



Board Chair: Larry Wall
Executive Director: Dorothy M. Priester

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Total children in county under age 6: 4,144

Children under age 6 living in poverty: 10.1%

Cherokee County Highlights

- 35% increase in enrollment for the Dolly Parton Imagination Library
- “The First Steps program has been a blessing to me and my family in so many ways.”

Cherokee County First Steps Partnership *Fiscal Year 2008 Annual Report*

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Major strides were made over the 2008 fiscal year through the First Steps Partnership. During this time there was a 35% increase observed in participation of the **Dolly Parton Imagination Library**. A total of 764 children were involved in the program during FY08. Additionally, **Child Care Quality Enhancement** provided Pre-ECERS assessments to reveal areas which needed most improving in four childcare facilities.

An emphasis was placed on **Child Care Training and Professional Development**. In partnership with Cherokee County School District's Adult Education Program trainings were provided to help child care providers maintain their licenses. Amongst those in attendance were 76 teachers that received recertification from our trainings alone.

The need for a child care network in Cherokee County was identified through a survey with the child care directors last Fall. *Cherokee County Child Care Director's Association* has 13 members that meet each month to discuss business relevant to the child care providers and serve as a support group. In April, Cherokee County First Steps was the recipient of proceeds awarded at the *Inaugural Annual Limestone College 5K/1Mile Walk/Run*. Donations totaling \$2,990 were used to supplement the child care training program.

Further, First Steps partnered with *DSS* to provide 41 children with **Child Care Scholarships**. Among the participants, 98% were identified as having one or more risk factors.

Also, a highly competitive grant for an **AmeriCorps VISTA Volunteer** was awarded Cherokee First Steps by the United Way of the Piedmont. The VISTA member will create and maintain a volunteer program, develop funding opportunities and a public awareness and education campaign.

The board and staff at First Steps of Cherokee County are continually “*getting children ready for school.*”

Submitted on behalf of the children of Cherokee County,

Dorothy M. Priester
Executive Director

First Steps to School Readiness Strategy Areas

The First Steps initiative approaches children's school readiness needs in five ways:

Family Strengthening: A parent is a child's first and best teacher. First Steps works to help parents become the best parents they can be. First Steps also helps parents further their own education.

Healthy Start: Children's development and ability to learn are profoundly impacted by their health in the earliest years. First Steps works to help families understand children's health needs through education and screenings while also working to help them access needed health services.

Quality Child Care: Quality child care provides immediate and long-term learning benefits for children. First Steps works to expand the availability of quality child care to families and to enhance the level of quality in existing child care environments.

Early Education: Research shows that children who participate in high-quality preschool classes are more likely to start school ready to learn, as well as be more successful later in life. First Steps works to expand high-quality 3-year-old and 4-year-old kindergarten opportunities in public and private settings.

School Transition: The transition into kindergarten is a critical time that sets the tone for children's perspectives about the school years, as well their parents' perspectives. Making a strong initial connection between school and home -- and supporting both parents and students during this transition time -- has been shown to impact students' later school success and parents' later involvement during the school years.

2007-08 County Partnership Programs by Strategy

FAMILY STRENGTHENING

Dolly Parton Imagination Library

Program Description: Children under age 5 are enrolled to receive age-appropriate books through Dolly Parton's Imagination Library program. We pay for shipping only; the Dollywood Foundation pays for the books. The books are mailed to the child's home in his/her name every month until they are 5 years old. The quality books remove barriers to reading for many of the children and parents are reminded to read to their children. These books increase the availability of books in the homes and increase positive parent-child interactions. All children that participated in any Cherokee County First Steps (CCFS) strategy were encouraged to enroll in this program.

Program Results:

- 764 children participated in the program.
- 68% of parents surveyed reported reading to their child at least once a day. (According to the U.S. Census Bureau, released October 2007, only about half of children ages 1 through 5 are read to seven or more times a week.)
- 66% of parents surveyed reported they increased the amount of time spent reading to their children since enrollment in the Imagination Library program.
- 58% of parents surveyed reported doubling the number of children's books in their home since their participation the Imagination Library program.

- Enrollment increased this year by 35%.
- 5,863 books were distributed to children.
- 95.4% of the funds were used to procure books. (The remaining 4.6% of funds were used to purchase enrollment forms.)

