

# Family Poverty and Its Implications for School Success

Issues Facing Cincinnati's Families

## Executive Summary

March 2004

Prepared for:

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## Family Poverty and Its Implications for School Success: Issues Facing Cincinnati's Families

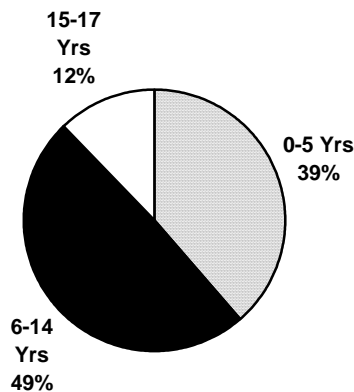
### Executive Summary

#### The Face of Poverty

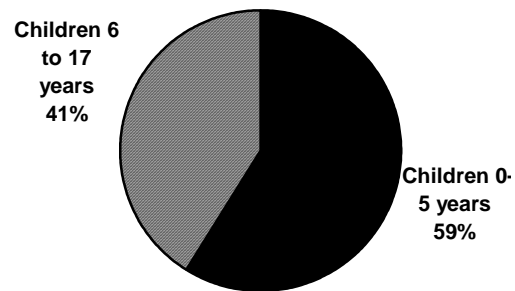
In Ohio, 408,685 (14.8%) of the state's 2,761,385 children belong to families that are poor and living within the state's system of public assistance. Poverty rates for families and children living in the city of Cincinnati exceed statewide rates, with 25,807 (31.8%) of the city's children living in families with incomes below the poverty level in 2000.

- In 2000, 24,871 (11.4 %) Hamilton County children lived in poverty.
- In 2000, African American children in the city of Cincinnati living in poverty outnumbered White children almost 3 to 1.
- 23,756 (63%) of the 37,708 students attending Cincinnati Public Schools are eligible to receive free or reduced price lunch.
- 8,000 (32%) of the 25,000 homeless in Cincinnati are children under the age of 18, with the average age of a homeless child in Cincinnati being nine years old.

**Figure 1. Cincinnati children in poverty**



**Figure 2. Cincinnati families in poverty by age group of children in family**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Factfinder

#### The Consequences of Poverty for Children

**Child Health.** Children born into poverty are more likely to have been low birth weight babies and are more likely to die in the first month than other children. Poor children have more chronic health problems such as asthma; demonstrate poor motor skills; exhibit low height and weight for age, demonstrate substandard nutritional status; are at greater risk for accidents and injuries; are more likely to have physical impairments that

restrict their activities; and are more likely to engage in risky and health-compromising behavior such as smoking and early sexual activity.

***Social-Emotional Development.*** The key risk factors for poor social-emotional development include: persistence of poverty, single-parent status, maternal educational level, English proficiency, parent psychosocial problems, homelessness, chronic illness, neighborhood violence, and substance abuse, all elements strongly associated with living in poverty. A child's ability to establish and maintain early, important relationships with parents, peers, and teachers upon entering school is a strong predictor of school success.

***Cognitive Development.*** Poverty has significant effects on the development of cognitive and verbal skills. Children in impoverished families are likely to have low cognitive scores and learning disabilities in combination with other health problems, with average cognitive scores that are 60% lower than those of high SES children.

## **Poverty and School Success**

Poverty negatively impacts school success, school achievement, and social-emotional functioning. The higher the family's income, the better children will do on ability measures and achievement scores and the more likely that child is to finish high school.

- Poor children are twice as likely to repeat a grade and are more likely to move frequently than their more advantaged peers, primary risk factors for dropping out of school.
- Schools serving low-income students have fewer resources, are located in lower-quality facilities, face greater challenges recruiting highly qualified teachers, face many more challenges in addressing and meeting students' needs, and experience lower levels of parent involvement.
- Increasing mothers' education promotes children's early acquisition of basic cognitive, social, and emotional skills.
- Health issues associated with poverty put children in poor families at greater risk for school absence than children in more advantaged families, thus making it even more difficult to close any learning gaps that may exist.

With few exceptions, Hamilton County schools serving low-income students had lower graduation rates than those serving more economically advantaged students.

