

Issues to Watch 2021



No one could have predicted the many challenges that came with 2020. With the year officially behind us, ACS is highlighting three issues for 2021, which not only impact the work ACS does every day but our clients as well. Keeping tabs on these topics can help your organization recognize and harness opportunities and avoid potential pitfalls. If you'd like to learn more about any of these issues, or how your organization might best position itself to address them, we would love to talk.

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K-12



With a change in administration at the Federal level, national K-12 public education policy will see significant changes in 2021 and beyond. President Joe Biden's administrative priorities include modifications to school reopening rules within the context of COVID-19 and increased financial investments, as well as shifts in policy regarding school-based health care, workforce readiness, and educational equity.

Proposed K-12 financial investments will be expansive and most notably include the tripling of Title 1 funding—potentially bringing the fund to nearly \$48 billion up from \$15.9 billion in 2019. These dollars would be targeted toward:

- ▶ Offering competitive wages to teachers.
- ▶ Universal Pre-Kindergarten for all 3- and 4-year-olds.
- ▶ Further investments in public schools in low-income areas.

The following policy shifts have been discussed not only in the [President Biden's campaign platform](#), but more broadly among K-12 stakeholders across the nation:

- ▶ **Increasing mental health services offered in schools.** This sits within the larger context of expanding wraparound services for public schools, particularly those in low-income areas. The Biden administration recognizes how chronically sick children, children who have experienced trauma, and children without readily accessible health care, lose out on in-school time.
- ▶ **Prioritizing diversity among teachers to improve academic achievement for students of color.** This includes the continuation of an Obama-era policy to pursue desegregation tactics.
- ▶ **Investing in career-technical and vocational training and providing opportunities for students to earn credentials before graduation.** President Biden establishes a clear interest in creating pathways out of poverty for low-income students and intends to create partnerships between K-12 schools, community colleges, and employers.

In addition, President Biden has recommended the appointments of cabinet members and leadership team members who have deep roots in the K-12 sector, including Miguel Cardona as Secretary of Education. Cardona is a former elementary school teacher and Commissioner of Education of Connecticut. Cardona has indicated that his priority will be to ensure the U.S. Department of Education fulfills President Biden's commitment to help reopen schools after his first 100 days in office—an accomplishment that will impact a broad swath of federal policy, rules, and regulations, as well as require emergency funding.

Expect Federal K-12 policy to focus on efforts that support eliminating racial inequities.



Estimates indicate that districts will need at least \$30 billion in additional funding to put in place the necessary protocols to reopen safely.

The success of the Biden administration's K-12 proposals will hinge on Congressional budget negotiations. If the past is any indication, discussions about additional investments in the K-12 space will be a source of intense debate as consideration for investments in K-12 during the CARES (Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security) and HEROES (Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions) Act policy discussions were met with significant partisan wrangling. The second stimulus bill saw four times as much money as the first, providing \$54.3 billion for K-12 schools (mostly through Title 1), which may signal increasing bi-partisan support for K-12 education.

Policy analysts speculate that the passage of any of these proposals will require financial contributions from states, which are hurting from the economic impact of the pandemic. It will be important to watch how governors and state legislators support or oppose federal K-12 legislation because their buy-in will be critical.

ACS currently partners with various [K-12 education clients across the country](#) on state policy, federal policy, communication, and earned media. While responding to and recovering from COVID-19 will continue to be the top priority among ACS's education clients, they are also working to take advantage of the opportunity to reimagine and reshape the field. Most notably, there are opportunities to rethink approaches to teaching and learning; education-related policies; and public understanding and perception of school districts, educators, and staff, and the impact they have on the daily lives of children, families, and communities.

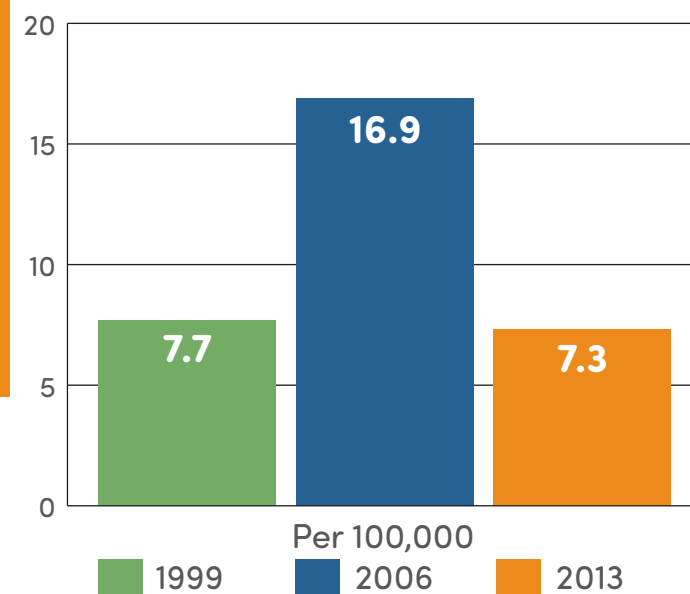
Infant Vitality

When California noticed their state's pregnancy-related mortality rate reaching peaks in 2006 (from 7.7 deaths per 100,000 live births in 1999 to 16.9 per 100,000 in 2006) they started by looking at the causes of death and finding solutions to the most preventable causes. From this initiative, the group

