



## The Urban Child Institute Mission

The Urban Child Institute is a non-profit organization dedicated to the well-being and health of children from conception to three years old in Memphis and Shelby County. We are a data-driven, result-oriented coalition of community researchers, strategists, and practitioners who share a common vision of turning research into actionable knowledge. The Urban Child Institute is working to become a recognized leader in child advocacy research, a trustworthy community partner, and a place of choice for expertise, advice, and collaboration for those who want to improve the lives of children in Memphis, Tennessee.

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## Data Book Purpose

*The State of Children in Memphis & Shelby County* was created by The Institute and first published in 2006. The initial purpose was to collect the best available data on children in our community. Many individuals and organizations were gathering important information on children, but the 2006 “Data Book” was the first time that the data had been assembled in a single document.

This 2011 volume continues to track and update the data. It has also become more focused on our community’s youngest children, specifically those under age three. Additionally, The Institute is excited that the new Data Book includes contributions from some of our community’s top experts in various fields related to children’s well-being.

We hope that the Data Book will be a useful tool for government leaders, service providers, educators, and all community stakeholders who desire positive changes in Memphis and Shelby County. We believe that the evidence it presents for the importance of children’s earliest years provides clear direction for community efforts to improve the lives of our children and the future of our community.

## 2011 Introduction

The Urban Child Institute's Data Book provides the most comprehensive information available about the state of children in Memphis and Shelby County. It is also a call to action, challenging us to make Memphis known as a city that cares for its children. This year's data should encourage us to redouble our efforts in the battle to give every child in our community a fair start in life.

To do so, we need to invest early. The first three years of life are an especially important period for brain development. During this time, the brain is still organizing itself, and a child's earliest experiences help determine the wiring of his brain. Positive experiences help create strong and efficient connections that form the foundation for more advanced networks that will emerge later. Children's long-term behavioral adjustment, emotional well-being, and academic achievement are based upon skills that are learned before age three.

The figures in the Data Book highlight the challenges that we face, but they also remind us that every one of us has a role to play – government, the faith community, neighborhoods, grassroots organizations and, most of all, families. It is in joining hands that children's issues will be put at the top of the agenda for Memphis and Shelby County.

### **The 2011 Data Book spotlights key facts that should propel our best efforts:**

- Concentrated poverty is spreading and increasing: one in three Memphis census tracts have poverty rates 40% or more
- Too many children aren't ready for kindergarten, a trend exacerbated by the rising rate of children in poverty
- Achievement gaps result from the way children's brains develop
- Shelby County performs poorly on most measures of child health, leaving effects that last a lifetime
- Significant numbers of parents are not fostering optimal development of their children
- For African-Americans, infant mortality is higher today compared to 2000, while for whites it has dropped by one-third
- Teen birth rates for African-Americans have risen slightly since 2002 while dropping 25% for whites
- Risks to the children of teenage mothers begin in the womb
- The relationship between family income and school readiness is not fixed: many children do better than demographics would suggest

**The good news is that we know what works: getting the youngest children into Early Head Start and Memphis City Schools pre-K, getting more people into parenting classes, and funding more home visitation programs.**

**The facts in the Data Book can be complex, but the equation for changing them is simple: Investments and interventions in early child development improve education, build a better workforce, reduce crimes, expand the economy, and build a stronger Memphis.**

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