- During 2002-2003, high poverty schools met no more than 60% of state proficiency indicators.
- During 2002-2003, the attendance rate for Cincinnati Public Schools, with 62.7% of students classified as economically disadvantaged, was 90.8%, much lower than the 96% rate for Indian Hill, with less than 1% of students classified as economically disadvantaged.
- During 2002-2003, Cincinnati Public Schools students scored below state proficiency levels at all grades in all subjects.

- The 2002-2003 graduation rate for Cincinnati Public Schools was 60.2%, more than 20 points lower than the 83.9% rate for the state overall.

### **Implications for Cincinnati's Families**

There is a distinct relationship between family income and school success. Children in poor families are more likely to have limited access to health and wellness services as well as limited exposure to print materials, toys, and activities that stimulate early development of reading and language skills. Children in poor neighborhoods are also more likely to be attending school in lower-quality facilities that face greater challenges recruiting highly qualified teachers, addressing and meeting students' needs, and involving parents than schools in higher-income neighborhoods. Failure to improve developmental competencies of children before they enter school sets low-income children on a path marked by low achievement and by negative social and personal outcomes that accompany poor school success. These factors combine to make school an overwhelmingly negative experience for many poor children.

School success is tied to family well-being. A major goal of welfare reform and work programs is to move parents in low-income families toward self-sufficiency. Families need income equivalent to twice the official poverty standards to become economically sufficient, impossible at federal minimum wage. For a family to attain 200% of poverty, two adults must each be working at full-time, year-round jobs paying almost \$9.00 per hour.<sup>7</sup> For the many single-parent families living in poverty, this would require one full-time, year-round job paying almost \$18 per hour to attain economic sufficiency.

Solutions to family poverty must involve a community-wide approach that ultimately serves the family as a unit and addresses the entire array of cognitive, social-emotional, and behavioral skills needed for school success. Coordinated programming is needed to link low-income parents and children to a collaborative network of services that will support both parents and children as a family unit, rather than as individual, disconnected elements negotiating a vast network of disparate systems.

Community awareness of the effects of family poverty is an essential first step to developing community solutions. Moving families from poverty to self-sufficiency must become the focus of a broad-based community effort that extends beyond traditional human service agencies alone. A first step must be involvement of community residents and employers in conversation around these issues. However, it is the critical second step that must then occur – translation of the conversation on family poverty into action that ultimately improves the lives of Cincinnati's children and families.

# Family Poverty and Its Implications for School Success

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## Research Brief

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## **Family Poverty and Its Implications for School Success: Issues Facing Cincinnati's Families**

### **The Face of Poverty**

Since World War II, education has been increasingly viewed as an important means for equalizing income and social disparity in the United States. Success in school increasingly determines success in adult life, including likelihood of attending college, career opportunities, and income potential.<sup>27</sup> This research brief summarizes the consequences of family and child poverty on children's development with specific reference to factors related to school success and the implications for families in the greater Cincinnati area.

After peaking at 23% in 1993, the percentage of children in the U.S. living in poverty fell to 16.2% in the year 2000 with a very slight increase to 16.3% in 2001.<sup>33</sup> This difference translates into 11.7 million American children living in poverty in 2001.

In Ohio, 408,685 (14.8%) of the state's 2,761,385 children belong to families that are poor and living within the state's system of public assistance.<sup>35</sup> In 2001, a family of three with an income below \$14,630 per year was considered poor. Soaring unemployment from 2001-2004 in combination with a poverty undercount in the 2000 census suggest that child poverty in Ohio will continue to increase.

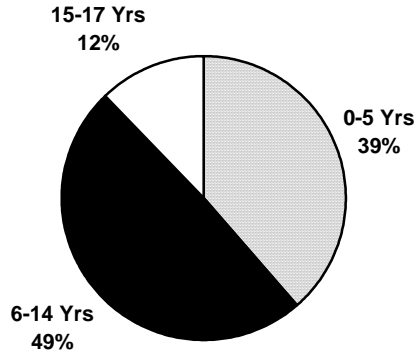
- 36.7% of Ohio's Black children and 10.7% of all other racial groups live in poverty.<sup>11</sup>
- 62% of Ohio low-income families are headed by a single parent, as compared to 18% economically advantaged families.<sup>26</sup>
- 19% of low-income families are headed by parents who do not have a high school diploma.<sup>45</sup>

