

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 20, 2008

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New Report on Education Details Differences in Enrollment, Attendance, Performance at Schools in Metro Area and Within Hamilton County

At a press conference at the Creative Discovery Museum, the Ochs Center for Metropolitan Studies released a study of education issues in the Chattanooga region. The report, the third in a series of seven reports that comprise the *2008 State of Chattanooga Region Report (SOCRR)*, examined dozens of indicators related to enrollment, attendance, student performance and demographics. The report provides detailed information on children at the neighborhood level in Hamilton County. It also examines differences between the six public school systems that provide education to children in the Chattanooga metropolitan area.

Major Findings from the Report include:

- ❑ Among 1000 respondents to a 2008 countywide survey, 84% indicated quality schools was very important to the quality of life in Hamilton County: 90.3% of respondents ranked quality public schools as either the most important factor or very important in creating or retaining jobs in the County. While 80% of parents of children in Hamilton County public schools rated their child's school as good or excellent, parents of children in private and parochial schools were three times as likely to rate their child's school as excellent (91%) as public school parents (31%).
- ❑ In the Chattanooga Metro Area, half of total student enrollment (2005-2006; pre-K to 12th grade) were educated in Hamilton County public schools; 36% were in five other public school systems and 14% of students were enrolled in private schools.
- ❑ In 2007, 53.9% of Metro Area students were eligible for free or reduced lunch. Marion County and Walker County public schools (63.4% and 61.0% respectively) had the highest percentages of children eligible for free or reduced lunch. In 17 subregions out of 36 subregions in Hamilton County, more than half of all children attending public school are eligible for reduced or free lunch based on their household income. Six subregions accounted for 32% of all eligible students in the County and just 19% of the overall student population.
- ❑ Every school in the Catoosa County public school system met adequate yearly progress (AYP) in 2007. In Hamilton County, 84% of public schools – the second highest percentage in the region – met AYP. In both Marion and Sequatchie Counties, one-third of schools failed to meet AYP.

- ❑ Graduation rates (2006-2007) were highest in Marion County (87%) and lowest in Walker County, Georgia with only 55.4% graduating from public high schools. Hamilton County has the second highest graduation rate in the Metro Area -- 75.1%.
- ❑ In Hamilton County, 28.1% of students failed to attend school at least 93% of the time: more than one-third of high school students failed to meet the systemwide attendance goal. Among public school students from Amnicola/East Chattanooga, more than four in ten students were absent at least thirteen days out of the school year.
- ❑ While an increasing percentage of Hamilton County students are scoring advanced on third grade reading TCAPs, white students were more than two and a half times as likely to score advanced on the third grade reading test and economically disadvantaged students scored below proficient at a rate more than four times higher than those without an economic disadvantage.
- ❑ On third grade math TCAPs, the percentage of students scoring advanced increased from a low of 37.5% in 2005-2006 to 43.4% in 2007-2008: the greatest increase was among non-economically disadvantaged students – up 8.1 percentage points.
- ❑ Overall, the percentage of students scoring advanced on the Algebra I Gateway increased from 25.9% to 32.5% in 2007-2008: while the percentage of both African American and White students scoring advanced increased, the performance gap based on student race grew as well.
- ❑ Students performed better on the English II Gateway: the percentage scoring advanced increased from 66.1% in 2006-2007 to 72% in 2007-2008: the percentage of both African American and White students scoring advanced increased while the performance gap closed.
- ❑ Dallas Bay/Lakesite had the fastest growth in student enrollment -- up 28% since 2005. Six other subregions also experienced double digit growth during this period. Public school enrollment declined in 14 out of 36 subregions. Downtown's student population declined 26.6% going from 757 in the 2004-2005 school to 556 by 2007-2008.
- ❑ Performance on the third grade reading TCAP varied by subregion: for example, while 79.7% of Signal Mountain Children scored advanced on the reading TCAP, just 11.5% in South Chattanooga did. In six Chattanooga neighborhoods – Bushtown/Highland Park, Glenwood/Eastdale, South Chattanooga, Amnicola/East Chattanooga, Ridgedale/Oak Grove/Clifton Hills, and Woodmore/Dalewood – less than 20% of children scored advanced in reading. Scores increased in 25 subregions.
- ❑ On the third grade math TCAP, the percentage of students scoring advanced in math in Signal Mountain was eight times the percentage of students scoring advanced from Amnicola/East Chattanooga. In three neighborhoods, less than one in five students scored advanced. The percentage of students scoring advanced on the math TCAP increased in 21 subregions.
- ❑ While there were differences in performance by subregion on the Gateway exams, the degrees varied by exam topic. Among students living in Signal Mountain, 89.8% scored advanced on the English II exam – more than double the percentage scoring advanced from Ridgedale/Oak Grove/Clifton Hills.

On the Math exam, however, 73.4% of students from Signal Mountain scored advanced -- eight times the percentage of students scoring advanced in Amnicola/East Chattanooga.

“More than anything else, we know that education is essential to the economic and civic vitality of our region,” said David Eichenthal, President and CEO of the Ochs Center for Metropolitan Studies. “For the first time, our report looks at education across six counties. The result is clear differences in demographics, enrollment and student performance by county and by subregion.”

The report on education was authored by Dr. Eileen Robertson Rehberg. The 2008 State of Chattanooga Region Report on the Education can be downloaded at the Ochs Center website - www.ochscenter.org. The development of the State of Chattanooga Region Report was generously supported by grants from the Lyndhurst Foundation, Benwood Foundation, Community Foundation of Greater Chattanooga, as well as funding to the Ochs Center from the United Way.