QUALITY CHILD CARE

Child Care Quality Enhancement

Program Description: We conducted ECERS-R assessments that revealed areas of improvement in classrooms at four child care facilities. The assessments were also used to determine the procurement of quality and age-appropriate materials/supplies/equipment the respective child care providers.

Program results:

- 4 classrooms were assessed (1 in each facility).
- 100% of directors surveyed felt the scores reflected areas that needed improvement in their facilities.
- 100% of directors surveyed reported the materials received were age appropriate and beneficial in teaching children.
- 100% of directors surveyed believe the additional materials will help increase their enrollment.
- 250 children were impacted.
- \$11,063 was spent for materials and supplies for the four facilities.
- Pre-ECERS-R scores for the facilities ranged from 2.32 – 3.98.
- 21 monitoring visits totaling 63 hours were conducted on child care facilities.

Child Care Training and Professional Development

Child Care Providers are required by DSS to attend training each year to maintain licensing. The Directors and Assistant Directors must report 20 class-room hours and other employees are required to have 15 hours of training. These trainings were provided at a very nominal fee. The cost was \$10 for a half day and \$20 for a full day session (5 hours). Some of the trainings were provided by volunteers, including the Executive Director. We also supplied meals for participants who attended trainings that were longer than 2 hours. The partnership collaborated with the Cherokee County School District's Adult Education Program in offering trainings. Cherokee County First Steps underwrote the cost to provide all the training sessions and each partner hosted at their respective sites.

Program results:

- 157 teachers were trained (non-duplicated).
- 76 teachers received recertification for DSS hours as a result of participating in at least 15 hours of training.
- 31 teachers received at least half of their credit hours as a result of participating in at least 7.5 hours of training.
- 5 child care facilities had **all** of their staff receive recertification for DSS hours as a result of participating in at least 15 hours of training.
- 5 child care facilities had **half** of their staff receive as a result of at least half of their staff participated in at least 15 hours of training each.
- 27 child care facilities benefitted from Cherokee County First Steps training partnership.
- 13 trainings/workshops were conducted which totaled 55 credit hours.

Child Care Scholarships

This strategy provided quality child care for children 5 and under who qualified based on federal poverty guidelines and other risk factors. We partnered with State Department of Social Services to administer this program and received a 20% match.

Program results:

- 41 children received scholarships.
- 64% of directors surveyed stated that children in their facility received ABC Vouchers and/or scholarships.
- 10 child care facilities received scholarships from CCFS.
- 98% of participants were identified as having one or more of the state Board of Trustees' priority risk factors.
- 27 monitoring visits were conducted with child care facilities which totaled 32 hours.

FINANCIAL SUMMARY

Expenditures By Funding Source	
State Appropriation <i>(Fund 10)</i>	\$246,088
E.I.A. Appropriation <i>(Fund 55)</i>	\$ 15,492
Lottery Appropriation <i>(Fund 35)</i>	\$ 138
C.D.E.P.P. Appropriation <i>(Fund 60)</i>	\$ 0
C.O.E. Appropriation <i>(Fund 65)</i>	\$ 0
N.F.P. Appropriation <i>(Fund 70)</i>	\$ 0
State Private <i>(Fund 15)</i>	\$ 0
Local Private <i>(Fund 20)</i>	\$ 6,757
Federal <i>(Fund 30)</i>	\$ 0
In-Kind <i>(Fund 25)</i>	\$ 37,695
TOTAL:	\$306,170

In-kind	
Buford Street Child Development Center (Meeting Space)	\$ 100
Angela Dawkins (Volunteer)	\$ 300
Ruth Hutcherson (Volunteer)	\$ 500
Jim Kiser (Rent)	\$7,200
Limestone College (Meeting Space)	\$ 50
Dorothy Priester (Unpaid Comp. Time, Mileage, Training)	\$6,820
Spartanburg Community College Cherokee Campus (Meeting Space)	\$1,125
SC Department of Social Services (Match=6 Scholarships)	\$21,600

Expenditures By Program / Strategy Name	
Dolly Parton Imagination Library (2122)	\$ 14,885
Child Care Quality Enhancement (6012)	\$ 39,574
Child Care Training & Professional Development (6052)	\$ 48,235
Scholarship Initiatives (7031)	\$129,600
Indirect Programmatic Functions	\$ 44,136
Administrative Functions	\$ 29,740
TOTAL:	\$306,170

