

Children's Educational Well-Being



What happens to a child before the first grade will likely determine success thereafter.

Parents are a child's first teachers, and the quality of early childhood experiences closely follows the economic and educational status of a child's parents. Children of well-educated and economically secure parents perform at predictably higher levels. Memphis parents fall well below all statistical averages in both education and economic welfare.

This section focuses on the state of pre-school learning in Memphis and Shelby County and provides a current score card of local achievement and challenges.

Public education in Memphis is on a steep and slippery slope.

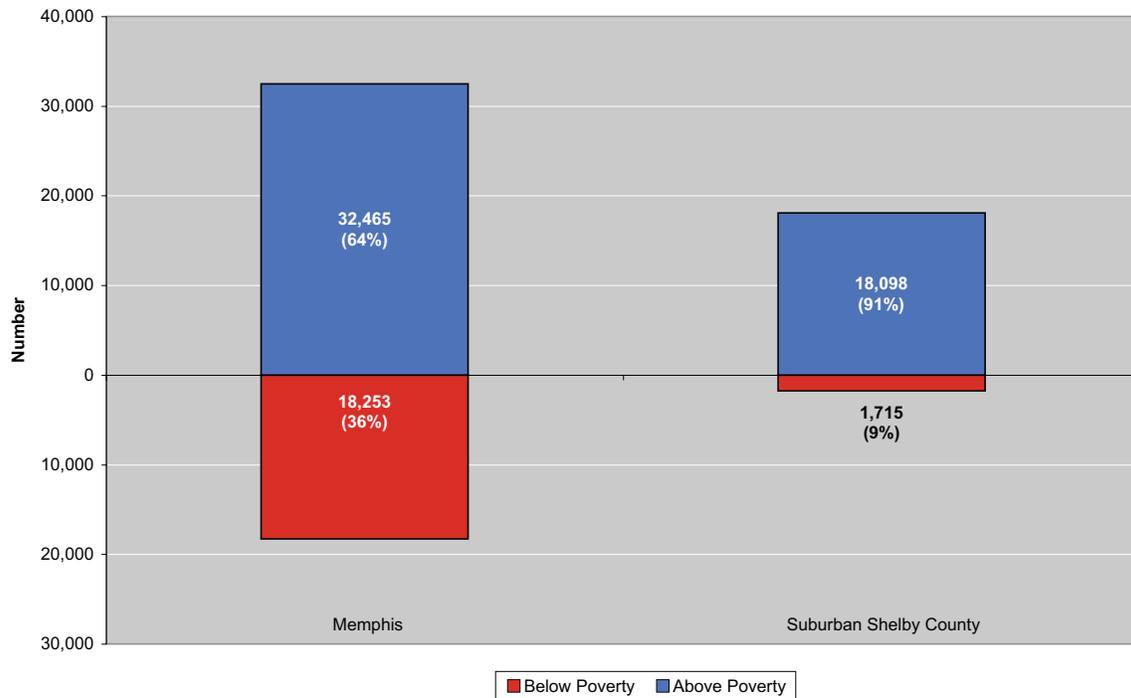
Public school educators in Memphis face one of the most difficult challenges in the community due to the backgrounds of a majority of the children they must teach. These children are more likely to:

What occurs in the very first years of a child's life contributes to that child's ultimate achievement in school and in life.

Today many children arrive at school with a significant head-start on learning. That makes it much more difficult for children from impoverished backgrounds to catch up. They are behind on the first day of school and fall farther behind each day. Educational achievement in most cases will determine success in life.

- Live in poverty with only one parent or grandparent
- Rely on free and reduced price lunches at school
- Have little or no pre-school educational experience
- Have limited cognitive stimulation
- Are exposed to increased levels of violence in their homes, neighborhoods and schools
- Change residences and schools regularly

**Number and Percentage of Children under 5 years
by Poverty Status, Memphis & Suburban Shelby County, 2006**



Source: American Community Survey, 2006.

Eight out of 10 Memphis school children are economically disadvantaged.

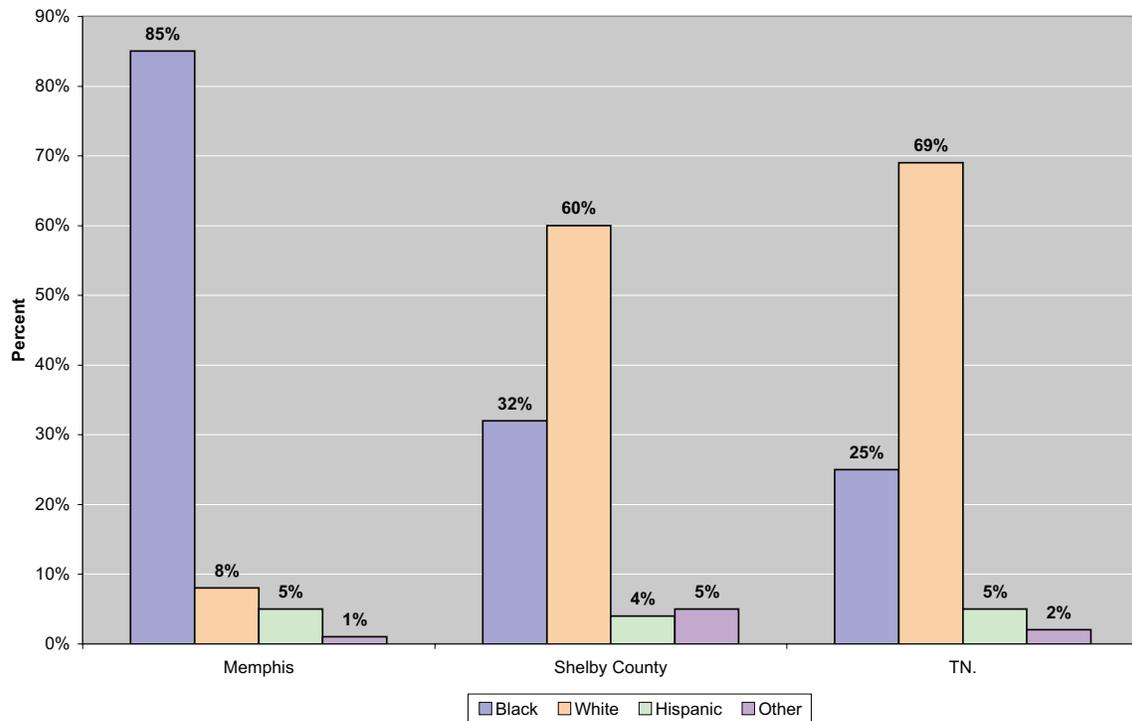
- In 2006 there were 70,531 children under age five in Shelby County.¹
- Nearly three out of four (72%) lived in the City of Memphis.²
- Three out of four poor children in Shelby County also lived in Memphis.³
- Eight out of 10 children in Memphis City Schools (MCS) lived in economically disadvantaged families.
- Only one out of four students in Shelby County Schools (SCS) lived in an economically disadvantaged family.⁴