Poverty rates for families and children living in the city of Cincinnati exceed statewide rates with 25,807 (31.8%) of the city's children living in families with incomes below the poverty level in 2000.<sup>42</sup>

- In 2000, 24,871 (11.4 %) Hamilton County children lived in poverty.
- Of the 25,807 city of Cincinnati children living in poverty in 2000, African American children outnumbered White children almost 3 to 1.<sup>12</sup>
- 37% of Cincinnatians in poverty are children under the age of 18.<sup>42</sup>
- 23,756 (63%) of the 37,708 students attending Cincinnati Public Schools are eligible to receive free or reduced price lunch.
- A substantial undercount of the poor in the 2000 Census, particularly of homeless families, suggests that census figures may substantially under represent the percentage of Cincinnati children in poverty.<sup>20, 35</sup>
- 8,000 (32%) of the 25,000 homeless in Cincinnati are children under the age of 18.<sup>13</sup>
- 2,640 (33%) of homeless children in Cincinnati are between the ages of 0 and 4, 2,960 (37%) are between the ages of 5 and 12, and 2,400 (30%) are

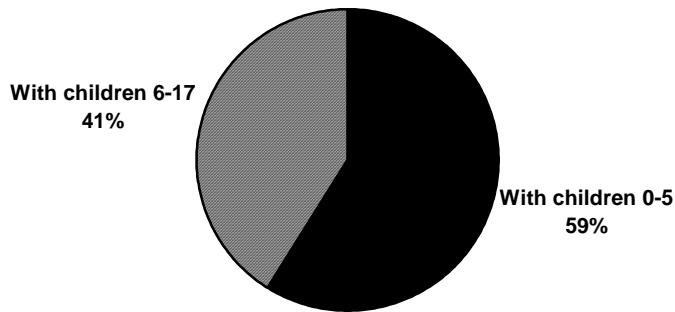
between the ages of 13 and 17, with the average age of a homeless child in Cincinnati being nine years old.<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 1. Cincinnati children in poverty**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Factfinder

**Figure 2. Cincinnati families in poverty by age group of children in family**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Factfinder

Poverty is a function of family income, race/ethnicity, and geographic location.<sup>43</sup> Deep poverty is predominantly concentrated in the central core of a city. Cincinnati concentrates its poverty in the inner core more than most cities in the country.<sup>37</sup>

- Minority children, specifically Black and Hispanic children, are much more likely to be living in poverty than White or Asian children.<sup>43</sup>
- An increased concentration of low-income households in the city core ensures that income and racial segregation will remain as persistent challenges. The degree of segregation in the Cincinnati metro area is 20 points higher than the national average.<sup>37</sup>

## The Consequences of Poverty for Children

**Child Health.** Hamilton County and Cincinnati health statistics are generally reported as overall usage data, without discriminating by income level. However, examination of indicators that are more highly correlated with poverty revealed the following:

- 12.1% of the population of Hamilton County does not have health insurance.<sup>19</sup>
- 10.8% of the population of Hamilton County is enrolled in Medicaid.<sup>19</sup>
- In 2000, 5,809 child abuse cases were opened for investigation with 29% of those transferred for ongoing services.<sup>17</sup>
- The infant mortality rate for Hamilton County in 2000 was 9.9 per 1,000 in the population, significantly higher than the U.S. rate of 6.9. Low birth weight or prematurity were the cause of 22% of these deaths.<sup>18</sup>

Children living in poverty experience a number of risk factors that contribute to poor health outcomes.

- They are more likely to be living in older, substandard housing with exposure to environmental toxins such as lead<sup>32</sup>, live in neighborhoods that are not safe<sup>41</sup>, and live in households that consistently do not have enough nutritious food available to promote healthy growth and development<sup>40, 42</sup>.
- Lead poisoning is a specific concern for poor children. Lead has been associated with long-term impairment of neurological function and cognitive deficits leading to lowered school achievement.<sup>32</sup>
- Children born into poverty are more likely to have been low birth weight babies and are more likely to die in the first month than other children.<sup>33</sup>
- Poor children have more chronic health problems such as asthma; demonstrate poor motor skills; exhibit low height and weight for age, an indicator of substandard nutritional status; are at greater risk for accidents and injuries; are more likely to have physical impairments that restrict their activities; and are more likely to engage in risky and health-compromising behavior such as smoking and early sexual activity.<sup>32, 33, 40</sup>
- High levels of stress from living in poverty are associated with increased violence toward children with rates of child abuse disproportionately higher among low-income families.<sup>14, 40</sup>

**Social-Emotional Development.** Chronic adversity and exposure to long-term stressors have a negative impact on children's social-emotional development.