NOTABLE DONORS

<i>DONOR'S NAME</i>	AMOUNT
Cherokee County School District	\$1,457
Child Care Trainings (Fees from Child Care Providers)	\$1,560
Limestone College 5K Walk/Run (Donors):	
Debbie & Ashby Blakely	\$ 100
Buford Street Drug/Ace Hardware	\$ 100
Busy Town Child Development Center	\$ 300
Custom Specialties	\$ 250
Gaffney High School Teacher Cadets	\$ 230
Mark & Elizabeth Ireton	\$ 230
Jackie & Carole Lister	\$ 60
Palmetto Bank	\$ 50
Sagesport	\$ 250
Upstate Carolina Medical Center	\$ 100
Other Participants (Donated Less than \$50 Each)	\$1,320
United Way of the Piedmont	\$ 750
TOTAL: \$6,757	

Local Match Percentage for FY 2008: 17%
(at least 15% Legislative requirement)

CHEROKEE COUNTY PARTNERSHIP **BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Kim Bagwell, Pre-K Primary Educator
Pennie Bevis, Business Community
Jean Brewington, Early Childhood Educator
Kara Brill, Parent
Beth Bullock, House of Representatives Appointee-Replaced May 08
Kim Camp, Family Education & Training Representative
Laura Camp, School District Representative
Dr. Ron Cope, Pre-K Primary Educator
Kelly Davis, House of Representatives Appointee
Benny Dukes, Senate Appointee
Katherine Dukes, *Vice Chair*, Transportation Provider
Pastor Deborah Eadie, Faith-Based Community
Verlene Eaker, Child Care Representative
Lana Gardner, Library Representative
Sandra Greene, Senate Appointee
Christine Gregory, Healthcare Representative
Dr. Angela Hinton, Parent
Vanessa Jefferies, Head Start Representative
Dr. Joette Johnson, Early Childhood Educator
Randy Mathis, *Treasurer*, Non-Profit Community
Rev. Flor Morales, Faith-Based Community
Janet Moss, House of Representatives Appointee- May 08
Joy Phillips, Early Childhood Educator
Dr. J. W. Sanders, Jr., Non-Profit Community
Renee Smith, *Secretary*, Parent
Jenny Stroupe, Family Education & Training Representative
Kayron Wall, Early Childhood Educator
Larry Wall, *Chair*, DSS Representative
Teresa Welch, Health Department Representative
Brian West, *Member at Large*, Business Community
Linda Wilson, Child Care Representative

COUNTY DATA SNAPSHOT

In FY08, First Steps County Partnerships statewide made it a priority to become increasingly data-driven. County Partnerships successfully began using powerful new components of the First Steps data system, and County Partnerships also utilized data in new ways to drive their FY09 program plans. In addition to enhanced program data tracking, County Partnerships are also focusing on the best available data about children and families to best understand their communities' needs. At the end of FY08 and the beginning of FY09, County Partnerships began an extensive analysis of this data, including data about the risk factors known to impact children's potential school success, such as low birth weight, teen mothers, and families living in poverty. A county-level risk data report is included in the subsequent pages of this report.

SUCCESS STORIES

Jamie Johnson, Cherokee County parent receiving child care scholarships:

"I am a single mom of three children living on a single income, so every bit counts. This program has made me able to put my sons Ayden and Lucas in an environment where they are learning their ABCs, how to count, identify colors, and interact with other children while I feel safe leaving them to go to work everyday to provide for them. The First Steps program has been a blessing to me and my family in so many ways."

Robbie Beattie, father of 3 year-old Layla, who receives Dolly Parton Imagination Library books:

"Every time we get one, she goes ballistic. She asks us every time we check the mail, 'Did we get a book? Did we get a book?' She's just thrilled with it."

Mary Sellars, Director of Buford Street United Methodist Child Development Center:

"I would like to thank First Steps for the assistance they have given us. It has really helped us financially. The classes are less expensive for us. First Steps purchased furniture for our toddler class a few years ago and last year we had a mentor that came in and helped with the centers."

“We are very fortunate to have Dorothy Priester for the Director of First Steps. She listens to the Director of each daycare and is willing to help us in any way that she can, such as working out the classes we need each year and with any problems we have.”