California Maternal Quality Care Collaborative (CMQCC) was born. The collaborative leveraged evidence-based research and best practices to create toolkits that standardized the health care providers' responses to common and preventable complications in pregnancies. The practices and procedures outlined in the toolkits were adopted by 200 California hospitals, and by 2013, the pregnancy-related mortality rates declined by 55 percent.



California Pregnancy-Related Deaths



Since then, California has become a model for responding to pregnancy-related mortality, so much so that the Biden administration intends to adopt a similar approach to increase infant and maternal vitality at the national level. Although CMQCC was not the first to develop recommendations for maternal and infant health, they were the first to develop standardized care guidelines that were widely adopted by hospital systems.

Increasing infant and maternal vitality, especially in the Black community is an important and under resourced need throughout every state.

In the example of California, authentic engagement, decision making, and inclusion among a diverse set of stakeholders was the key to the adoption of effective guidelines that ultimately turned the tide. In order to be successful, engagement must, at a minimum, include mothers, physicians, nurses, and medical professionals, including doulas and midwives, that are part of and work with communities of color.

Grassroots organizations like [Black Mamas Matter Alliance](#) see the inequitable treatment of Black mothers by health providers as one of the driving forces behind pregnancy-related deaths and other unwanted health outcomes. [One survey](#) showed the many ways that interactions with providers impacted an individual's birth experience, including a lack of opportunity to make decisions about their care, feeling pressured to accept interventions (i.e., induction, cesarean birth), and not feeling heard. Black Mamas Matter Alliance outlined recommendations to address the racial disparity in their human rights toolkit:

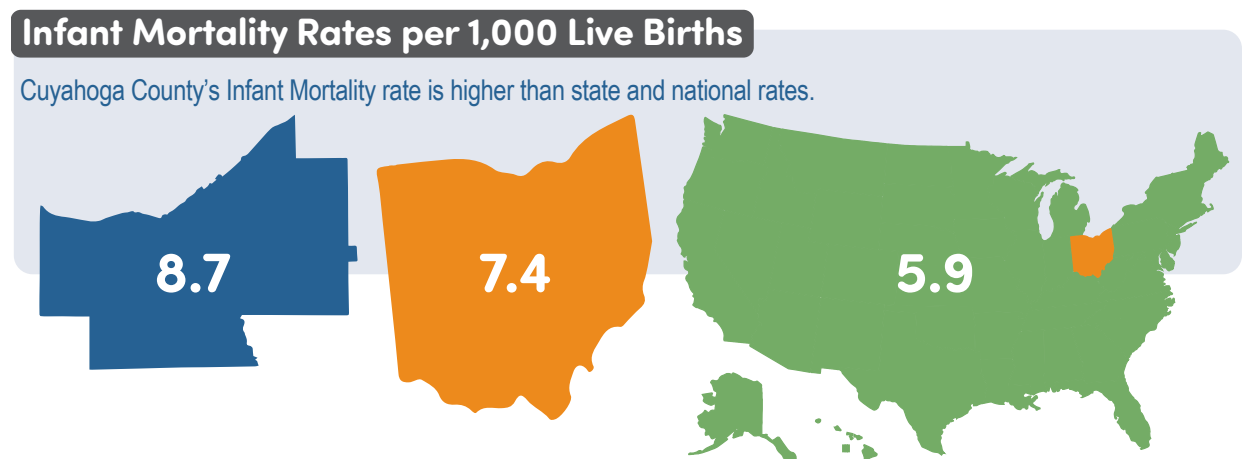
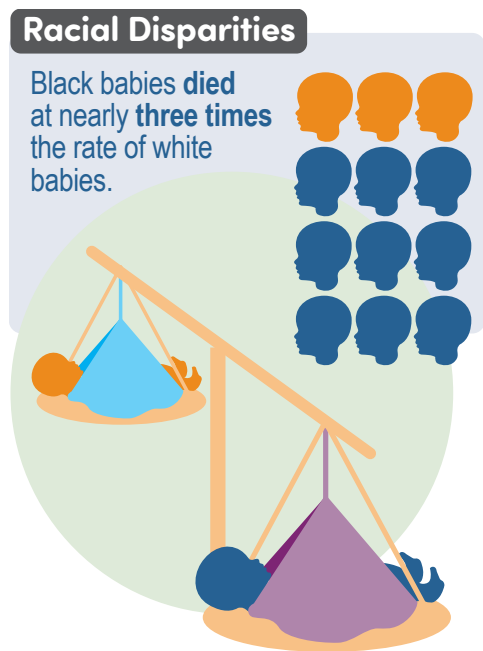
- ▶ Diversifying the health care workforce.
- ▶ Providing implicit bias training to providers.
- ▶ Expanding opportunities for families to utilize community-focused resources like doulas and midwives.
- ▶ Ensuring there are consequences for providers that are not providing high-quality care to Black parents. This requires some form of accountability and procedures in place to measure successful and equitable care.

