



ACS Today

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Dedicating a Year to Celebrate a Decade: 10 Years of Us Means More for YOU

ACS is halfway through our tenth year, and we're excited to celebrate some big things happening for those we serve and the fields we care about most! Like the new plan for universal pre-K in Cleveland (PRE4CLE) that's on its way to becoming a national model. Or the support we see growing for the needs of public schools throughout Ohio thanks to the vision and commitment of the Ohio 8 even during a tough legislative environment. And of course, across the nation we're celebrating the work of many innovative Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Forward Promise grantees, who are making a stand to create a better, more positive future for our country's young men and boys of color. Being a part of this kind of work—and much more—is the real reason we're so pleased to mark our 10th year of advancing the missions of our clients around the country!

ACS Helps Bring Universal Pre-K to Cleveland

What if every child in your city or county had access to a high-quality, affordable pre-K program? Think of what that could do in terms of boosting educational achievement, graduation rates, and even economic stability! That's exactly what a group of visionary, committed community leaders in Cleveland have launched—with the help of ACS. As a result, the city now has "PRE4CLE," a plan for universal Pre-K that is on track to become a national model.

Cleveland had a mandate to create accessible, high-quality pre-K as part of The Cleveland Plan, which was created under the leadership of Cleveland Mayor Frank Jackson and Cleveland Metropolitan School District CEO Eric Gordon. To meet that

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Making Strides for Men and Boys of Color

As a partner to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), ACS staff have been traversing the country lately, conducting Learning Exchanges with many of RWJF's Community Partnership grantees in its Forward Promise Initiative. Forward Promise is an \$11.5 million initiative that focuses on promoting opportunities for the health and success of middle- and high-school aged boys and young men of color. It calls attention to situations that disproportionately affect these populations—such as certain school discipline policies, community violence or poverty—and programs that create dramatic positive changes for them.

At each Learning Exchange, the ACS team listens carefully to the needs and challenges of organizations that provide positive outcomes for young men and boys of color, and will use that information to create custom strategies to help each grantee strengthen its efforts and successfully implement their local plans. [Continued on page 4](#)

Recent Appearances:

ACS Joins a Gathering of Leaders

Lori McClung, Scarlett Boudier and Rebecca Cohen recently joined more than 350 leaders and more than 25 delegations from across the country at the national Gathering of Leaders conference dedicated to building awareness and support for boys and young men of color. Held in Oakland, CA, June 16–18, the conference explored ways to create and expand a movement toward providing boys and young men of color with greater opportunity. Attendees ranged from large national foundations to small community groups. As part of the discussion, participants shared stories of successful coalitions that are being created in sites across the country.

ACS attended the Gathering as part of its work with Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Forward Promise Initiative and presented a training on Advocacy and Strategy Development skill building, providing tools that helped attendees build advocacy strategies related to coalition building, policy, advocacy and communication in their local communities. In addition, ACS met with RWJF grantees to provide technical assistance and to trouble shoot any current challenges they face in preparing for and advancing their RWJF related priorities. Using that information, ACS then finalized technical assistance plans for each grantee and will now begin delivering that assistance and helping each develop new skills and knowledge to change the lives of the men and boys they serve.

Building A Base for Ohio Public Education

In several states across the country, public school districts and public education advocates are pressing hard against potentially damaging legislative policies. Ohio is no exception, but thanks to the diligence and advocacy of groups like The Ohio 8, the 2014 Ohio legislative session had less of a negative impact on public education than it might have otherwise. ACS directed, coordinated and supported all of The Ohio 8's legislative activities in the Mid-Biennial Budget Review (MBR), as well as helping The Ohio 8 become a go-to resource for both lawmakers and the media.

One important gain from the 2014 session was the inclusion of new high school graduation requirements that clarify the types of exams and scores necessary for a student to graduate. Although not all of The Ohio 8's proposed changes were incorporated in the MBR, the standards are now much more clear for all high schools. Most importantly children and their families now know the expectations and can plan appropriately to ensure successful high school graduation. Beginning in the 2014-15 school year, the Ohio Graduation Test will be replaced by the College and Work-Ready Assessment System, which includes standards for end-of-course exams and content requirements for national standardized assessments of career and college readiness. Unfortunately, the new requirements do not extend to nonpublic school students and homeschooled students, although students in those schools are allowed to participate in the College and Work-Ready Assessment System if they wish.

In addition, The Ohio 8 convinced lawmakers to allow school districts enough time to implement two new laws: one that expands career and technical education to 7th and 8th grades, and one that requires schools to use a research-based, locally-based method of identifying students at risk of dropping out and creating a student success plan for them that includes a career-technical education option. In both cases, The Ohio 8 convinced lawmakers to delay implementation for one year so that school districts would be able to plan and prepare fully without undue disruption or hardship on students and teachers in the upcoming school year. Supporting students to complete high school is a core principle for The Ohio 8.