**Stephanie Gettys, Registered Nurse Upstate Carolina Medical Center,
Grandmother of the Dolly Parton Imagination Library Books recipients:**

“I just wanted to let you know what a wonderful program you have. Both of my Grandchildren are signed up for this program and love it. They get so excited every time a new book comes in the mail. We must read each book to them at least 20 times and they never get tired of listening!”

2008 School Readiness Risk Profile

Cherokee County

Total Children Under Six: 4,144

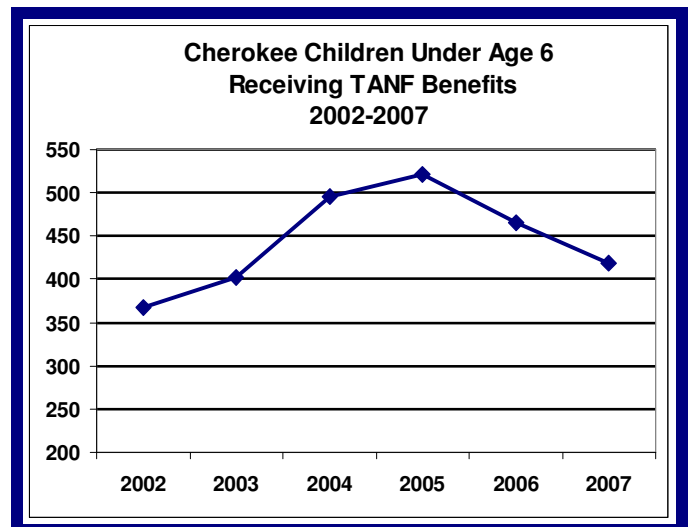
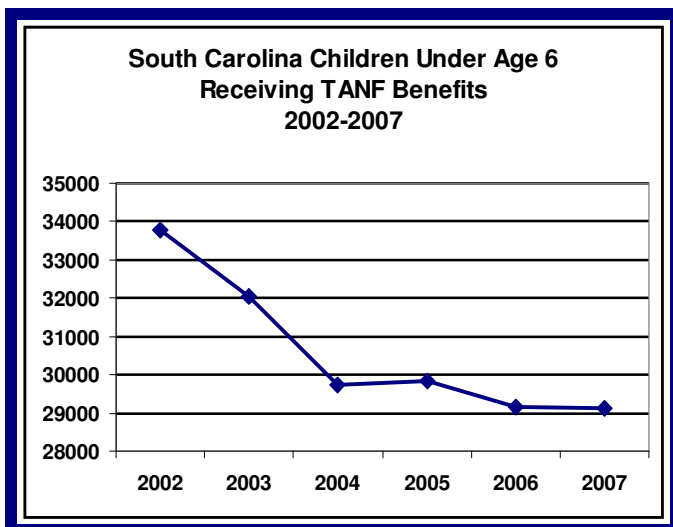
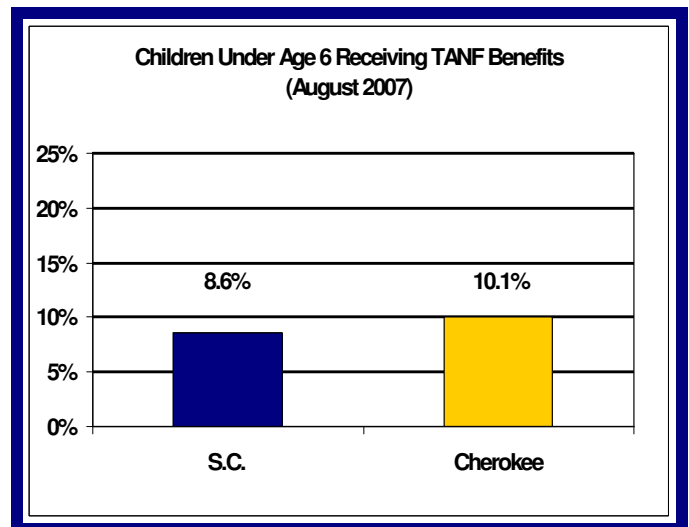
CHILD POVERTY (Children in Families Receiving TANF Benefits)

Statewide Average (2007): 8.4% Cherokee County (2007): 10.1%

Fast Fact: Roughly 1 in 10 Cherokee County children has an annual family income equivalent to \$10,325 (or less) for a family of four. A recent statewide analysis suggests that 45% of these children will be retained or score at the “below basic” level (PACT) by third grade.