- There is a higher occurrence of emotional and behavioral problems among poor children and adolescents.<sup>32, 34</sup>
- Long-term poverty is associated with heightened feelings of anxiety, unhappiness, and dependence among children.<sup>14, 33</sup>
- The economic stress of poverty may also contribute to poor social-emotional development in children by elevating parental stress, increasing parents' tendency to discipline children harshly and inconsistently while ignoring children's needs for physical and emotional comfort and reassurance.<sup>15, 25</sup>

- The key risk factors for poor social-emotional development include: persistence of poverty, single-parent status, maternal educational level, English proficiency, parent psychosocial problems, homelessness, chronic illness, neighborhood violence, and substance abuse, all elements strongly associated with living in poverty.<sup>10, 23, 38, 39</sup>
- The more risk factors present in a poor child's life, the more likely it is that child will experience behavioral and social problems.<sup>1, 2, 38</sup>
- A child's ability to establish and maintain early, important relationships with parents, peers, and teachers upon entering school is a strong predictor of school success.<sup>16, 25, 39</sup>

***Cognitive Development.*** Poverty has significant effects on the development of cognitive and verbal skills.<sup>14</sup>

- Children in impoverished families are likely to have low cognitive scores, learning disabilities, and other health problems.<sup>14, 32</sup>
- Before starting kindergarten, the average cognitive scores of children of high socio-economic status (SES) are 60% higher than those of low SES.<sup>27</sup>
- Family SES and early language development are positively related to later language development, academic achievement, and school success.<sup>23, 41</sup>
- First graders from families who are not poor are more proficient in understanding words in context and in performing multiplication and division than first graders from poor families.<sup>16, 31</sup>
- Poor children are less likely to grow up in homes that are cognitively stimulating and more likely to be raised by parents with fewer years of education.<sup>16, 33</sup>
- Poverty is more strongly correlated with cognitive and academic outcomes than it is with social-emotional, behavioral, and health outcomes.<sup>14, 15, 33</sup>
- Children in working poor families have a significantly lower likelihood of being identified as gifted than either children in very poor families or children in working families with incomes above the poverty level.<sup>43</sup>

## **Poverty and School Success**

Children in families whose income falls below 200% of the federal poverty level perform well below average on their reading, math, and general knowledge test scores compared to children living in families whose income falls above 200% of the federal poverty level.

- Poverty negatively impacts school success, school achievement, and social-emotional functioning with more detrimental effects occurring in the presence of persistent poverty.<sup>23</sup>
- In 1998, McLoyd found that the longer a child has been in poverty, the lower their achievement relative to other age-peers, with deficits in verbal, mathematical, and reading skills that may be two to three times larger than higher SES children.<sup>32</sup>

- On average, higher levels of parent education are associated with lower rates of child poverty.<sup>41</sup>
- The higher the family's income, the better children will do on ability measures and achievement scores and the more likely that child is to finish high school.<sup>15</sup>
- Income poverty is highly correlated to low levels of preschool ability, which is associated with low test scores later in childhood as well as grade failure, school disengagement, and dropping out of school.<sup>15, 33</sup>

Students in low-income families under perform at all educational levels.<sup>27, 31, 41</sup> School success is most vulnerable to the effects of poverty during the preschool years.<sup>5, 47</sup>