Children living in families in poverty (below \$20,000 per year for a family of four) and low-income (\$20,000-\$40,000 per year) face more difficulties in school.⁵

Economically Disadvantaged (ED) students are defined as those living below 185 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). In 2006, this percent was equivalent to \$37,000 per year for a family of four. These students are eligible for free and reduced-price lunches at school.⁶

Problems facing families with incomes between 100 percent and 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level are highlighted in a recent book entitled *The Missing Class*. Children living in these families face many of the same obstacles as children living at or below poverty. Yet their parents' higher incomes often disqualify them for services and programs that could help lift them above their low-income status.⁷

Percentage of Student Enrollment by Race, MCS, SCS & Tennessee, 2007

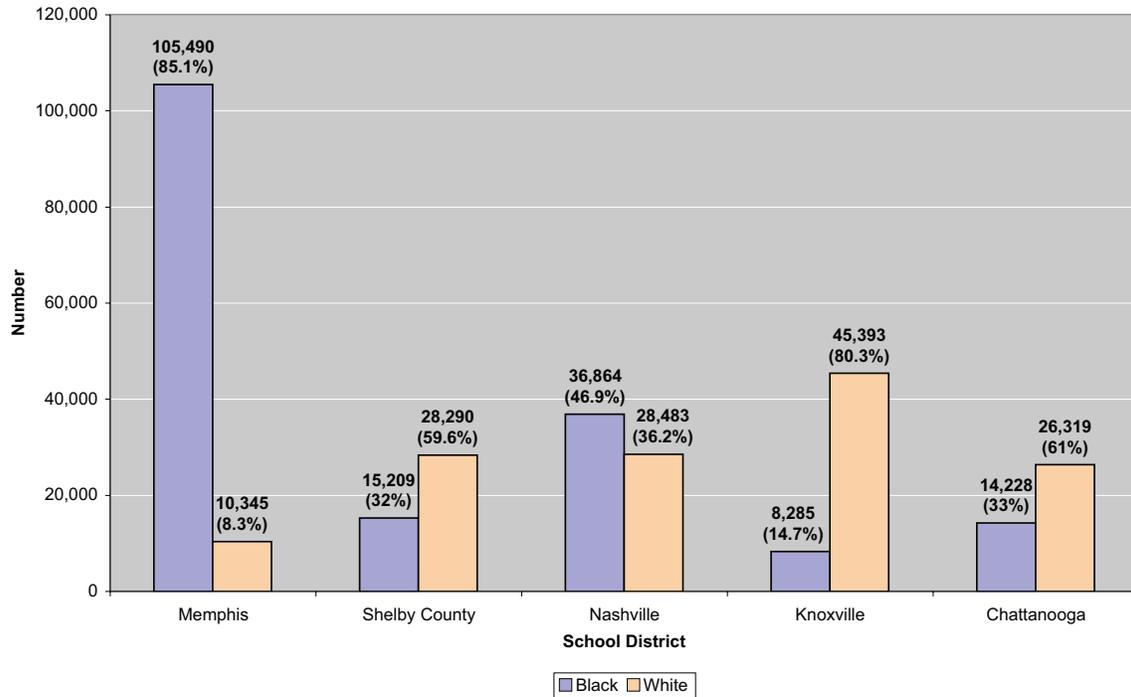


Source: TN Department of Education, 2007

Almost half of Tennessee's black students attend school in Shelby County.

- Nearly half (48.6%) of all black students in Tennessee attended school in Shelby County.⁹
- MCS is the largest school district in Tennessee and has the largest number of minority students in Tennessee.
- In 2007, 85 percent of students in Memphis City Schools were black.
- In Memphis City Schools in 2007 the number of white students continued to decrease and the number of Hispanic students increased.¹⁰

Number and Percentage of Public School Enrollment by Race, Memphis, Shelby County, Nashville, Knoxville & Chattanooga, 2007



Source: TN Department of Education, 2007

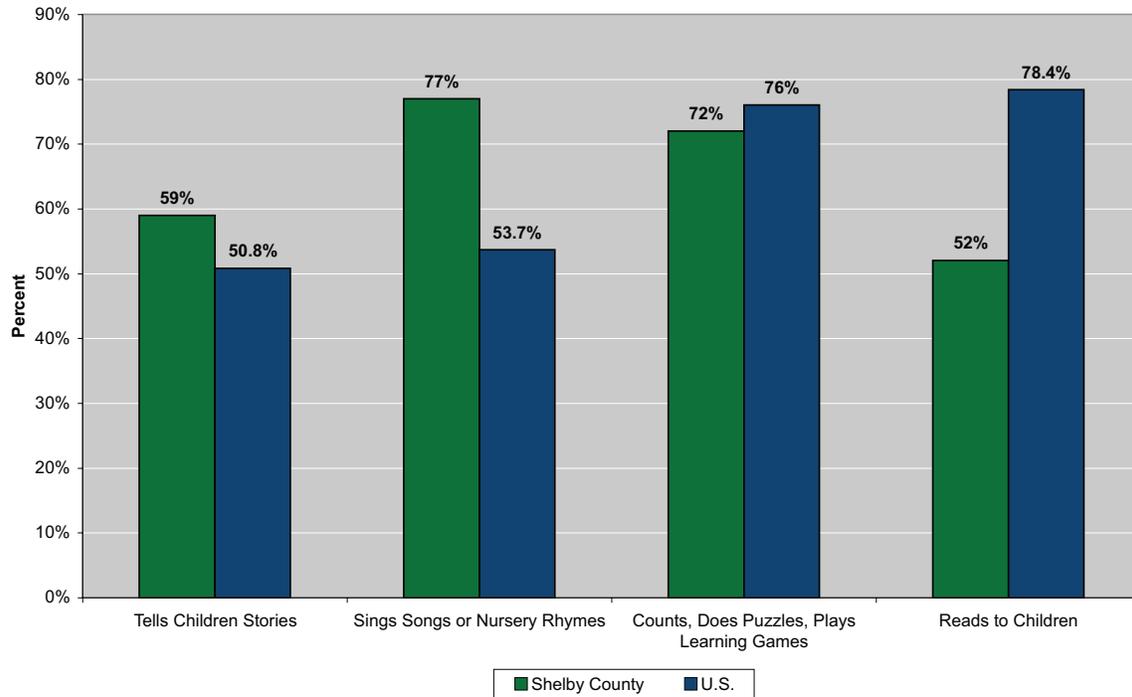
Home is every child's first schoolhouse.