Children in deep poverty often face a wide variety of school readiness obstacles, ranging from inadequate prenatal care and nutrition to low maternal education.

419 of Cherokee County’s 4,144 children under age 6 received federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits during 2007, indicating a family income at or below 50% of the federal poverty definition.



2008 School Readiness Risk Profile

Cherokee County

Total Children Under Six: 4,144

CHILDREN AT LOW BIRTH WEIGHT (Less Than 5.5 lbs.)

Statewide Average (2005): 10.2%

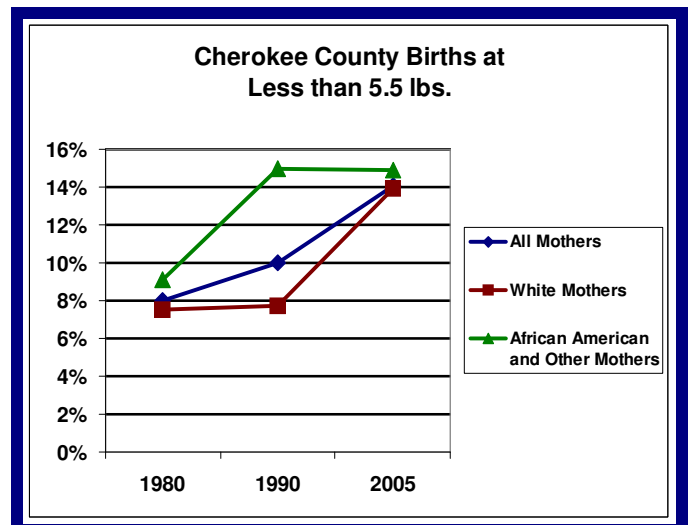
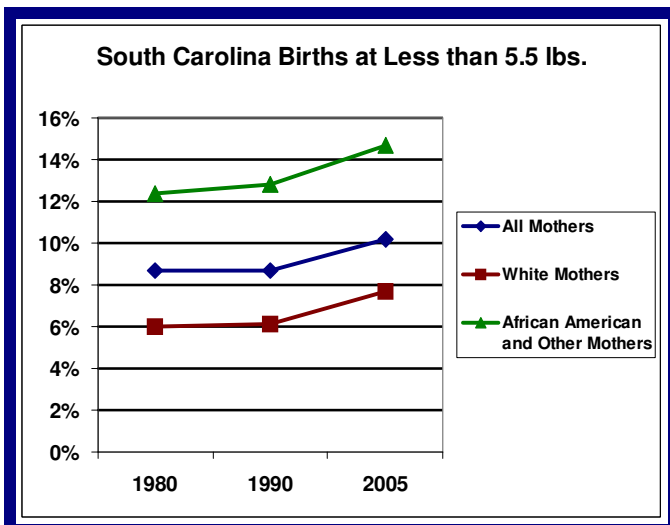
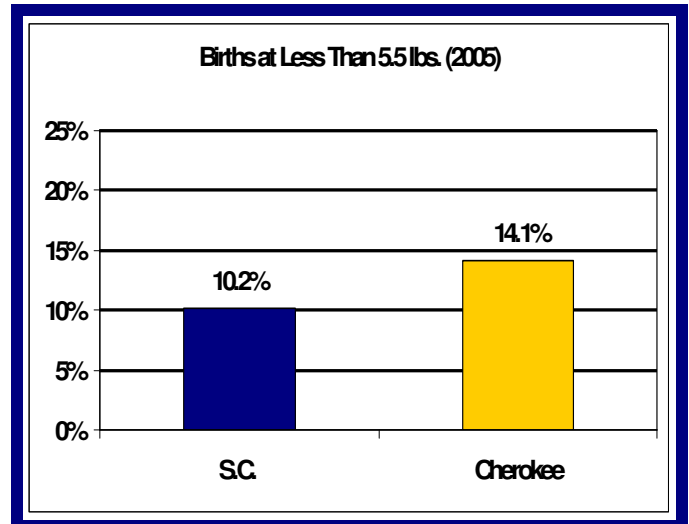
Cherokee County (2005): 14.1%

Fast Fact: Roughly 1 in 7 Cherokee County children is born at a weight less than 5.5 lbs. A recent statewide analysis suggests that at least one-third of these children (36%-52% depending on weight category) will be retained or score at the "below basic" level (PACT) by third grade.

Babies born at low weights are often prone to developmental delays associated with early academic failure.

