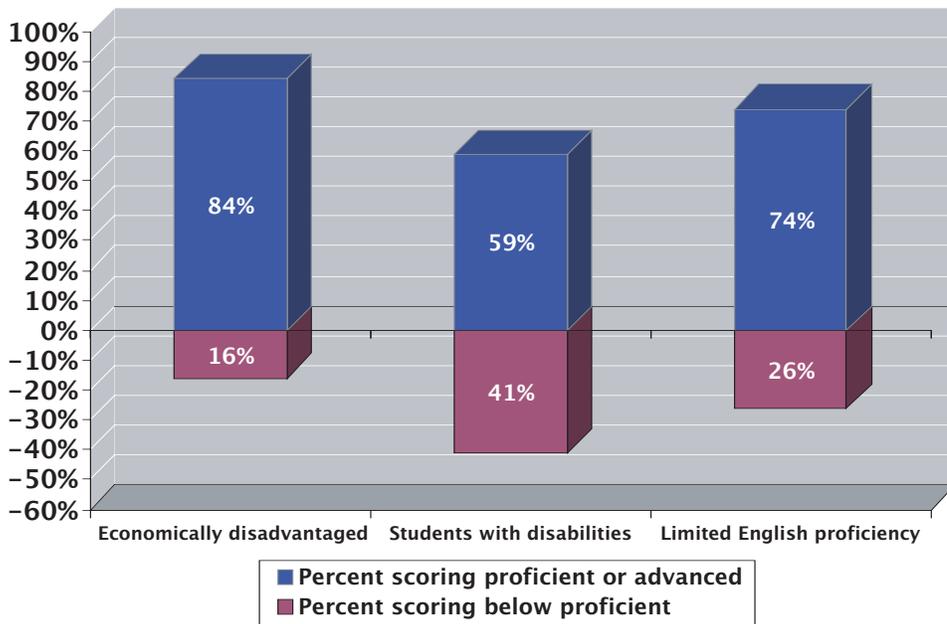
## Performance gaps in reading exist also among students in risk-groups.

“Americans believe in the ideal of equal opportunity and also believe that the best way to ensure that opportunity is to enable all children, regardless of their parents’ stations, to leave school with skills that position them to compete fairly and productively in the nation’s democratic governance and occupational structure.”

- Richard Rothstein

- A large share of the achievement gap is due to differences in the resources available to different families. Social scientists conclude that socio-economic status accounts for more of the “...variation in cognitive scores than any other factor...”.
- In Memphis, about 71 percent of MCS students are from low-income families. Average scores for students from low-income families fall below the average for the school system. Similarly, students with disabilities and those with limited English proficiency typically have somewhat lower average scores.

2005 TCAP - Memphis City Schools Reading Performance by Key Risk Factors



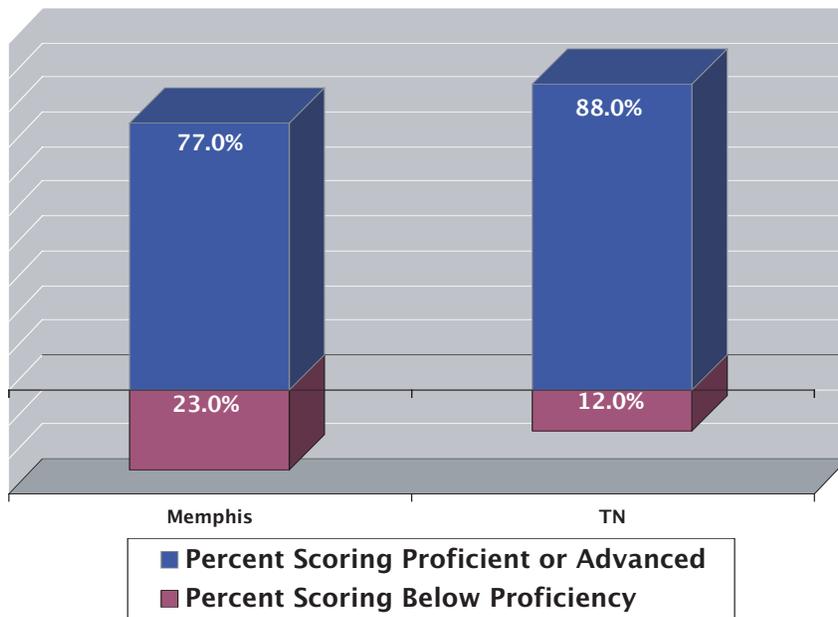
## The gap between average MCS scores and average state scores is larger in math than in reading.

