



ACS Today

# CONNECTED TO THE ISSUES

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Spring 2013

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## WHAT'S NEW

**ACS President Lori McClung and Vice President Scarlett Boudier were selected from among hundreds of applicants across the country to present**, not one but two, workshops on public engagement and advocacy at the premiere early childhood conference this spring. The 2013 National Smart Start Conference will be held in Greensboro, NC April 29-May 2. McClung and Boudier will present "Advocacy, Communication and Media Relations Strategies for Early Childhood," and "Prepare Your Organization to Build an Early Childhood Public Awareness Effort."

**Cuyahoga County Council selected ACS from among several competitors in 2013** to continue the work started in 2012 to build County Council's strategic communication capacity and know how.

Ohio's proposed Medicaid expansion, and funding for programs within that expansion can be confusing on the best of days. **Planned Parenthood Advocates of Ohio, the statewide advocacy arm of Planned Parenthood, recently looked to ACS to help review, analyze and demystify the state's budget** and gain a clearer picture of where family planning stood within the Medicaid expansion proposal now under consideration within the Ohio General Assembly.

In this issue, you'll notice a focus on K-12 education advocacy. K-12 education is by no means our only focus at ACS, but it's one that is intertwined with the work of many of the clients we serve. The current environment surrounding public education couldn't provide a better example of why advocacy, lobbying, and strategic communication are critical in ensuring *all* voices are represented in our collective decision-making as a society, from early childhood to older adults and every stage in between.

## ACS Helps Ohio 8 Protect Public Education

The Ohio legislature is in full swing, and The Ohio 8 (a coalition of the state's eight urban school district) is playing a key role in the critical conversations about how Ohio's K-12 public education system is funded and policies that affect student achievement.

With help from Advocacy & Communication Solutions, Akron Public Schools Superintendent David James testified on behalf of The Ohio 8 before the members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Subcommittee on March 1. During his testimony, ([Read testimony here...](#)) James urged lawmakers to revise several policies in House Bill 59 (Ohio's operating budget bill) that change the way programs and services to many children are funded, including students designated as Gifted, Special Education, English Language Learners and Economically Disadvantaged. Among other items, House Bill 59 includes a requirement that schools must contract out services to other providers if they fail to show "consistent progress" in serving student subgroups. The proposed law, however, does not define "consistent progress" or what, specifically, would trigger the need to contract out for services. James requested that schools receive three years of funding before the contract out provision is required, and a detailed definition of "consistent progress."

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## Dayton Public Schools Gets Advocacy Edge

Once upon a time, Dayton Public Schools (DPS) had its own, in-house legislative liaison. Years of budget cuts made that position obsolete, but the need to speak up for K-12 education policy grew more and more urgent. As a member of the Ohio 8, DPS had the opportunity to leverage that group's work with ACS in community outreach and legislative policy in order to build support for public education at home and in the statehouse.

"Locally, ACS worked directly with us, clarifying our unique needs within the Ohio 8, and participating in some of our community forums to talk about legislation," says David Romick, president of the Dayton Education Association. "They are very accessible, which is important, since we often are asked to speak in our community with very short notice, and they provide talking points and coaching to make sure we have the latest information and stay on message." [Continued on page 3](#)

## ACS Team Spotlight

### Cassie Gaffney Policy Associate

Cassie works closely with the ACS team to coordinate and execute government relations and policy analysis efforts for ACS clients. During the legislative session, she divides her time between Columbus and Cleveland, where she resides.

She has 9 years of experience in the political realm, having managed congressional campaigns and fundraising efforts across the state of Ohio as well as experience advocating for nonprofit organizations at the federal level.

Cassie completed her Master of Urban Planning, Design, and Development degree at Cleveland State University's Levin College of Urban Affairs. While at Cleveland State, she was awarded the Wallace G. Teare Award in recognition of her advocacy for quality housing for low-income and elderly people. She earned her Bachelor's in Political Science at Muskingum University.

Cassie resides in Cleveland, where she is working alongside Social-Emotional (SOMO) Leaders (SOMO Cleveland) on a citywide initiative that is bringing the science of success, wellbeing, and happiness to professional and social networks throughout the city. She also serves as a member of the Cleveland Coalition, a civic organization working to create and sustain a vibrant, healthy, and connected community.

When she's not working on policy issues, you'll likely find Cassie sailing, playing with her two large dogs, shooting photography, or whipping up something delicious in the kitchen.

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## 7 Tips for Crafting a Compelling Letter to the Editor

Letters to the Editor can be a great way to get your issue in front of thousands of readers. Not only do you get to make your case—you also have the implicit nod from an editorial body that your message is worth consideration.