Home has been called America's first schoolhouse because families contribute much to the developmental capacity of children well before they reach school.¹¹

Yet, one in three adults in Shelby County has difficulty reading.¹² Parents who have difficulty reading are less likely to read to their children.

Some Shelby County parents who live in poverty provide pre-literacy experiences for their children instinctively. They were as likely, or more so than parents in poverty nationwide, to sing songs or nursery rhymes, count or do puzzles and tell their children stories. However, poor parents in Shelby County lagged far behind poor parents nationwide in reading to their children, the most important pre-literacy experience.¹³

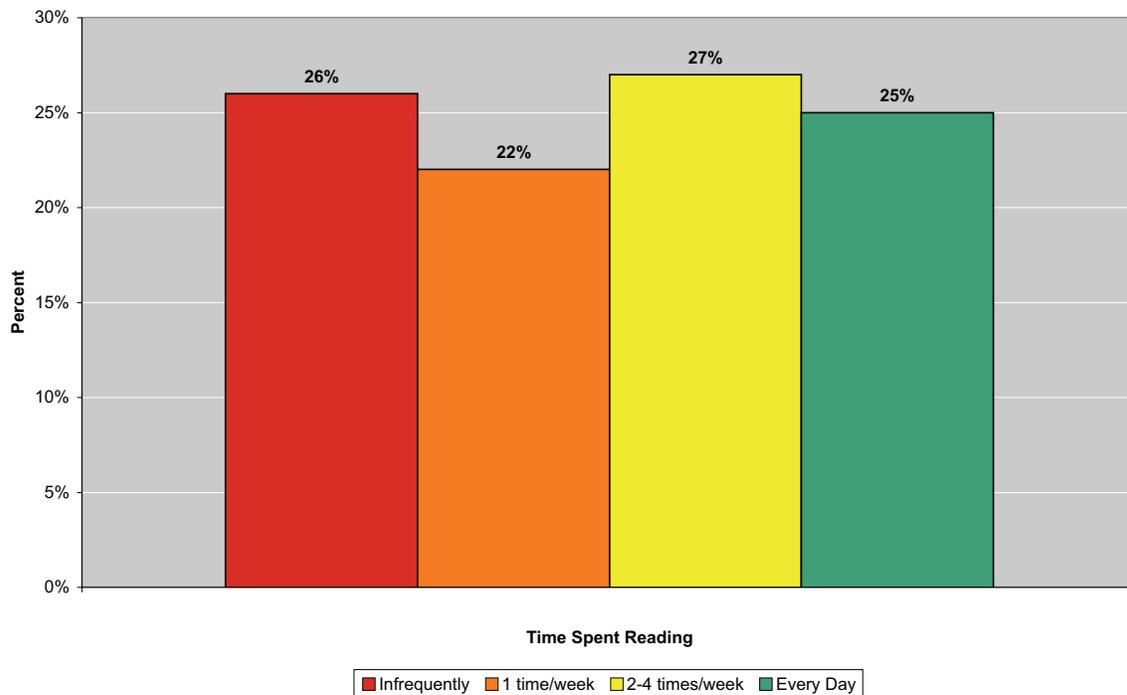
Percentage of Pre-Literacy Experiences Offered by Parents in Poverty, Shelby County & Nationwide, 2007 & 2005



Source: Memphis Literacy Council, 2007 and National Center for Education Statistics, 2005.

- Nationwide, three out of four parents living in poverty read to their children several times a week.
- Only half of parents in poverty in Shelby County read to their children several times a week.¹⁴
- Only one out of three children will enjoy pre-literacy experiences (reading, playing peek-a-boo, story-telling) with a family member.

Percentage of Parents in Poverty by Time Spent Reading to Their Children, Shelby County, 2007



Source: Memphis Literacy Council, 2007

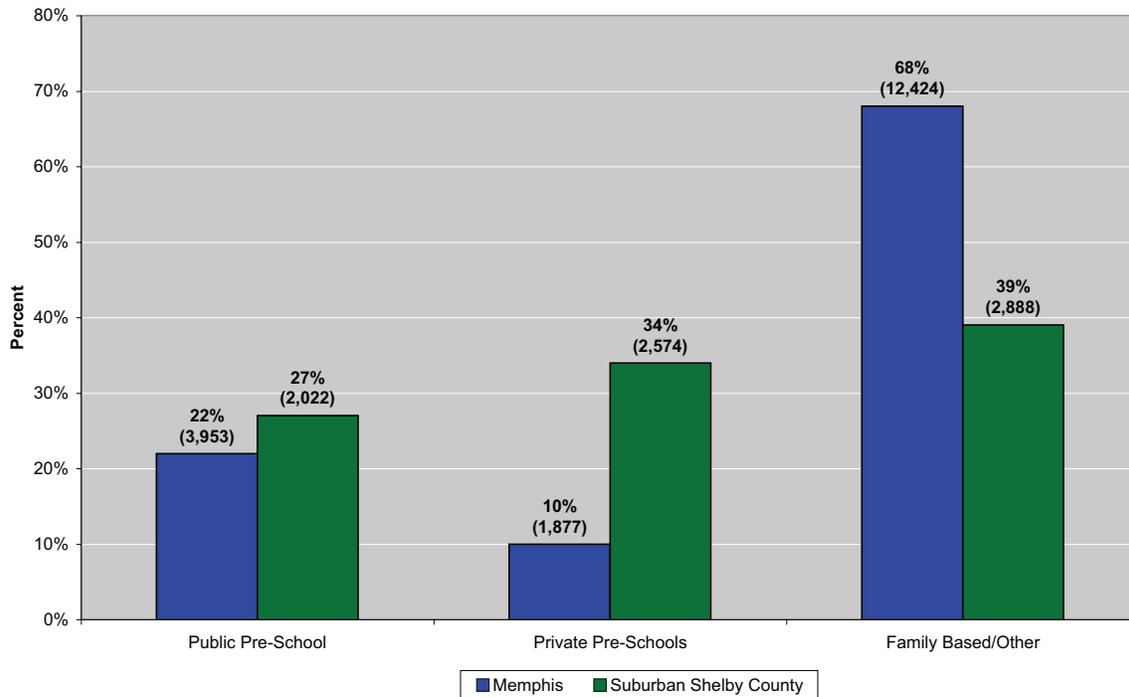
Tennessee is a leader in state-supported pre-kindergarten education.

Nationally recognized programs such as the Perry Preschool, Chicago Child-Parent Centers, the Carolina Abecedarian program and Head Start have demonstrated that children who receive high-quality, early education fare better in school and in life.¹⁵

The National Institute for Early Education Research recognized Tennessee as one of six states in the nation with the highest quality pre-kindergarten standards.¹⁶ A recent report from the Editorial Projects in Education Resource Center gave Tennessee high marks for its efforts to promote state-supported, high-quality, early education throughout the state.¹⁷ Pre-school education is a mixed bag.