“Higher order thinking and problem solving skills are necessary for entry into the economic mainstream. Without these skills, children will be tracked into an economic underclass.”

--The Algebra Project

- The gap between MCS and Tennessee state math scores (11 points) is almost twice as large as the gap in reading scores (5 points).
- Moreover, achievement gaps in math increase as students reach high school. On the TCAP test, the gap between Memphis and Tennessee is 11 points; on the Gateway test the gap is 16 points.

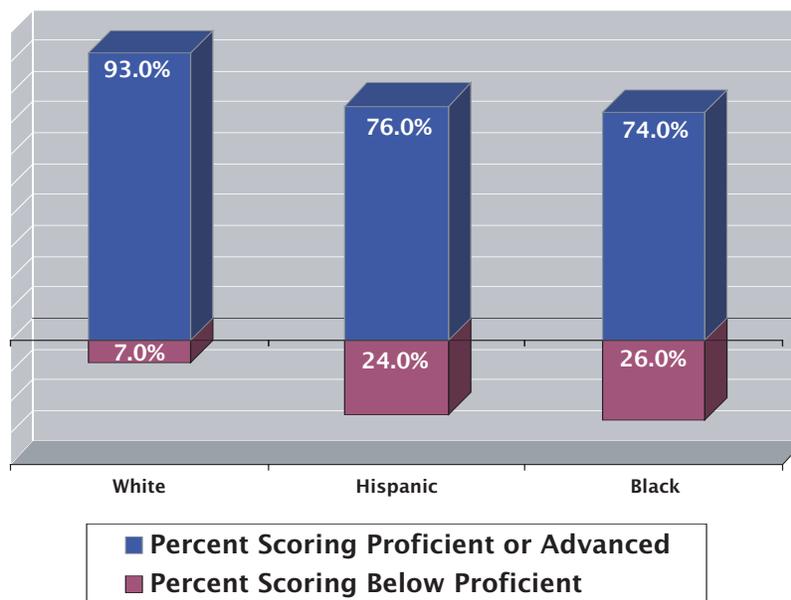
Comparing Memphis and Tennessee: 2005 TCAP Math Proficiency



## Performance gaps in math among ethnic groups are larger than those in reading.

- The gap between white and Hispanic students is about the same in math and English. The gap in math scores between white and black students is much larger.
- Again, the gap widens by high school. On the 2005 Gateway (Grades 9-12) test the gap between white and black students is 25 points.

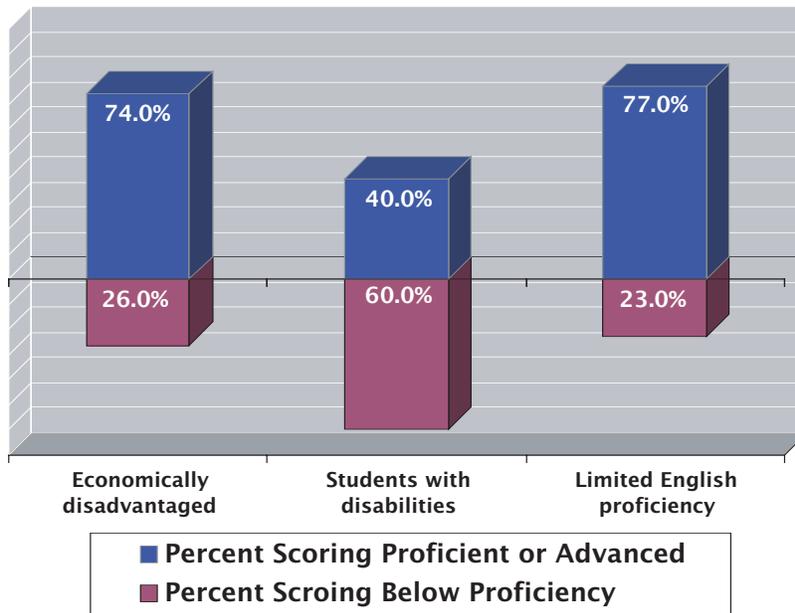
2005 TCAP - Memphis City Schools Math Performance by Ethnic Category