**How do you help ensure that your letter is published, and is as compelling to readers as possible? Here are 7 tips to keep in mind:**

- 1. Own your opinion.** Newspapers will not publish unsigned letters, so make sure your letter has your name, as well as any other information requested (such as phone number, address or email.) You can find guidelines for Letter to the Editor submissions on most newspaper websites.
- 2. Keep it short.** Most papers have restrictions on length, and under 200 words is usually best for keeping a reader's attention.
- 3. Start strong.** Compelling letters usually pull in the reader with a startling fact, a visceral image or a strong statement.
- 4. Use your own words.** It's fine to use other sources or standard talking points as resources for your letter, but don't simply repeat what others have said or written. Give your letter your own voice.
- 5. Speak your truth.** Readers relate strongly to personal stories, so if you have something to share that illustrates the importance of your issue, add it to your letter.
- 6. Reinforce with facts.** Letters to the Editor are opinions, and yours gains credibility when you clearly state facts (and sources) that support your point.
- 7. Ask for action.** Don't shy away from asking readers to support your cause, and give them a specific way to do so in your letter, such as visiting a website to learn more, attending an event or changing a personal behavior (if appropriate). ▲

## ACS Helps Ohio 8 Protect Public Education

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In addition, House Bill 59 includes a statewide expansion of the "Parent Trigger," which allows parents to sign petitions to a) remove staff, or b) transfer the control of their child's school building to a private operator or the Ohio Department of Education, or a combination of the two. The Ohio 8 urged lawmakers to consider two alternatives: 1) maintain a pilot program currently housed with Ohio 8 member Columbus City Schools in order to test the concept or 2) Integrate the evidenced based model of parent engagement within the process of turning around low performing schools as seen in Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS). Ohio 8 member CPS was recently highlighted in Education Week ([Read the full article here...](#)) for implementing a bold and holistic strategy that turned around 13 of that city's low performing buildings.

Following the March 1 testimony, ACS has been helping the Ohio 8 prepare and submit requests for specific amendments to HB59 to address all of the concerns above and more. This work will continue through the next several weeks, in anticipation of a House vote on the budget by the end of April. Then the budget will be considered in the Ohio Senate; differences between the two chambers will be resolved in a bicameral conference committee and then the two-year budget will be signed by Governor Kasich by June 30th. ▲

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*Advocacy & Communication Solutions, LLC, helps organizations utilize strategies in advocacy, communication and organizing to achieve success. For more information about ACS please contact us at [info@advocacyandcommunication.org](mailto:info@advocacyandcommunication.org).*

## Recent & Upcoming Appearances:

### January–March 2013 Ohio 8 Regional Meetings

Throughout the first quarter of this year, ACS has helped The Ohio 8 coordinate and facilitate community meetings throughout the state to discuss their response to Governor John Kasich(R-OH) education funding proposal. Meetings have included teachers, administrators, parents, and union leaders. Below are a few that attracted many from each region of the state.

- Canton Educators Association, featuring CEA Union President Geneva Parker.
- Educational Service Center of Stark County, featuring Canton City Schools Superintendent Adrian Allison.
- Cincinnati Teacher's Union, featuring CTU President Julie Sellers.
- Dayton Education Association, featuring DEA President David Romick.

### April 1, 2013 Cleveland State University Guest Lecturer

ACS President Lori McClung was a guest lecturer at a class on Managing Public Policy and Advocacy at Cleveland State University on April 1. Lori has been asked to present to this graduate-level class for several years, and is consistently one of the highest ranked presenters.

## Dayton Public Schools Gets Advocacy Edge

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“ACS is highly knowledgeable about K-12 issues, which comes from the first-hand experience they’ve had as (former) school district employees,” says DPS Superintendent Lori Ward. “They add to that a first-hand knowledge of government and a wealth of connections. That makes them unique. There are few organizations out there with that particular combination of expertise and knowledge.”

As part of the Ohio 8, DPS works with ACS to build relationships at the Capitol. “Lori and Scarlett are skilled at negotiating the legislature and the governor’s office,” Romick explains. “Because we all have busy schedules, they get into legislators’ offices to talk to them about the Ohio 8’s mission and background. They also get us into offices at key times and makes sure we have opportunities to provide testimony before the legislature.”

That communication is a two-way street, as ACS also provides DPS with continual updates about legislative developments concerning K-12. “They give us up-to-date intelligence on issues that could be detrimental to public education, like SB 5 in 2012 that would have gutted collective bargaining,” says Romick. “Often, we wouldn’t know what we didn’t know if it weren’t for them.”

But the messages of DPS and other Ohio 8 members don’t stop there, as evidenced by at least one media story each week during the past 8 months reflecting comments/quotes from The Ohio 8 leadership on K-12 education issues. “ACS is really good at collectively making us recognize that we’re powerful as a group,” Ward observes. “Our letters to the editors have been very successful, and we’ve gained a great deal of recognition through state-based education newswires. “I think hiring ACS was the smartest move the Ohio 8 has made. The benefits will be long lasting for the children we serve.” ▲

## 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](mailto:info@advocacyandcommunication.org) or call us toll-free at 1-877-372-0166.

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