Economically better-off children attend private kindergartens and pre-kindergarten programs. Some children attend state-supported facilities. Others receive pre-school training at home, while many others receive none.

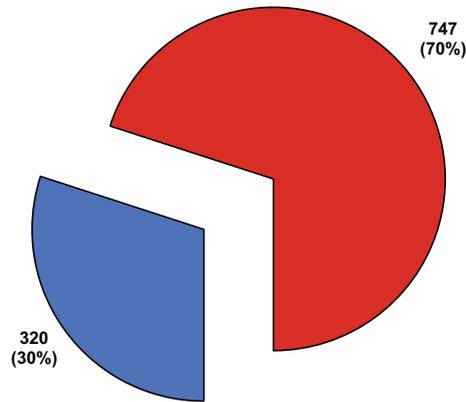
Percentage of Three and Four-Year-Old Children by Care Arrangement, Memphis City & Suburban Shelby County, 2006



Source: American Community Survey, 2006.

- Nationwide almost half (46.1%) of three and four-year-olds are in non-parental child care, including pre-K programs.¹⁸
- In Tennessee more than one third (36%) are enrolled in pre-K programs.
- In Shelby County about 45 percent spend part of each day in non-parental care (ACS 2006).
- One out of five is in a private pre-school program.
- One out of four is in a public pre-school program. (ACS 2006).

**Number of Child Care Centers
by Star Rating, Shelby County, 2008**



■ Child Care Centers with a 3-Star Rating ■ Child Care Centers with a 0-, 1-, or 2-Star Rating or Unrated

Source: TN Department of Human Services, 2008.

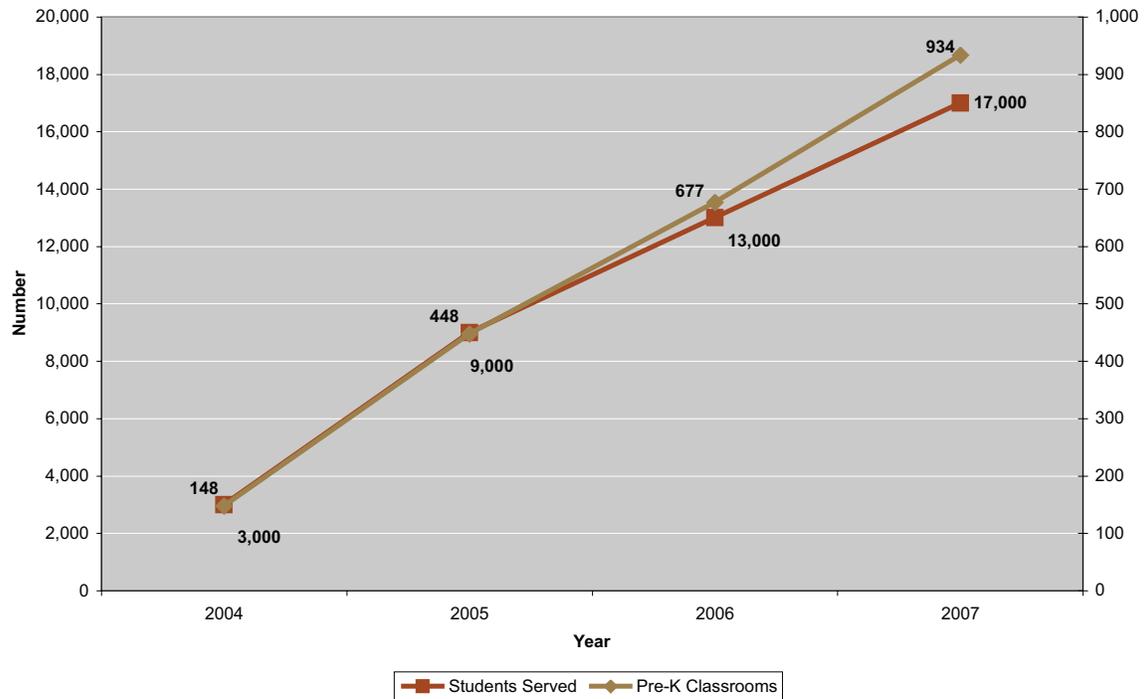
30 percent of Shelby County child care centers are three-star rated.

There are many metrics for evaluating the quality of child care centers, such as staff-to-child ratio, staff education and training level, open parent-staff communication, etc. The quality of child care trends with its cost. Higher quality centers are often more expensive and unaffordable for low-income and poor parents. Informal child care arrangements are often used because they are more convenient for working parents whose jobs necessitate child care during evening and weekend hours when many centers are closed.

The Tennessee star system measures the quality of child care facilities.

- Three stars identify the highest rank and validate that a center meets or exceeds Tennessee’s standards for child-adult ratios, curriculum, safety and teacher qualifications.¹⁹
- The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) also has established rigorous standards for child care centers and employees nationwide.²⁰ There are 23 NAEYC-accredited centers in Shelby County.

Number of Pre-Kindergarten Classrooms and Students Served by Pre-Kindergarten Programs, Tennessee, 2004-2007



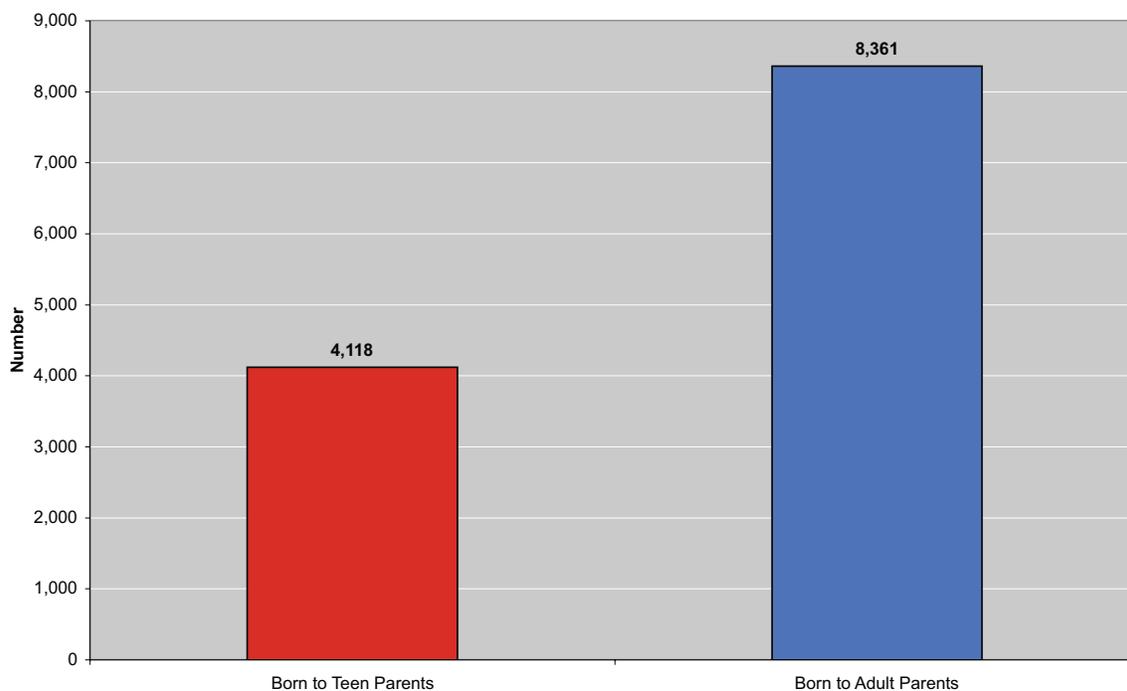
Source: TN Department of Education, 2004-2007.