- Many children in low-income families enter formal schooling significantly behind their age mates academically, socially, and physically, putting them at greater risk for early departure from school, retention, and referral to special education.<sup>16, 27, 32</sup>
- Health issues associated with poverty put children in poor families more at risk for school absence than children in more advantaged families. Excessive absence makes it even more difficult for children who enter school already behind to make up any learning gaps that may exist.
- Poor children are twice as likely to repeat a grade and are more likely to move frequently than their more advantaged peers, primary risk factors for dropping out of school. Poverty in adolescence is also linked to a greater likelihood of dropping out of school.<sup>11, 33</sup>
- Schools serving low-income students have fewer resources, are located in lower-quality facilities, face greater challenges recruiting highly qualified teachers, face many more challenges in addressing and meeting students' needs, and experience lower levels of parent involvement.<sup>3, 27, 31, 37, 39</sup>
- Stratification in educational outcomes increases as children move through school, primarily because of differentiation of school experiences that begin in first grade and persist through high school.<sup>3, 27, 41</sup>

Locally, school districts in Hamilton County demonstrate distinct differences on indicators related to school success as a function of percent of disadvantaged students served by the district and resident median income. These indicators include attendance, graduation rates, and attainment on the five state proficiency tests given in fourth, sixth, and ninth grades.<sup>36</sup>

- With few exceptions, schools serving low-income students had lower graduation rates than those serving more economically advantaged students (see Table 1).
- During 2002-2003, high poverty schools met no more than 60% of state proficiency indicators.<sup>36</sup>

Cincinnati Public School students have demonstrated consistently poor attainment in the major proficiency areas of language arts, mathematics, writing, and science. During 2002-2003, students scored below state levels at all grades in all subjects, with the highest attainment occurring on the writing test.<sup>36</sup>

- 40.8% of fourth graders, 42% of sixth graders, and 89.5% of ninth graders passed the reading test.
- 28% of fourth graders, 26.9% of sixth graders, and 67.6% of ninth graders passed the math test.
- 61.2% of fourth graders, 73.4% of sixth graders, and 91.6% of ninth graders passed the writing test.
- 26.7% of fourth graders, 35.2% of sixth graders, and 75.2% of ninth graders passed the science test.
- During 2002-2003, the attendance rate for Cincinnati Public Schools, with 62.7% of students classified as economically disadvantaged, was 90.8%, much lower than the 96% rate for Indian Hill, with less than 1% of students classified as economically disadvantaged, or the 94.5% rate for the state overall.<sup>36</sup>
- The 2002-2003 graduation rate for Cincinnati Public Schools was 60.2%, more than 20 points lower than the 83.9% rate for the state overall.

**Table 1. Demographic comparison of high and low poverty Hamilton County school districts, 2002-2003**

District	Resident Median Income	% Econ. Disadvan. Students	% Minority Students	Attendance Rate (%)	Graduation Rate (%)	State Indicators Met*
<b>High poverty</b>						
St. Bernard-Elmwood Place	25,645	57.4	10.7	94.7	85.9	11
Norwood City	25,517	42.3	9.1	93.1	72.1	12
Cincinnati City	25,151	62.7	73.3	90.8	60.2	4
Lockland City	24,365	100.0	32.5	94.1	90.9	14
<b>Very low poverty</b>						
Indian Hill Exempted	57,800	0.8	4.9	96.0	98.8	22
Wyoming City	48,311	<0.5	13.1	96.2	99.4	22
Sycamore City	44,514	5.9	10.5	95.5	95.7	22
Forest Hills	43,509	4.0	3.0	96.0	95.1	22
Madeira City	40,448	1.1	4.6	95.8	99.2	22
Mariemont	37,082	<0.6	3.9	95.7	90.8	22

**Source:** Ohio Department of Education, 2002-2003 District Report Cards

\* Indicators based on percent proficient in the five state tests at 3 grade levels, plus attendance and graduation rates; total possible for 2002-2003 = 22

