

## Executive Summary

The many changes in the world in the past two decades have changed the way we consider early childhood development. Increasingly complex research projects and data collection methods allow us to know more about what children need to grow into healthy citizens.

Dr. Shonkoff shares with us the findings of his work with the Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development, established by the Board on Children, Youth, and Families of the National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine. The committee examined research in the field and identified implications for policy, practice, professional development, and research.

The committee identified the core concepts of human development which frame our understanding of young children. It concluded that all children are born wired for feelings and ready to learn. Their early environments matter and nurturing relationships are essential. While society is changing, the needs of young children are not being addressed. The interactions among early childhood science, policy, and practice demand dramatic new thinking.

Their recommendations for policy and practice require a commitment to two complementary agendas:

- How can society use knowledge about early childhood development to maximize the nation's human capital and ensure the ongoing vitality of its democratic institutions?
- How can the nation use knowledge to nurture, protect, and ensure the health and well-being of all young children as an important objective in its own right, regardless of whether measurable returns can be documented in the future?

To this end, the committee addressed the issues of a need for greater attention to mental health needs, the need to protect early brain development, the need to recognize the significance of nonparental caregivers, and the need to enhance support for working families.

The committee concluded its work with the urgent call for a new national dialogue, focused on re-thinking the meaning of both shared responsibility for children and strategic investment in their future.

Drs. Fair and Stanberry bring current statistics on Mississippi children and families. Indicators of child well-being indicate our children are below the national average for every indicator. Our rural and low economic

conditions increase the likelihood that children will have more health and nutrition issues and more developmental disabilities.

Fair and Stanberry raise the issues of inadequate funding with the current Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) formula for the number of children in need under the age of 3, the lack of properly trained personnel to meet the needs of young children with special needs, and the lack of adequate access to childcare.

The authors suggest the need for higher standards for early childhood educators working in child care and Head Start. Many children have special needs and they mostly need the same thing all children need: **A good, healthy start with competent parental and nonparental caregivers.**

If, as a state, Mississippi is to improve its ratings on poverty, education, and business, we must look at the root of the problem. Our human capital, our children, must be nurtured and supported in healthy ways.