Pre-Kindergarten programs are one of the best economic investments a society can make.

Tennessee invests \$4,700 per child participant per year in early childhood programs. Tennessee added 257 new pre-kindergarten classes in 2007 making a total of 934 classes serving 17,000 children.²¹ The Tennessee General Assembly has funded the pre-kindergarten

initiative (both the Pilot and Voluntary programs) at a total of \$80 million for 2007-2008 school year. Each classroom receives approximately \$85,700 in funds from the State of Tennessee. A fully-funded pre-kindergarten classroom costs approximately \$100,000.²²

Total Number of Children Eligible for Early Head Start by Age of Parents, Shelby County, 2006



Source: American Community Survey, 2006.

Early Head Start benefits parents and children.

Almost one out of three children in Shelby County was eligible in 2006 for Early Head Start or Head Start. One in three children eligible for Early Head Start was born to a teenage mother. These children are more likely to live in poverty, to hear fewer words and are less likely to spend time reading with their parents and caregivers. These factors make children of teenage mothers less prepared when they reach school.

Early Head Start is the first critical step for these children because it makes it easier for teenage mothers to finish high school, pursue further education and gain job training while providing their children with high-quality child care.

(Love, Kisker, Ross et al, 2005)

Compared to other parents whose children do not participate, parents whose children are enrolled in Early Head Start:

- Are more likely to participate in job training programs and to be employed
- Are less likely to have another child within two years
- Are more likely to read to their children
- Less likely to spank their children

High-quality, early childhood education is critical to the future of Shelby County.

Nothing is more important to the future of Shelby County than decreasing the number of citizens who live in poverty. We must break the cycle of poverty.

The key to doing so is providing quality child care options that allow parents to go to school or work while children are being prepared to be successful in school by qualified caregivers.

Investing in high-quality universal pre-kindergarten programs for all children is a wise economic decision. (*Committee for Economic Development, 2006*)

The Shelby County 'Class of 2024'

The "Class of 2024" is a snapshot of children who should graduate from high school in 2024.

- Three out of four live in Memphis.
- One out of four is white.
- Two out of three are black.

- One out of 10 is Asian, Hispanic or other non-white.
- In Memphis, three out of four will face poverty.

Parents of the 'Class of 2024'

- Half are single mothers.
- One out of seven is a teenage mother.
- Three out of four teenage mothers were giving birth for the first time.
- One out of seven primary caregivers is another relative, most likely a grandparent.

- One out of three children born in 2006 will be raised by a single parent whose education stopped in high school.
- Almost half the "Class of 2024" will live in fragile families that are low-income or below the poverty threshold.

What the future holds for the 'Class of 2024' if current trends continue

- One out of four will drop out of school.
- One in seven will apply for public assistance before his or her 21st birthday.
- One out of 10 will be arrested before age 21.
- One out of 10 girls will have an unintended pregnancy.
- One out of 20 girls will have a baby before she finishes high school.
- Half will grow up in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty where unemployment, crime and illiteracy rates are high, and where members of the community are isolated from work and school.
- One out of five will have a parent in prison.
- One out of 20 will be a victim of child abuse.

If we apply the Seattle Social Development program results to the 'Class of 2024'

- 10 percent would delay sexual activity until age 18.
- 10 percent would have fewer sexual partners by age 18.
- Three percent fewer children would have unplanned pregnancies.
- Six percent fewer children would be suspended from school.
- 10 percent fewer children would fail a grade.
- 25 percent fewer children would become a regular smoker or drinker.

Public schools must be prepared to build on early childhood efforts.

For many years our public schools have had to deal with children who were not prepared for school. Now more children each year are receiving some formal pre-kindergarten opportunities. Quality early childhood experiences alone, though, cannot ensure a child's successful future. High quality public education must build on the foundation children receive in their early years to assure subsequent gains through high school graduation and beyond.

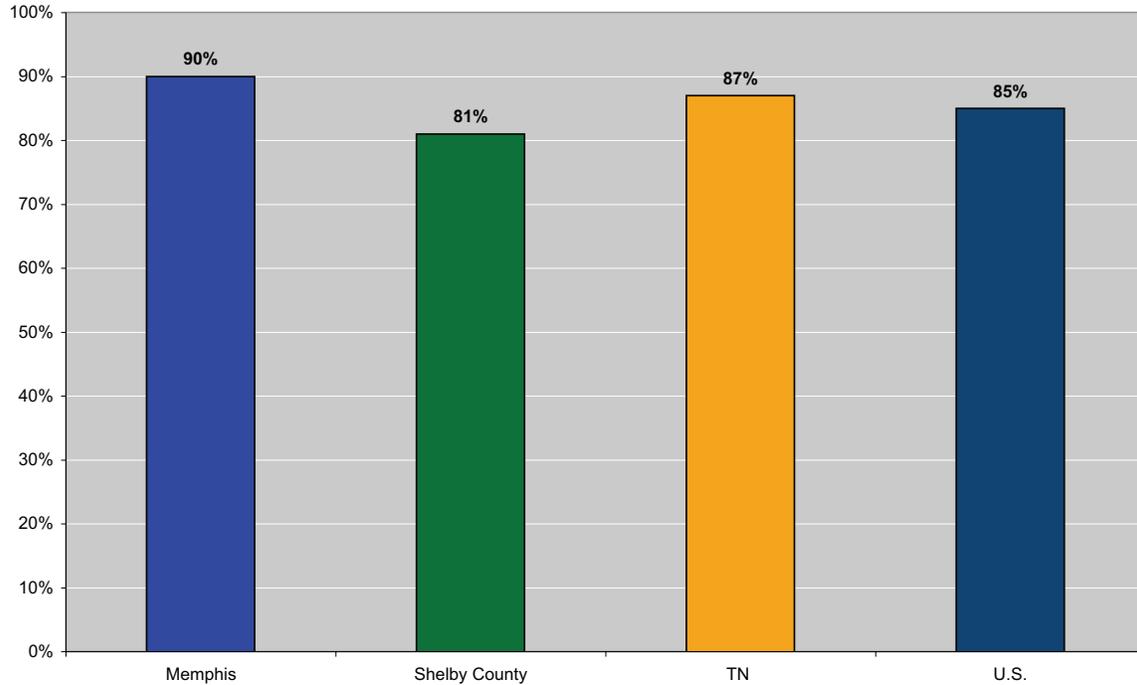
To expect children to defer parenting until after they finish high school and are out of their teenage years, we must assure that school stimulates them and offers attainable improvement in their lives.

