

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 5, 2008

Contact: Lori Quillen
423-425-5613

**Research Council Study Finds 1,000 Children Born in Hamilton County
Every Year at Risk of Not Being Ready for School**

*Highlights Need for Improved Coordination and Tracking Effectiveness of \$30 Million in
Early Intervention Investments; Berke, Mackey and Bennett Pledge Joint Effort*

Just one week before classes resume in Hamilton County public schools, a study by the Community Research Council (CRC) has found that roughly 25% of every incoming kindergarten class in public and private schools are at risk of not being ready for school.

At a press conference at the Children's Home, the study's authors and members of a 19 member advisory board were joined by Sen. Andy Berke (Hamilton County, Marion County), County Commission Education Chair Warren Mackey and Chattanooga City Council Chair Linda Bennett who pledged to work together to address the study's findings.

"Every child in our county – and in our state – deserves an excellent education. As we provide those children most at risk with the help they need, we must ensure that we are investing dollars as effectively as possible," said Senator Andy Berke, a member of the Senate Education Committee who helped commission the study.

"We can improve the performance of our public schools in Hamilton County by focusing hard on helping at risk children overcome the obstacles that they face," said Commissioner Warren Mackey.

"While some suggest that the City is out of the education business, this report highlights the important role of the City's Head Start and child care programs in helping young children better prepare for early grade success," said City Councilmember Linda Bennett.

Berke, Mackey and Bennett pledged to work together with the Advisory Board and CRC to improve coordination between the State, County and City.

The CRC study found that, out of approximately 20,000 children under five years old living in Hamilton County:

- ❑ According to the 2006 American Community Survey (ACS), 20.5% of children under five lived in poverty – up from 18.9% in the 2000 Census. For a household of three, the poverty threshold in 2007 was \$16,537.
- ❑ CRC's analysis of Health Department data found that for children born between 2004 and 2006, nearly 30% of mothers reported annual household incomes less than \$10,000 and 37% reported less than \$15,000 in annual household income.
- ❑ Hamilton County birth data indicate that between 2001 and 2006, 25% of children born in the county had a mother with less than a high school education.

- ❑ According to 2006 ACS data, 29% of children under five live in households with just one parent.
- ❑ According to 2000 Census data, one in ten children under five were living in a home where English was not the primary spoken language: with the increase in the Latino population in the county, this percentage is now likely to be higher – in 2006, Latino mothers accounted for nearly 12% of all births in Hamilton County.
- ❑ According to 2000 Census data, 6.7% of children between the ages of 5 and 15 had one or more disabilities: applying the same proportion to the under five year old population, there are 1,340 children with disabilities

Factors that place certain children at risk translate into performance on early grade tests in public schools based on third grade test scores from 2007:

- ❑ Children from economically disadvantaged households are four times more likely to score below proficient on the Reading/Language Arts TCAP and three times more likely to score below proficient on the Math and Social Studies TCAPs than those children not from economically disadvantaged households
- ❑ Students with disabilities are three times more likely to score below proficient on the Math TCAP, two and one half times more likely to score below proficient on the Reading/Language Arts and twice as likely to score below proficient on the Social Studies TCAP as those children without disabilities
- ❑ Students with limited English proficiency are three to four times more likely to score below proficient on the Reading/Language Arts and Math TCAPs than those students without an LEP issue

To help at risk children prepare for school, federal, state and local governments and private philanthropy spend approximately \$30 million annually on child care, Head Start, pre-school, pre-kindergarten and other programs. Still, the study estimates that as many as 13% of at risk children do not participate in these programs.

The CRC study also found that while thousands of children are assessed for developmental progress annually in Hamilton County, there is no standard or mandated single test or measure to identify the number of children entering Hamilton County public schools who are developmentally at risk.

- ❑ Individual programs or interventions have different measures of their success: in many cases, these measures are based on compliance – following specific models or regulatory requirements – rather than outcomes – the actual performance of children.
- ❑ There is no current effort to link the types of interventions that a child receives before they enter school with how they perform in Kindergarten and other early grades.

At risk children are concentrated in high poverty neighborhoods. Four areas -- Ridgedale/Oak Grove/Clifton Hills, Downtown, Bushtown/Highland Park, and Amnicola/East Chattanooga – are among neighborhoods with highest percentages of low birth weight babies, single mothers, mothers without a high school education and mothers who are teens. These are also areas subregion areas with more than 80% Latino and

African American newborn babies and poverty rates that exceed 30% -- a rate that is two and one-half times the county rate

The report identifies a series of steps that can be taken to address the issue of school readiness:

- Identify those children who are at risk from birth and provide these children with a continuum of services
- Ensure that parents, child care providers, parent educators and teachers of every child work together to provide children with the resources and programs needed to overcome risks to academic achievement
- Identify opportunities for coordination and integration of services to improve service provision and avoid duplication
- Connect the early childhood program providers community with the school system to pass along knowledge and information on each child
- Develop a basic, easy to use instrument – based on best practices elsewhere and consultation with Kindergarten teachers, Pre-Kindergarten teachers and child care providers – that provides assessment information on school readiness for every child entering Hamilton County schools.
- Using the common assessment tool, develop a database that captures this child by child information and can be used to develop school performance based outcome measures for early childhood interventions

The report was authored by Dr. Eileen Robertson Rehberg, Director of Data Analysis/Senior Policy Analyst for the Community Research Council; David Eichenthal, and Shelby Kain. A copy of the full report is attached.

Funding for the report was provided by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and a Community Enhancement Grant from the State of Tennessee, sponsored by Senator Andy Berke.

The Community Research Council (CRC) is a Chattanooga-based nonprofit organization that conducts independent data analysis and policy research to improve the quality of life in the Chattanooga region. In 2006, CRC completed the first ever State of Chattanooga Region Report, the most comprehensive analysis ever of the quality of life in Hamilton County. For more information about CRC and the State of Chattanooga Region Report, visit <http://www.researchcouncil.net>.

###