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Summer 2015

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What's New: Powerful Tools to Further Your Work

ACS has new resources available for download now. Be sure to check out these two new tools available for free download from the ACS website!

[Eight Tips for Successful Engagement](#)—If you've ever thought, "if only that person would get involved..." this handy guide is for you. These eight steps help you plan, connect and follow up with contacts that are both familiar and unfamiliar with your cause in order to secure their engagement and enthusiasm.

[Better Than Zero: How alternative discipline is replacing zero tolerance to break the school-to-prison pipeline](#)—This report takes a high-level look at the current national conversation and policy changes surrounding the school-to-prison pipeline, and a closer look at how zero-tolerance policies in particular are changing nationally and in several states, including some alternatives that have delivered promising results.

Summer Reading

ACS has your summer reading covered. In this issue we recap K-12 and early childhood issues in the Ohio budget, show examples of how promising practices can build success, and share with you several new ACS reports and tools to help you accomplish your goals.

Happy reading from all of us at ACS!

The dust has settled and the Ohio state budget has been signed by Governor John Kasich. It is now time for retrospection and a reconciliation of goals and accomplishments. On the surface, it was a tough budget in terms of out-and-out victories for ACS and our clients, but a valuable one in terms of ground gained in anticipation of the fall session.

Our "win" for the 2015 budget season comes in the form of a School Transportation Joint Task Force created and funded in the new budget. This new Task Force will study and discuss how school transportation is supported and funded throughout the state. It's important, because state funds to support student transportation in many districts have not kept pace with actual costs of aging bus fleets, maintenance, and fuel. The creation of the Task Force was the culmination of a three-year, consistent advocacy effort by The Ohio 8 Coalition and ACS.

"Changing state policies is rarely a 'one-and-done' endeavor," says [Ohio 8 Co-Chair, Superintendent Adrian E. Allison of Canton City Schools]. "We rely heavily on ACS as our partner to help us continue to build a case for the changes we want to see, strengthen our partnerships in the General Assembly, put forth our testimony, advocate through the media and keep pushing—steadily and continuously—for the ultimate win. That's a process that can take several years, but eventually we get there."

The Ohio 8 Coalition and ACS will continue to work on other legislative goals in fall 2015 and in 2016, including funding for special student populations and increased accountability and transparency requirements for charter schools.

"Because The Ohio 8 Coalition has been a consistent, vocal presence in every budget discussion during the past few years, they are now seen by both lawmakers and the media as a reliable source of information to inform deliberations," says Cassie Gaffney, ACS Policy Associate. "As a result, we've been able to raise awareness of both The Ohio 8 Coalition and the issues they care about during this session, which positions us well for the next budget."

PRE4CLE, Cleveland's plan to rapidly expand high-quality preschool opportunities, entered the budget negotiation world for the first time in 2015, hoping for funding to expand their existing state-funded preschool seats from half-day to full-day. Although the initial effort was not included in the biennial budget this time, PRE4CLE raised awareness and won supporters, including the entire Cuyahoga County Delegation,

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ACS Recent Appearances

Lori McClung and Rebecca Cohen have been spending time in Arizona helping First Things First (FTF) staff increase their capacity as spokespersons for their organization. Nearly 30 regional directors participated in one-on-one sessions, video critiques and full group trainings in May and June. As a result, FTF regional directors are now better prepared to communicate about the work and value both of FTF and early childhood, and the organization's message will be reinforced consistently statewide.

In May, Rebecca Cohen conducted a training session in Troy, Michigan for 60 [Great Start to Quality](#) outreach specialists at the Early Childhood Investment Corporation's training institute. Run out of the Michigan Department of Education [Office of Great Start](#), Great Start to Quality ensures that all children birth to age eight, especially those in highest need, have access to high-quality early learning and development programs and enter kindergarten prepared for success. Great Start to Quality helps parents find the best child care and preschool settings for their children and helps providers and educators improve the care they give to children. In her session, Reaching More Providers Through Promising Practices, Rebecca helped participants understand the best approaches for getting early childhood education providers to sign up for Michigan's Great Start program. As a result, the 60 outreach specialists gained confidence and competence in distinguishing target audience needs, and aligning messages and approaches to meet those needs.

Using Promising Practices To Inform Success

Evidence-based programs are gaining more and more traction among funders and advocates of children and youth, and there's no question as to why. Programs that can prove their effectiveness in terms of delivering on metrics are highly attractive; even when the data doesn't show as much progress as anticipated, it's easier to identify areas that need more attention and target efforts accordingly. ACS regularly looks for promising practices and shares them in ways that inform our clients. Two examples of such work include a new guide for youth development in Little Rock written by ACS and the [STRIVE Partnership in Cincinnati](#). STRIVE is a partnership of public and private entities that have a common set of goals, outcomes and success indicators to help improve kindergarten readiness, fourth-grade reading and math scores, graduation rates and college completion.

A recent report from the STRIVE Partnership in Cincinnati looked at its accomplishments in that city and two Northern Kentucky communities. STRIVE reports improvements in many of its target areas: fourth-grade reading, eighth-grade math, high school graduation and college

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Client Spotlight: ZERO TO THREE Increases Message Effectiveness for Infants and Toddlers Advocates

As Assistant Director of Public Policy at ZERO TO THREE, Barbara Gebhard saw an opportunity to up the game for her organization and the early childhood advocates and providers it serves in terms of message development. "We often get asked about communication and messaging issues from our state teams, and that need was brought to a head late last year when one of our most active listservs began to clamor for it. We felt that ZERO TO THREE could take the lead on developing a set of messages for the field."