Private high school tuition in Shelby County ranges from \$9,000 to \$15,000 a year. As a result, children who attend private schools are most likely to do so during pre-school and elementary school years.²⁴

In the City of Memphis in 2006:

- 97 percent of black students attended public schools.²⁵
- 49 percent of white students attended public schools. (ACS 2006)

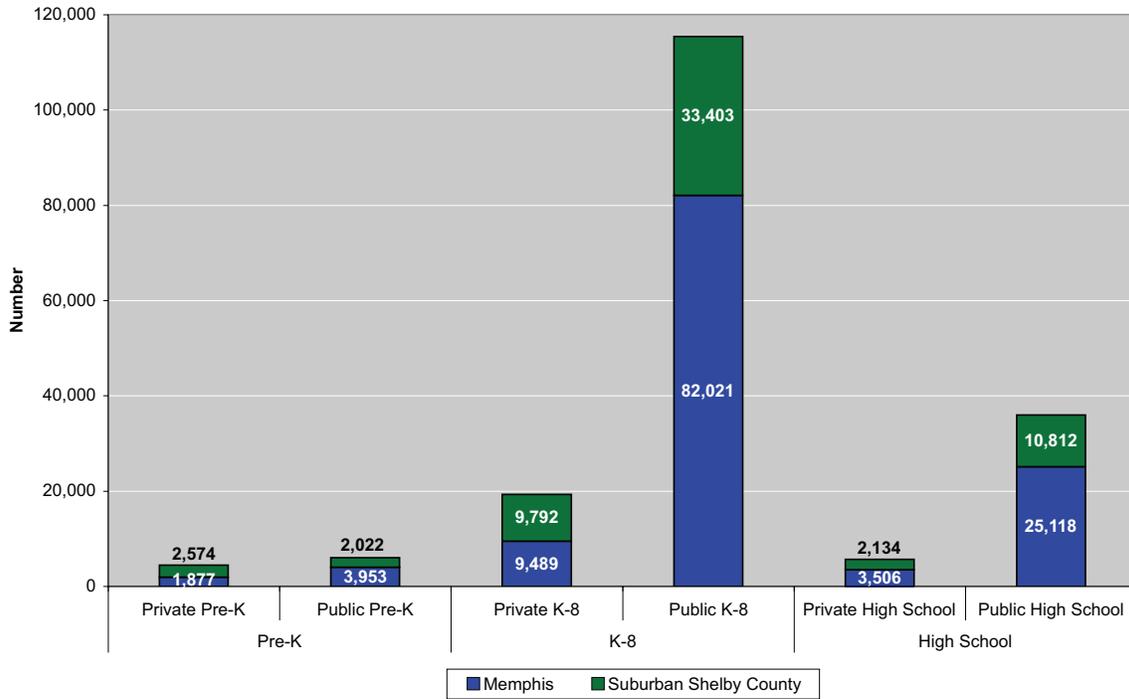
Percentage of Children in Public Schools, Memphis City, Shelby County, Tennessee, & U.S., 2006



Source: American Community Survey, 2006.

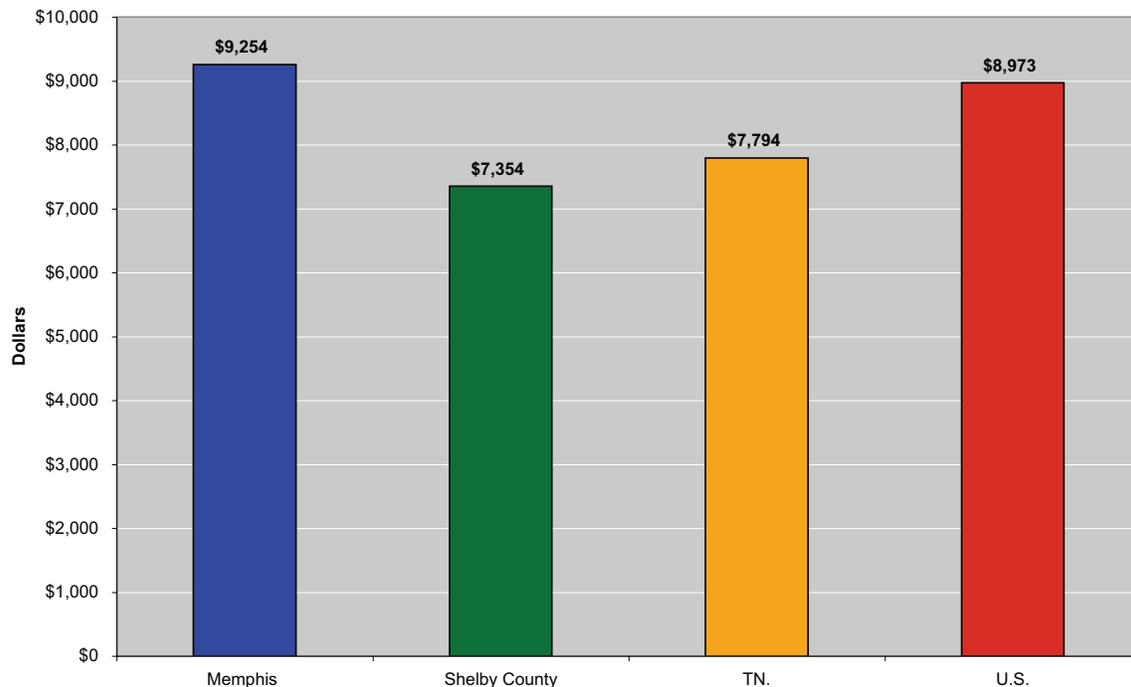
- Both nationally and statewide, 85 percent of children attended public schools.
- One out of five children in Tennessee lived in Shelby County.
- The Memphis City School District was the 21st largest in the nation.
- In the City of Memphis 90 percent of children attended public school.
- In Shelby County 81 percent of children attended public school.
- MCS serves 110,753 students in 112 elementary, 25 middle and 31 high schools, an average of 659 children per school.
- SCS serves 45,897 students in 49 schools, an average of 936 children per school.²⁶
- MCS operates 3.4 times more schools than Shelby County for 2.4 times more students.