## Performance gaps in math between risk-groups are similar to those in reading.

- As is the case with reading scores, math scores of low-income students are slightly lower than the system average. However, 71 percent of students in MCS come from economically disadvantaged homes.

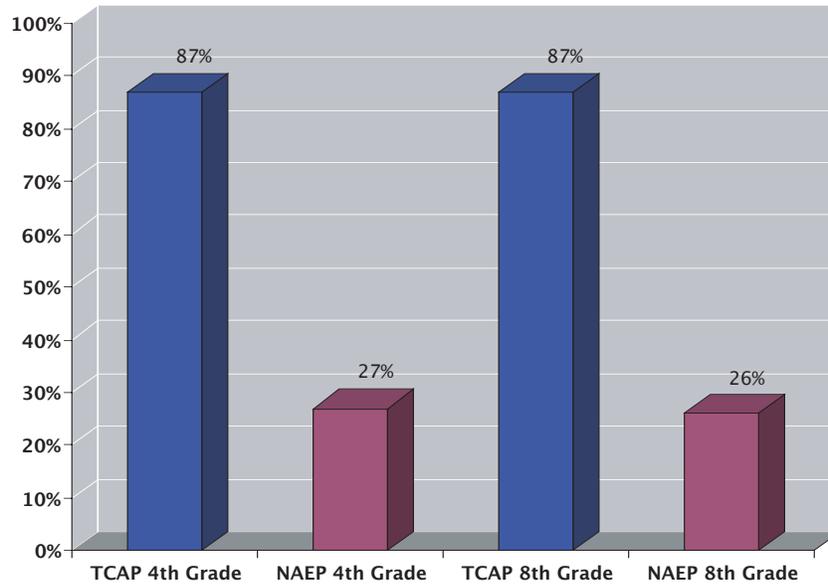
### 2005 TCAP - Memphis City Schools Math Performance by Key Risk Factors



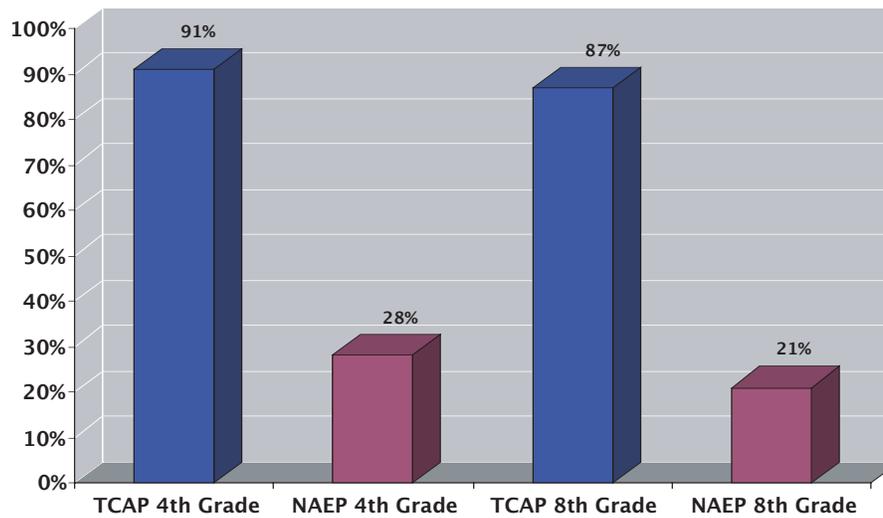
### It is difficult to compare MCS students to students nationwide.