**Table 2. Percent proficient in reading and math for high and low poverty Hamilton County school districts, 2002-2003**

District	4 <sup>th</sup> Grade		6 <sup>th</sup> Grade		9 <sup>th</sup> Grade Overall*	
	Reading	Math	Reading	Math	Reading	Math
<b>High poverty</b>						
St. Bernard-Elmwood Place	47.5%	41.3%	61.0%	37.7%	98.3%	86.2%
Norwood City	61.8%	53.5%	75.7%	48.1%	93.8%	82.7%
Cincinnati City	40.8%	28.0%	42.0%	26.9%	89.5%	67.6%
Lockland City	63.8%	38.3%	69.6%	60.9%	95.1%	87.8%
<b>Very low poverty</b>						
Indian Hill Exempted	91.5%	89.1%	85.5%	80.1%	100.0%	98.7%
Wyoming City	95.4%	84.1%	91.0%	82.7%	98.1%	94.8%
Sycamore City	88.5%	85.4%	86.9%	83.5%	98.5%	93.8%
Forest Hills	89.5%	86.9%	88.1%	83.8%	98.0%	95.9%
Madeira City	88.1%	88.1%	88.1%	82.2%	100.0%	95.8%
Mariemont	93.8%	80.6%	91.7%	82.7%	99.2%	96.0%
<b>State Requirement</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>85%</b>

**Source:** Ohio Department of Education, 2002-2003 District Report Cards

\* 9<sup>th</sup> grade rates are overall pass rates and include 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students who passed the test as 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> graders

Parental income and educational attainment are important indicators for children's achievement levels in schools.

- In the Cincinnati Public Schools, with 63% of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch, less than half the fourth and sixth graders scored at basic proficiency levels on the 2002-2003 state reading test.<sup>13, 36</sup>
- Almost 40% of Cincinnati Public students do not graduate high school.<sup>36</sup>
- Family income has a greater impact during the early childhood years on whether low-income children finish school than it does during the middle childhood years.<sup>15, 16</sup>
- Children in families with income less than 50% of poverty levels score 6-13 points lower on standardized tests than children in families with incomes between 150% and 200% of poverty levels.<sup>30</sup>
- Nationwide, over twice as many students eligible for free or reduced price lunches in 1998 scored below basic proficiency levels in reading achievement on the NAEP test than their peers.<sup>31</sup>
- Twice as many first graders from families that were not poor were proficient in understanding words in context and in performing multiplication and division than were first graders from poor families.<sup>31</sup>
- Increases in welfare mothers' education levels improved their children's academic, although not behavioral, outcomes.<sup>30</sup>
- Increasing mothers' education promotes children's early acquisition of basic cognitive, social, and emotional skills. Such support may help to prevent the child from being retained or placed in special education, provided the child starts school on a level with other children. Maternal schooling, which takes

place after the child has entered school, may benefit later achievement, but may occur too late in a child's educational experience to prevent academic problems.<sup>30</sup>

A major goal of welfare reform and work programs is to move parents in low-income families toward self-sufficiency. Yet, income alone is not enough to ensure that families will not still find themselves living in conditions of poverty.<sup>7</sup>

- Families need income equivalent to twice the official poverty standards to become economically sufficient, impossible at federal minimum wage. For a family to attain 200% of poverty, two adults must each be working at full-time, year-round jobs paying almost \$9.00 per hour.<sup>7</sup> For the many single-parent families living in poverty, this would require one full-time, year-round job paying almost \$18 per hour to attain economic sufficiency.
- Educational requirements for employment are increasing. Workers with limited education have fewer employment options and earn less than similar workers a decade ago.<sup>7</sup>
- As their earnings increase, families lose public supports at a greater rate than family expenses can be covered by income from a new job. Expenses related to work, increased taxes, transportation, and child care may consume most or all of these additional earnings.<sup>7, 8, 9, 42</sup>
- While increasing family income can improve child development outcomes, Cauthen found in 2002 that, in cases where parent employment did not increase income, positive developmental and academic gains were uncommon and, in some cases, unfavorable.<sup>6</sup>
- Mothers with young children are least able to support themselves through work.<sup>14</sup>
- Research presented in 2001 concluded that the programs which demonstrated positive outcomes for both parents and children were those that provided supports to help parents meet both work and family responsibilities, including such factors as health care, child care, and transportation.<sup>24</sup>

### **Implications for Cincinnati's Families**

Children from low-income homes begin school at a considerable disadvantage. Early childhood is a particularly vulnerable time for cognitive development and attainment of the social-emotional skills that mark school readiness.