Number of Students Enrolled in Public and Private Schools, Memphis & Suburban Shelby County, 2006



Source: American Community Survey, 2006

Amount Spent Per Pupil, Memphis City, Shelby County, Tennessee & U.S., 2007 & 2008



Source: EdWeek.org, 2008 and TN Department of Education, 2007.

Memphis cost-per-pupil is higher than Shelby County, Tennessee and U.S.

- In the U.S. today about 48 million students attend public schools, two million more than in 1970.
- Per-pupil spending has increased steadily in the U.S., corresponding with the increasing percentage of low-income students.
- In a classroom of 30 students in 1969 five children would have been eligible for today's free or reduced-price lunches. In a classroom of 30 students in 2007, 18 children were eligible.
- The Federal Government estimates that it costs 40 percent more to educate a low-income student. The majority of students in 94 percent of Memphis schools are from low-income families.
- MCS spends four percent more per student than the U.S. average, 19 percent more than the Tennessee average and 26 percent more per pupil than SCS.

How well Memphis students are performing depends on which test results you read.

Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) is Tennessee's program for 1) measuring student achievement and 2) maintaining compliance with regulations set by the Federal No Child Left Behind Act. TCAP tests are given in the spring to all public school students from second through eighth grade. To comply with Federal law, test results are reported by race/ethnicity, students with disabilities, economic disadvantage or limited English proficiency. Public high school students take the Gateway Exam.

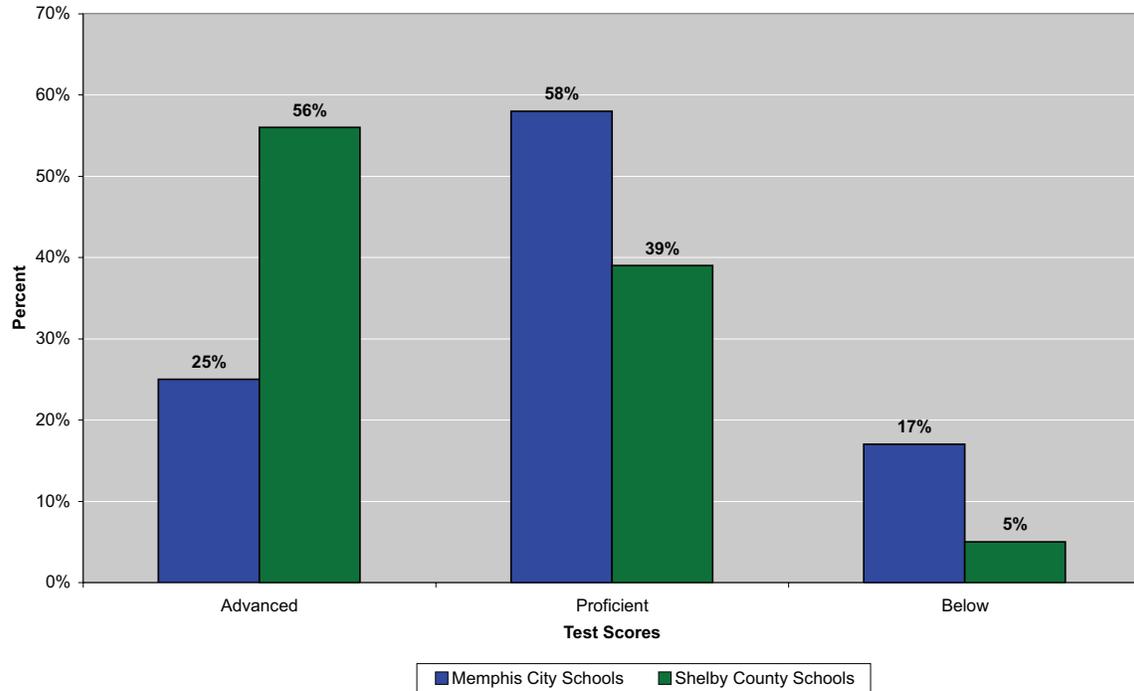
TCAP exams are scored to measure if a student is "proficient," meaning the student has mastered the appropriate grade-level material. Tracking TCAP scores is said to provide a comparative analysis of student performance from year to year and across the aforementioned risk categories.

A weakness of TCAP, however, is that the definition of "proficient" has been lowered consistently to assure that enough students are "proficient" to be able to report that schools are in compliance with the Federal mandate. By lowering the test score needed to be "proficient" schools can report student progress in the percentage of "proficient" students each year even though students actually are answering fewer questions correctly each year.

TCAP is not the only measure of student achievement. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), is an exam given every two years to a representative sample of students across the country, and it paints a much less encouraging picture of how well students are learning.

After downward adjustments of "proficient" and "advanced," most students in MCS and SCS are at or above grade level in reading and math on the TCAP, although gaps persist among at-risk students even using TCAP achievement measurements.

Percentage of All Students in Memphis City and Shelby County Schools by K-8 TCAP Reading Scores, 2007



Source: TN Department of Education, 2007

SCS students are more than twice as likely as MCS students to be above grade level (56% v. 25%).

Achievement gaps persist in both reading and math between low and middle-income family students, students with disabilities, students of different races and students with limited English proficiency.

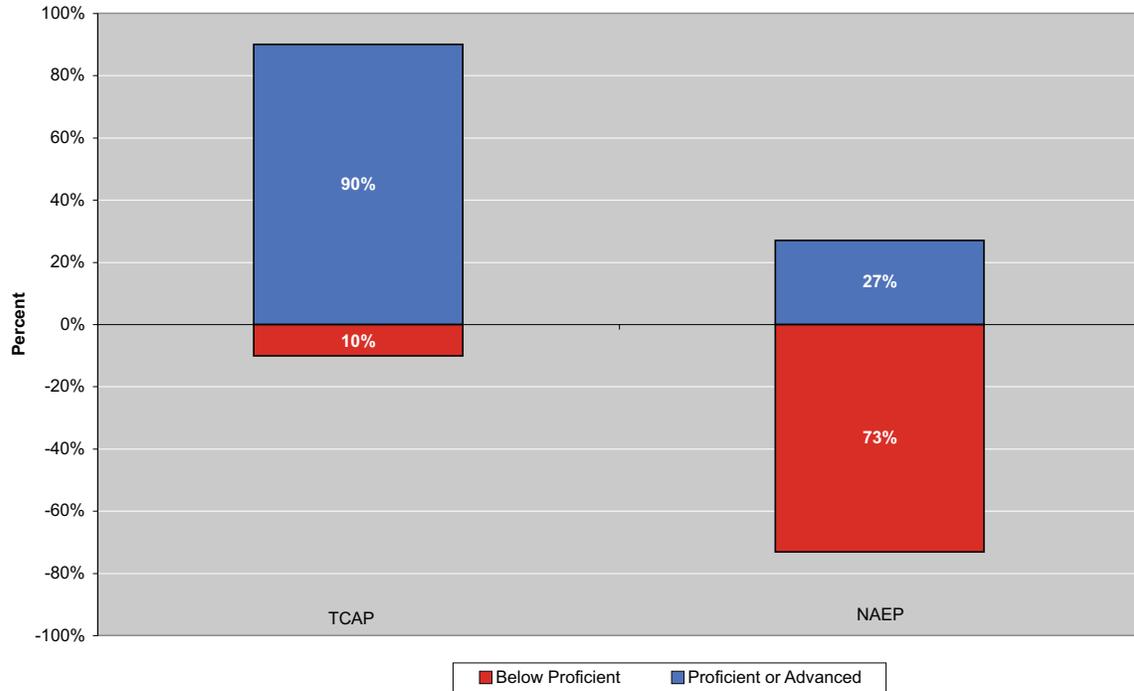
Confidence in TCAP performance by Tennessee students is undermined by results on NAEP.