Gebhard turned to ACS as a partner for this work. "We had used Lori and Scarlett several times as presenters for our team meetings, and I knew they had the experience we needed," she says. The ACS team researched what messages were used most often, assessed their effectiveness and looked at how they could be improved for broader use among advocates and those in the field. Then, they worked with Gebhard, who shared ZTT's deep knowledge of the struggles experienced by the states, to create the [Infant & Toddler Messaging Guide](#).

"It was truly a partnership," says Gebhard. "We used our individual expertise to make a product than either could not do alone."

To build excitement and engagement around the guide's release, Gebhard had the ACS team present a series of webinars about infant and toddler messaging. "With the webinars, we got a two-for-one approach," she says.

"We billed the webinars as a preview of the Guide."

"ACS's value is a combination of knowledge and expertise around communication issues and their experience working with organizations that have early childhood as part of their portfolio — both nationally and at the state level. I don't know that there's any other firm out there that has worked with multiple states on early childhood like they have. Plus, Lori and Scarlett are really good at answering questions and giving consultations, and are able to respond with both tips and examples from their work. They provide answers we need."

Download a copy of the [Infant and Toddler Messaging Guide](#) from the ACS website. ▲

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What's New:

ACS Spotlight: Heather Lenz

Heather Lenz may be one of the most organized humans on the planet, which allows her to tackle complex, multi-layered projects with apparent ease as an ACS policy associate. "I always build myself a framework to understand both the 50,000-foot view and the 10-foot view of a project," she explains. "That helps when you're addressing complex statewide or national issues and considering how they are actually addressed on the ground. It helps both me and our ACS clients understand what it is we're really working with. Our big picture goals, strategy, players, steps and status are all mapped out, so we can make sure our decisions are all based on evidence and research and we don't cut corners."

With this analytical eye toward organization and deep understanding, Heather takes on a number of multi-faceted projects for ACS clients, such as facilitating a diverse set of statewide stakeholders for First Things First to help coordinate all services for children 0-3 who have developmental delays, or helping the Greater Columbus Infant Mortality Task Force ensure that women of childbearing age have health insurance and are using it.

"In Arizona, we're working with a lot of stakeholders and services and systems that have not always been coordinated. We're bringing a strategic sense of the tools everyone should use, what referral information and resources should be used for families, and how to coordinate all services," says Heather. "In Franklin County we're helping Franklin County Department of Job and Family Services bring together qualified entities like hospital systems and health centers to build a strategy around increasing identification, enrollment, education, and tracking for women of childbearing age into Medicaid, as part of a broader community strategy to decrease infant mortality."

Heather particularly enjoys the camaraderie of the ACS team. "Everyone has a skill or knowledge base that I can learn from and tap into to make the work I do better. We work extremely well as a team, and that always makes the final product better and pays off for our clients."

Using Promising Practices To Inform Success

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completion. It also, however, reports gains in kindergarten readiness (57 percent of kindergarteners are ready, higher than a 44 percent baseline from 2005). The data collected are helping STRIVE identify subsets of the kindergarten population that are in need of further supports or interventions.

Cincinnati Students Meeting Outcomes		
	BASELINE YEAR	2014
Kindergarten readiness	44 percent in 2006	57 percent
Fourth grade reading	55 percent in 2005	76 percent
Eighth grade math	37 percent in 2005	61 percent
High school graduation	60 percent in 2011*	74 percent
College completion	47 percent in 2005	63 percent

Note: data looks at scores from Cincinnati public schools and the University of Cincinnati, which the StrivePartnership believes is reflective of the urban core.

The STRIVE model is now being adopted in cities around the country—in part because it allows communities to identify the promising practices already at work in their areas and couples them with data collection rather than completely reinventing the wheel.

But what about communities in which promising practices are not already in place? Or communities that are unsure about the promise their current practices might hold?

ACS has helped several clients understand promising practices and evidence-based programs for possible application in their home communities. For the City of Little Rock, Arkansas, ACS created the produced a comprehensive document, *Promising Practices for Children, Youth, and Families: A National Scan of Selected Programs and Organizations*, that explores the practices at work currently for prevention, intervention and treatment.

Promising Practices explores the following program areas:

- Violence prevention and intervention
- Afterschool programs
- Reentry programs
- Employability
- Domestic violence
- Substance abuse
- Teen pregnancy prevention and teen parenting
- Five-year-old children transitioning to kindergarten

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members of legislative leadership from both parties, and bi-partisan champions from around the state. With the help of ACS, PRE4CLE Director Katie Kelly participated in more than 70 meetings with policymakers, testified before the General Assembly and secured [significant press coverage](#) for PRE4CLE.

Overall, 2015 saw the continuation of growth in support for early childhood education in Ohio. Funding for preschool and other early childhood education programs has grown and the emphasis on high quality settings has become a priority within that funding conversation.

“Although we didn’t get all of the ‘wins’ we were working for, we did move our clients and their issues forward,” says Lori McClung, ACS President. “Those behind-the-scenes victories are sometimes hard to see, but they do add up in terms of positioning for victories in the coming legislative sessions. It’s never a matter of ‘if,’ just a matter of ‘when.’” ▲

Using Promising Practices To Inform Success

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ACS clients also have tapped into our research capacity to explore promising practices for specific types of programs, such as youth mentoring or programs for young men and boys of color. Research on programs for young men and boys of color is focused on promising practices emerging from five metropolitan programs. Entitled [10 Key Elements for Young Men and Boys of Color Strategy](#), this overview includes critical threads that are present in each city that helped to shape their strategies for young boys and men of color, and takes a look at the specific practices in each city that are helping to ensure success.

Identifying promising practices—both within and outside of a community—is a valuable exercise that should be a cornerstone of any community effort. Understanding promising practices can help a community better identify partners to include, data to collect and outcomes to pursue. If your organization would like help identifying promising practices related to your work, give [ACS a call](#). ▲

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