During an MBR process, sometimes it is about making distasteful policy a bit more palatable. From the perspective of ACS, this approach is about building a foundation for future opportunities where more significant advances can be made. Although the results of this legislative session were mixed in terms of support for public schools, The Ohio 8, with help from ACS, will continue to work hard to help lawmakers and the public understand the effects—and the importance—of the decisions that are made. ▲

Cassie Gaffney, Policy Associate

It's 8:00 a.m. on a Tuesday in May. The Ohio General Assembly is in full swing and ACS Policy Associate Cassie Gaffney is walking up the Capitol steps, coffee in hand, for the first of five scheduled meetings with lawmakers and key staffers. In between, she'll walk the halls, dropping in on offices to check the status of key public education and early childhood related legislative priorities, find out what lawmakers are thinking, determine their priorities, answer questions and allay their concerns. It's a typical day in the life of a registered lobbyist, and one of her favorite days of the year.

"I feel my absolute best when I'm in the capitol," says Cassie. "I love meeting with legislators and figuring out how to present messages in ways that will matter to our clients."

In addition to constantly monitoring the General Assembly, Cassie also provides continual updates to Ohio Statehouse clients and works with media outlets to build stories that will garner grassroots engagement and support. It makes for a busy time. During the 2014 session, ACS through in-person meetings, letters, testimony, and telephone calls is active each and every week...and then some.

"It's tough work," she says with a smile, "but I definitely feel like my work is effective and that we're making a difference!"

ACS Helps Bring Universal Pre-K to Cleveland

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mandate, the City needed a solid plan that incorporated the input and ideas of nearly 100 community leaders and stakeholders. Gordon and his co-leader in the effort, Marcia Egbert, Senior Program Officer at The George Fund Foundation, knew they needed a partner who could get (and keep) the attention of the City's busiest and most savvy thought leaders, and develop a logical, value-added process to create a viable plan for access to quality Pre-K for the city's three- and four-year-olds.

"ACS's involvement was *essential* to our work," says Egbert. "They were able to pull together an active community task force, organize it, convene all the sub-committees and the full group, and keep all of the conversations on task and productive. This required an unusually high degree of organization on their part, but they also made the process fun and engaging for participants, which was a real plus." But Egbert values the passion that ACS brought to the work just as much as the skills. "Because their passion for this subject matter was so strong and so apparent, they were able to get very busy people to concentrate and spend time they would never have thought they could spend otherwise. ACS's passion got their attention and kept them engaged because they saw how important it was."

During the course of three months, the ACS team convened the task force of more than 60 participants, guided 9 subcommittees and more than three dozen meetings to gather input for the PRE4CLE plan. ACS also tackled the considerable task of organizing and distilling all of the ideas, thoughts and questions into a written plan that was both comprehensive and comprehensible.

"PRE4CLE is exactly the kind of work that our team thrives on," says Lori McClung, ACS president and project leader. "It's tied to our deep early childhood knowledge and experience, and fresh and exciting at the same time. We are proud to have been a part of PRE4CLE's creation, and are proud at what this will mean for Cleveland's three- and four-year-olds." ▲

Making Strides for Men and Boys of Color

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Forward Promise Community Partnership grantees provide collaborative interventions such as mentorship, job training, and school programs that are proven to make a difference for young people, their families and communities. Each grantee brings together a number of private and public organizations with a shared goal of improving outcomes for young men of color in their communities. ACS conducted Learning Exchanges with selected collaborative partners to help them better understand and strengthen their governance and infrastructure, enhance their advocacy and strategy development and increase youth participation and civic engagement. For the next several months, ACS will work with each grantee to help them build plans in these areas to move them forward from concept to on the ground action!

Since May, ACS team members have visited a half a dozen Community Partnership or partnership related events, including:

- Chicago—Safe Schools Consortium (SSC)
- Little Rock—Central Arkansas Boys and Men Success Team (BMOST)
- Phoenix—Phoenix Indian Center
- Minneapolis—Northside Achievement Zone
- New Orleans—NOLA for Life
- Oakland—Various participants at A Gathering of Leaders

“Our work is most exciting and compelling when we get to learn deeply about a seemingly intractable problem and then come up with ways to help support key players in moving towards better results,” says ACS President Lori McClung. “Working with RWJF to change the life trajectories of men and boys of color is more than just inspiring—we’re creating something that’s transformational, for Forward Promise grantees and for us as well.” ▲

Be Empowered.

Want to learn how communication, strategy development or advocacy can move your organization forward? ACS is available for training sessions or conference presentations. Contact us for more information. Want more suggestions on improving your communications or strengthening your advocacy work? Contact us at info@advocacyandcommunication.org or call us toll-free at 1-877-372-0166.