A representative sample of students across Tennessee takes the NAEP alongside their peers across the country.

- Four out of five students in Tennessee earn scores of “proficient” or “advanced” on TCAP.

- Only one out of four Tennessee students earns scores of “proficient” or “advanced” on NAEP.
- State tests with large disparities between themselves and national test scores, such as Tennessee’s TCAP, are assumed to have less rigorous state tests.

Percentage of Students by Reading Achievement: Gaps Between the TCAP and NAEP, Tennessee & U.S., 2007



Source: TN Department of Education, 2007 and US Department of Education, 2007.

Student transience makes teaching difficult.

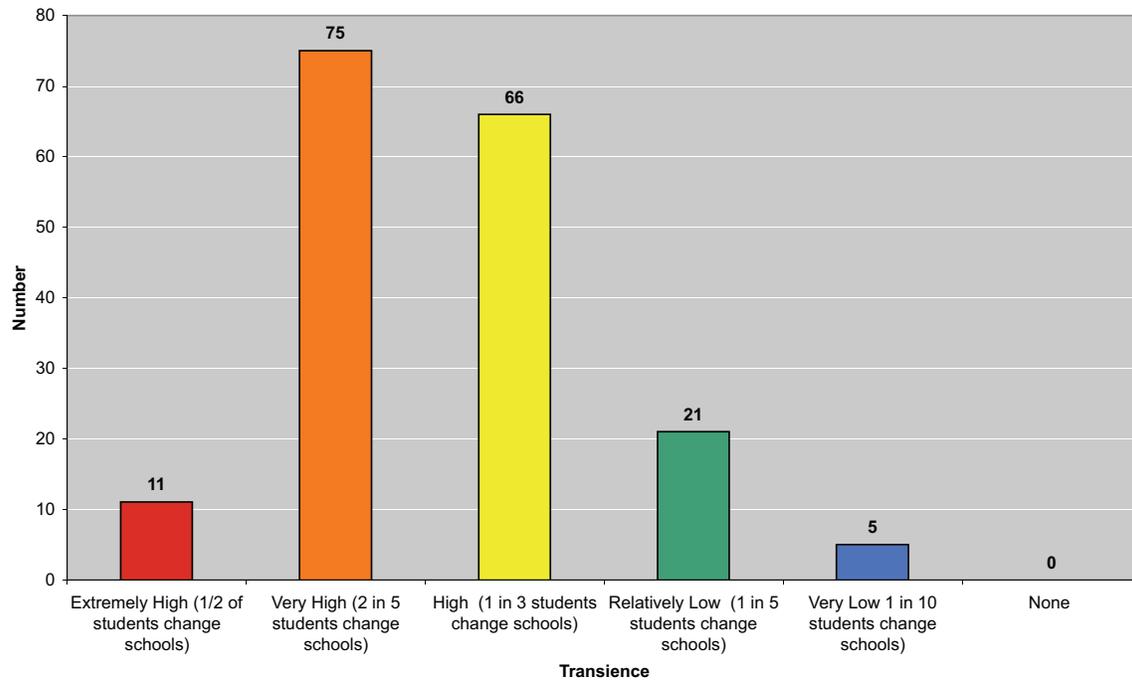
Stability is important to a child's social, emotional and educational development. When students are shuffled in and out of schools their ability to concentrate, settle into a schedule, build relationships with other students, teachers and administrators is disrupted.

Students from low-income families are more likely to change residences and schools.²⁷ When students move frequently, as does one out of three MCS students, the likelihood that they will drop out increases.

Family transience, and its negative effects on school success, is a nationwide problem. As demographer Harold Hodgkinson states, a typical teacher in Florida would say, "I had 24 students in the fall, 24 students in the spring, but 22 of the 24 are different students from the ones I started out with."²⁸

- Children in Memphis are likely to move three times a year before they start kindergarten.
- One out of three children in MCS changes schools for reasons other than grade promotion every year.

Number of Memphis City Schools by Mobility/Student Turnover, Memphis, 2006



Source: Memphis City Schools, 2006.

- In 11 of the Memphis City Schools at least half of students changed schools during the school year.
- In 141 Memphis schools, 80 percent of the schools in the district, more than one out of three students changed schools during the school year.
- Only five schools in the district had a relatively stable student population.
- Student transience in MCS has increased dramatically since 1999.²⁹

Nothing is more important to the future of Shelby County than decreasing the number of citizens who live in poverty. We must break the cycle of poverty.

The key to breaking the cycle of poverty is quality child care options that allow parents to go to school or work while children are being prepared by professionals to be successful in school. The gains that are made early must be sustained when children reach kindergarten and beyond through a shared commitment to quality public education.³⁰

References

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- ²⁵ American Community Survey 2006
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Glossary

At-risk children and students – Defined by national testing standards as those who come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, have difficulty with English, have a learning disability and/or living in a low-income family or in poverty.

Poverty – An income level defined by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services which categorizes minimums necessary to sustain individuals and families.

Near poor – A term coined by the authors of *The Missing Class: Portraits of the Near Poor in America* that refers to fragile families that are between 100 percent and 200 percent of the Federal poverty level.

Economically disadvantaged – A specific educational category that refers to students who live in families below 185 percent of the Federal poverty level and are eligible for free and reduced price lunches.

Early Literacy – A definition of children of pre-school age who receive from care-givers experiences such as reading, singing, saying rhymes and naming objects.

Pre-Kindergarten – A program to educate three and four-year-olds in classroom settings while functioning as childcare with emphasis on social, emotional, physical and cognitive preparation for Kindergarten.

Transience – A term used to describe the movement of students from one school to another during the school year for reasons other than grade promotion.