Despite being home to a hub of health care giants like the Cleveland Clinic, MetroHealth, and University Hospitals, the infant mortality rate in Cuyahoga County, Ohio was three times the national average in 2015. Infant deaths and racial disparities in Cleveland, Ohio (the seat of Cuyahoga County) was even worse—for every single white baby that died before their first birthday, nearly six Black babies died. In 2016, First Year Cleveland (FYC) was founded, with the mission to increase the number of newborn babies that celebrate their first birthday. ACS helped build and deploy FYC’s public policy strategy and continues to support advocacy implementation. Established by parents, leaders in health care, local government, faith-based organizations, and community members, the framework that drives this work is threefold:

1. [Reducing racial disparities](#)
2. [Addressing extreme prematurity](#)
3. [Eliminating sleep related deaths](#)

Although the work of FYC is far from complete, FYC’s approach has seen promising outcomes and last year Cleveland saw the lowest Black infant mortality rate in decades. By 2020, 64 more babies reached their first birthday than in 2015, there was a 23 percent reduction in infant deaths, and a 22 percent decrease in preterm births.

Keep an eye out throughout the year as we continue to advance infant and maternal vitality policy priorities and share information about the community driven best practices that prove success in improving birth outcomes.



Women in the Workforce

The global pandemic has impacted women in the workforce in unique and alarming ways, and a full recovery to pre-pandemic employment is likely to take years. A National Women's Law Center study looked at the economic impact women faced shutdowns occurred throughout the country in the spring of 2020. The study found that:



- ▶ Of the 9.8 million jobs lost since February 2020, women accounted for 55 percent
- ▶ Women are more likely to be frontline essential workers, making up the majority of health care and child care jobs.
- ▶ Black and Hispanic women and women with disabilities saw even higher rates of unemployment than their white peers.

As the academic year began in the fall of 2020, most students throughout the country remained in virtual learning environments. As a result, four times more women (nearly 865,000) than men left the workforce to be caregivers for children, parents, and friends. Pandemic spikes and surges

In December, nearly nine months after the pandemic hit the US, women accounted for 100% of the month's job losses, a total of 156,000 jobs. Meanwhile, men saw a gain of 16,000 jobs that month.

have left many schools with no choice but to remain remote. President Biden plans to safely reopen schools within his first 100 days in office, relieving thousands of caregivers from their nonstop duties. Still, there are legislative actions that could provide flexibility in the long term for use in ordinary as well as extraordinary circumstances. [The FAMILY Act](#), introduced in the U.S. Senate in 2019, would have guaranteed 12 weeks of paid family and sick leave, which goes far beyond the Family and Medical Leave Act under the Obama administration that granted 12 weeks of unpaid leave. The FAMILY Act will likely resurface during the early months of the Biden presidency. Additionally, the Biden administration has outlined an ambitious plan to expand affordable child care. Keep a look out for updates from ACS on this policy in future editions of our “What to Watch” newsletters.

As safety measures are relaxed and the pandemic subsides, policymakers and individual employers must focus on gender equity to support the reentry of women into the workforce.

By mid-2021, the country could see the reopening of schools and childcare facilities, mass vaccination, and economic growth, which may be an opportunity for many women to return to the workforce.

Rachel Thomas, the cofounder and CEO of [Lean In](#), put it well:

“If we’re not thoughtful about the long-term shift to remote work, it may end up creating two classes of employees: those that don’t have a lot of caregiving responsibilities...and those who do have caregiving responsibilities—predominantly women—who may end up paying for working remotely with fewer opportunities, less face time with senior leaders, and fewer chances to advance.”

Since our inception in 2004, ACS has been a woman- and minority-owned, remote firm combining in-person client engagement with the most current and dynamic best practices for working remotely. This combination has helped our firm expand its footprint across the country, build long-term and lasting relationships with clients and partners, and build a multi-million-dollar company that prioritizes the needs of working women, their professional development, and work-life balance.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

Spring 2020 Newsletter



Fall 2020 Newsletter



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