- Tennessee students also participate in the nationwide achievement tests called the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The NAEP is administered to only a representative sample of students across the state, so it is not possible to isolate scores for Memphis City Schools. By comparing the performance of Tennessee students on the NAEP and TCAP, however, we are able to place the performance of Memphis City Schools students into a broader context.
- The results of the TCAP and the NAEP paint two very different pictures of educational achievement in Tennessee. Consider the results of the two tests for 2005:

### Tennessee TCAP and NAEP Reading Performance



### Tennessee TCAP and NAEP Math Performance



- While the TCAP has three rankings, Advanced, Proficient, and Below Proficient, the NAEP test has four, Advanced, Proficient, Basic and Below Basic.

- The Basic level denotes "partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work at each grade assessed." The Tennessee Department of Education suggests that the TCAP Proficient level is comparable to the NAEP Basic level. If so, then Tennessee is assigning grades of Proficient to some students with "partial mastery" of fundamental skills.

### **Explanations vary for the discrepancy between the TCAP and the NAEP.**

- Some claim that the difference in performance on the two tests can be explained by the fact that the NAEP is a low-stakes test, while poor performance on the TCAP can have repercussions for schools. As a result, students and teachers have little incentive to take the NAEP test seriously.
- However, many states do not show a similar discrepancy between state achievement tests and NAEP results. In 2003 *Education Next*, a journal dedicated to school reform, examined the discrepancy between state tests and NAEP tests for all states for which data were available. "A" grades were assigned to states with the smallest gaps between students on the two tests. Tennessee received Fs in all categories, performing last out of all states included in the study.
- The U.S. Department of Education asserts that NAEP data, "will highlight the rigor of standards and tests for individual states: if there is a large discrepancy between children's proficiency on a state's tests and their performance on the NAEP, that would suggest that the state needs to take a closer look at its standards and assessments and consider making improvements."

### **Similar achievement gaps exist on the NAEP and TCAP.**

- If the gaps in average scores between ethnic and socio-economic groups on the TCAP are striking, those on the NAEP paint an even bleaker picture. The trends are similar to those on the TCAP. Black students score lower than whites, as do economically disadvantaged students. As on the TCAP, achievement gaps in math are particularly large.
- According to Richard Rothstein of the Economic Policy Institute, small gaps between socio-economic and racial groups may reflect a strategy by some states of administering extremely simple exams. "If very simple skills are judged proficient, most students of both races can pass the test. If more skill is required, fewer will pass. The simpler the level, the smaller the gap."
- Achievement gaps, then, may be larger than they appear on the TCAP. Proficient scores are set by the state. In order to show proficiency in many of the different categories of the TCAP, students must answer as few as 27 percent of the items correctly.

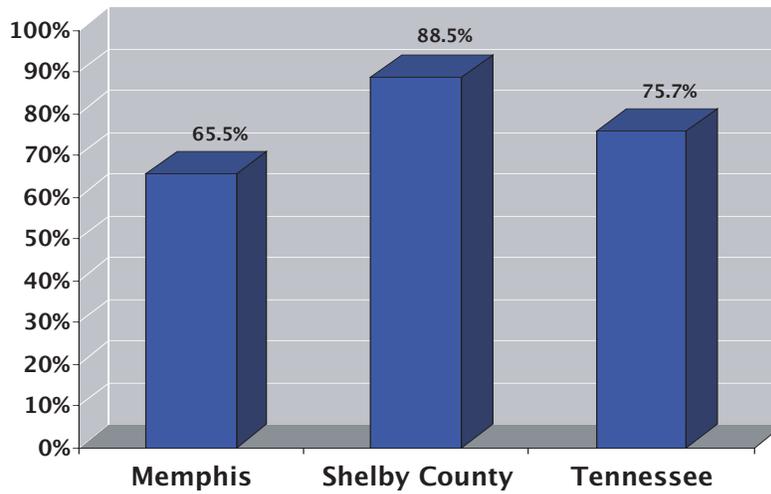
## Multiple ways of reporting graduation make it difficult to know what percent of MCS students complete high school.