Many have received inadequate prenatal care and suffer from significant health complications.

95 of the 672 children born in Cherokee County during 2005 weighed less than 5.5 lbs.



2008 School Readiness Risk Profile

Cherokee County

Total Children Under Six: 4,144

BIRTHS TO TEENAGE MOTHERS

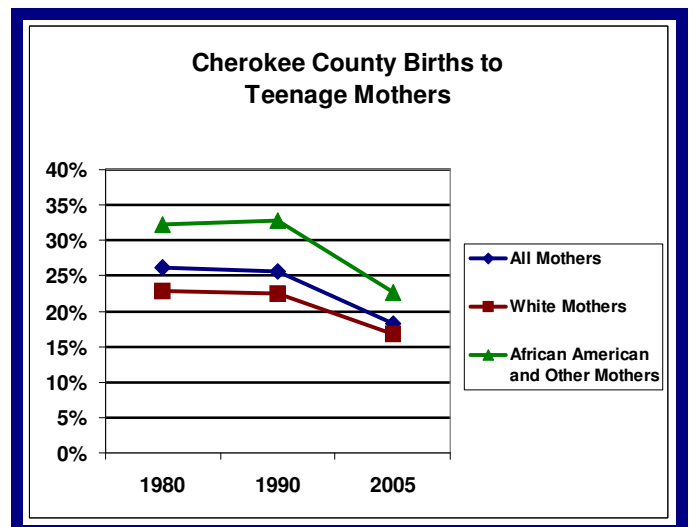
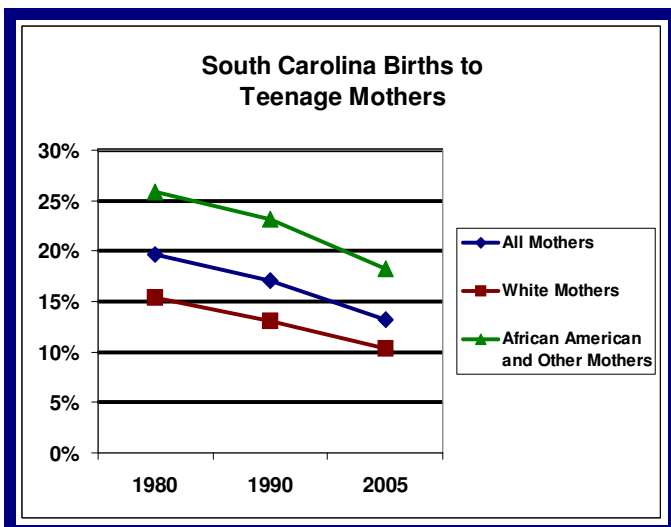
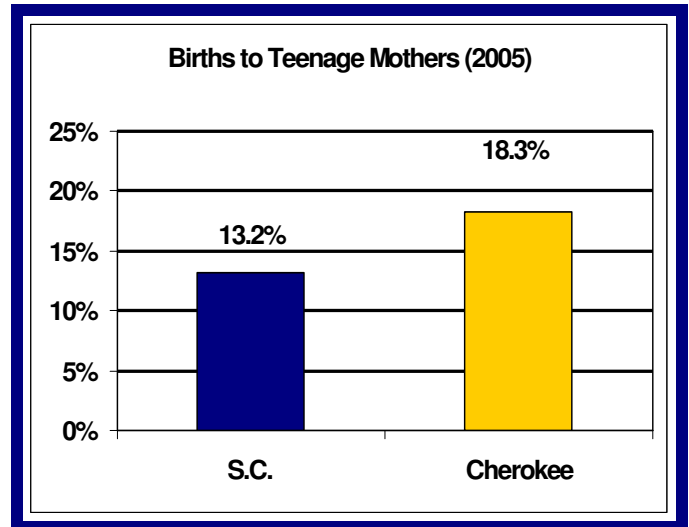
Statewide Average (2005): 13.2%

Cherokee County (2005): 18.3%

Fast Fact: Nearly 1 in 5 Cherokee County births is to a mother under 20 years of age. A recent statewide analysis suggests that 43% of these children will be retained or score at the “below basic” level (PACT) by third grade.

Teenage parents often lack the maturity and knowledge required to optimally fulfill important parental responsibilities, are less likely to advance their own educational attainment and often fail to advance beyond low-income status.