- Families with very young children are more likely to experience poverty than families with older children. Economic declines and job loss on a statewide basis increase the likelihood that more young children will experience the effects of poverty in the near future.
- Those who experience childhood poverty are more likely to be poor as adults. Breaking the cycle of poverty means improving opportunities for school success for low-income children.<sup>27, 33</sup>
- Socioeconomic status is strongly related to the development of skills needed to ensure school success. Low-income children are far more likely to be

behind in attaining critical developmental milestones than their middle- or upper-income peers. In addition, low-income children are more likely to attend schools that are poorly equipped to meet the many health, emotional, social, and cognitive needs of these children. As a result, children in poverty find themselves facing a daunting array of barriers to school success from the time they are born.

- Failure to improve developmental competencies of children before they enter school sets low-income children on a path marked by low achievement and by the negative social and personal outcomes that accompany poor school success.
- The negative impact of poverty on adults has far-reaching effects on children with regard to health, social-emotional, cognitive, and academic outcomes. Improving school success must be linked to improving family outcomes as a whole.

## Conclusions

Review of the research literature and informational materials about poverty in general and growing up poor in Cincinnati, in particular, lead to the following conclusions:

- There is a distinct relationship between family income and school success. Children in poor families start school behind more economically advantaged children. Not only do they experience more developmental and health problems during early years, they are also less likely to receive adequate treatment to address these problems. These children are more likely to be living with parents who are poorly educated and, thus, they have limited exposure to print materials, toys, and activities that stimulate early development of reading and language skills. Upon starting school, children in poor families score lower on proficiency indicators, setting in motion a cycle of remediation, retention, and academic struggles that make it less likely they will graduate high school or attend college. Children in poor neighborhoods are also more likely to be attending school in lower-quality facilities that face greater challenges recruiting highly qualified teachers, addressing and meeting students' needs, and involving parents than schools in higher-income neighborhoods. These factors combine to make school an overwhelmingly negative experience for many poor children.

- School success is tied to family well-being.  
 Increasing the economic health of the family in ways that lead to income stability is an important step in improving developmental outcomes for children in poverty. Employment provides benefits for low-income adults that extend beyond the provision of additional income. However, employment that does not bring income stability for families may actually result in negative outcomes for the children of the family. Long-term, stable employment is essential for families to build a cushion of benefits and savings that can sustain them during emergencies. Employment programs must integrate basic job training with educational, social, and emotional supports that are targeted to improving low-income parents' prospects for long-term, stable employment.
  
- Solutions to family poverty must involve a community-wide approach that ultimately serves the family as a unit.  
 Intervention programs for children living in poverty must address the entire array of cognitive, social-emotional, and behavioral skills needed for school success, including building parental skills in supporting the development of their children. An emphasis on addressing cognitive skill deficits during the preschool years could help ensure that low-income children enter school more on par with their more advantaged age mates. Coordinated programming must be developed that can link low-income parents and children to a collaborative network of services in the areas of job training and employment, education, physical and mental health, and social advocacy. In particular, Cincinnati's schools, childcare, and social support programs must work closely together to support both parents and children as a family unit, rather than as individual, disconnected elements negotiating a vast network of disparate systems.
  
- Community awareness of the effects of family poverty is an essential first step to developing community solutions.  
 While it was not difficult to obtain information for this brief about the effects of poverty on a larger scale, it was extremely difficult to obtain statistical data about childhood outcomes in Cincinnati and Hamilton County. While many programs exist, most publicly available information consisted of anecdotal reports of services provided and demographic data more suited to annual reporting than to statistical research. Additionally, many of the local resources obtained cited data from different sources and years or did not separate out the data by income, making comparisons and conclusions difficult. Given Cincinnati's high rates of poverty for families and children and low rates of academic proficiency, efforts to develop data-sharing or a centralized source of information on local poverty would play an important role in better understanding the face of family and child poverty in Cincinnati.

- Moving families from poverty to self-sufficiency must become the focus of a broad-based community effort that extends beyond traditional human service agencies alone.

There is a vast array of human service efforts being carried out in Cincinnati with the goal of improving the lives of poor families in our region. However, these agencies cannot be expected to work in a vacuum. Broad-based community support is essential to facilitate the creation and maintenance of services to Cincinnati families living in poverty. A first step must be involvement of community residents and employers in conversation around these issues. However, it is the critical second step that must then occur – translation of the conversation on family poverty into action that ultimately improves the lives of Cincinnati’s children and families.

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