“No one can dispute the singular importance of high school graduation. The high school diploma represents the bare minimum requirement for successful participation in the workforce, the economy and society as a whole. The unemployment rate for high school dropouts is more than 30 percent higher than that of graduates. And when employed, dropouts earn close to 30 percent less. Dropouts are also more likely to end up incarcerated and to rely on public assistance.”

- The Education Trust

- Performance on standardized exams is only one measure of the success of a school district. “Graduation rates used in conjunction with test scores provide a more complete picture of school performance than test scores alone because a school’s test-proficiency rate will be higher if low-performing students drop out and do not have their scores included with their peers.”
- States report graduation rates and goals in different ways. The Education Trust reports that some states have set goals that are actually below their current graduation rates. Others, such as Tennessee, have determined that any improvement will be sufficient.
- States do not report graduation rates by ethnic or socio-economic groups. Only the overall rate for the school or system is considered. In states such as Tennessee, that consider any progress to be adequate, the graduation rate of black students, for example, may be declining. As long as the overall rate is increasing, the state will meet its graduation goal.
- Cohort dropout rates may be the most accurate indicator of graduation success. Cohort rates compare the number of twelfth-grade graduates with the number of students enrolled as ninth-graders four years earlier, adjusting for students who transfer in or out.
- Schools are required by Federal law to calculate a graduation percent that measures the number of students who graduate on time (within four years, plus one extra summer.)
- In Memphis, 65.5 percent of the 2005 cohort graduated on time. This is more than 10 percentage points below Tennessee and 23 points below Shelby County.
- Meanwhile, 20 percent of ninth-graders entering in 2001 dropped out before graduation in 2005

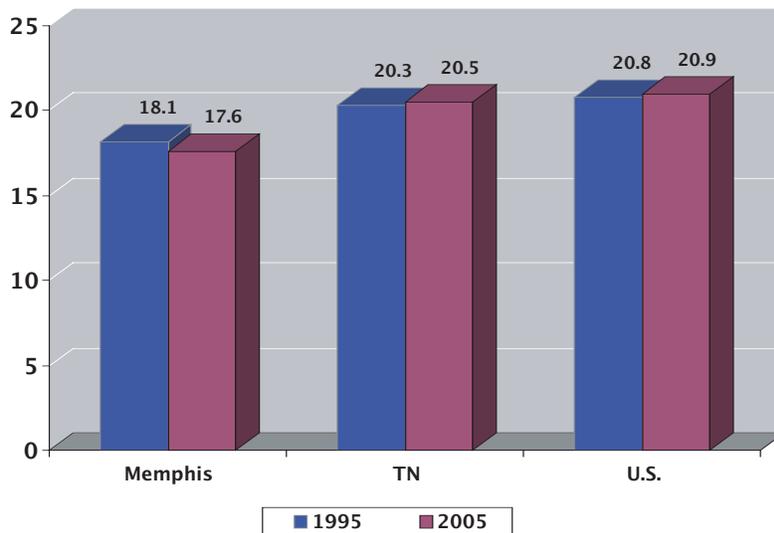
### 2005 Graduation Percent



### MCS students are less prepared for college than their peers across the state and nationwide.

- Students considering college take the American College Test (ACT). MCS students who take the test routinely score lower than state and national averages.
- Also noteworthy, the average ACT score in Memphis has decreased since 1995, while average scores across TN and the U.S. have risen.

### Average ACT Scores of Memphis Students Compared to Tennessee and U.S.



### **What we need to learn:**

- If there are schools in the MCS system with high percentages of black students and low percentages of low-income students, how do they perform academically?
- What are the performance trends of schools that have optional (school-within-a-school) programs?
- Is it possible to isolate academic data for the optional and non-optional students?
- Where are non-MCS students being educated?
- How many are attending private schools or county schools?
- How many are being home schooled?
- Is it possible to obtain graduation statistics by race and ethnicity for black , white, and Hispanic students?