123 of the 672 children born in Cherokee County during 2005 had teenage mothers.



2008 School Readiness Risk Profile Cherokee County

Total Children Under Six: 4,144

BIRTHS TO MOTHERS WITH LESS THAN A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA

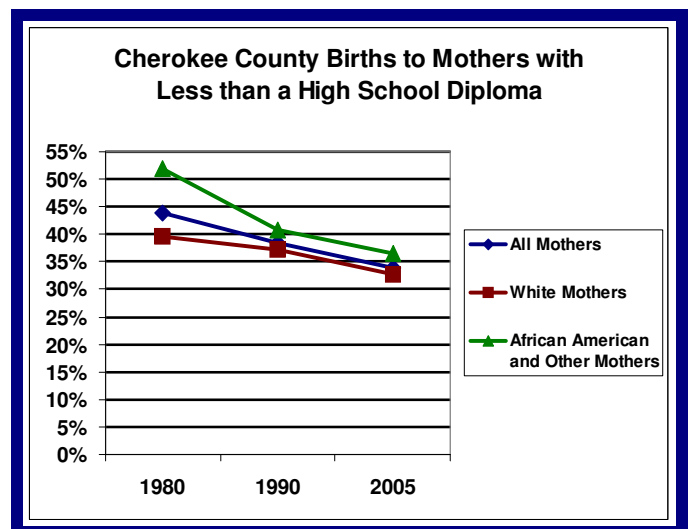
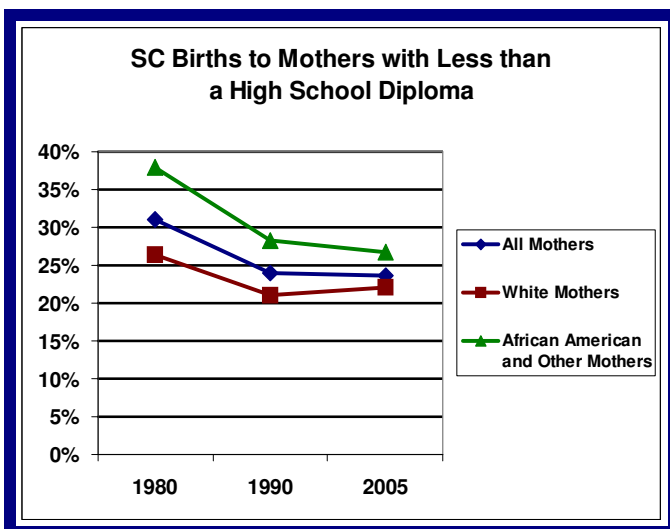
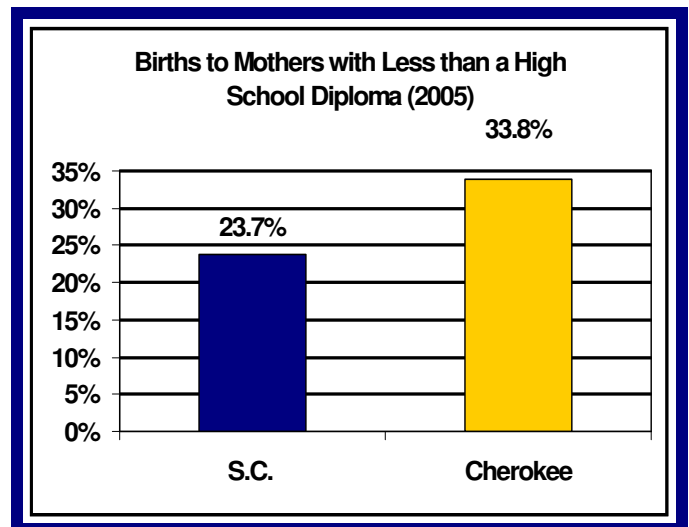
Statewide Average (2005): 23.7%

Cherokee County (2005): 33.8%

Fast Fact: 1 in 3 children in Cherokee County is born to a mother possessing less than a high school diploma. A recent statewide analysis suggests that roughly half (48%) of these children will be retained or score at the “below basic” level (PACT) by third grade.

Research suggests that a mother’s own educational attainment is closely linked to the subsequent academic performance of her children.

227 of the 672 children born in Cherokee County during 2005 had mothers with less than a high school diploma.



SUCCESS STORIES

Jamie Johnson, Cherokee County parent receiving child care scholarships:

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