

Strategies & Priorities

CTAC provides on-site technical assistance, research and evaluation services, and public policy support to more than 90 community-based organizations, coalitions and public institutions, annually. The groups CTAC serves – diverse in terms of race, language and culture – range from immigrant organizations and multi-racial housing coalitions to school districts and health systems. CTAC's priority is to address the conditions and root causes of poverty.

As a minority-controlled center, CTAC is particularly sensitive to the needs of disenfranchised groups. To respond to the severity of problems affecting low-income communities, CTAC is assisting school districts and state educational systems to function more systematically on behalf of all children; strengthening community-based efforts in neighborhood development and the reconfiguration of human services, and improving access to health care services for people affected by HIV or AIDS. CTAC is addressing the following priorities:

EDUCATION

1. Leadership of School Reform This is a landmark initiative that builds the capacity of urban school districts to implement educational reform on a system-wide basis. Making entire school systems effective requires leadership that can shape, steer and manage reform. This project assists superintendents and urban school systems to develop viable models for reform, manage the political barriers to school improvement and nurture effective working partnerships with educators, parents, youth, health and human service sectors and the corporate community. Since the project's inception, the following districts have participated: Albuquerque, New Mexico; Camden, New Jersey; Cleveland, Ohio; Jackson, Mississippi; Newark, New Jersey; Palm Beach County, Florida; and Salt Lake City, Utah.

2. Comprehensive District Accountability The most critical unmet challenge in education is to determine the effectiveness of a school district, school by school and student by student. To address this need directly, CTAC has developed an accountability model that is customized for districts to determine the success of their individual schools and programs, not just in the aggregate but according to the specific performance of different groups of children. Internally, districts then develop strategies based on these findings, and realign their management systems to improve the quality and delivery of instruction. Externally, the districts can demonstrate to the public what progress is being made and how increasingly better results will be achieved. Such a system of assessment and accountability has never previously been available to school districts. This initiative began with the school districts of Albuquerque, Des Moines, Long Beach, Salt Lake City and Savannah, was further developed in a range of school districts in Northern and Southern California, and is now being used by districts nationwide.

3. New Directions in Systemic Reform CTAC is partnering with select districts to implement educational improvements on a system-wide basis. The lead school system in this national initiative is the Christina School District, the largest district in Delaware with 20 percent of the state's public school students. CTAC conducted a detailed assessment of the district's readiness and capacity.

Based on this assessment, CTAC is assisting the district to change systems to support student achievement, engage the community as true partners in systemic reform and demonstrate results through scientific research. This three-tiered strategy will ensure that the results in student achievement hold up to scrutiny, guide improvement efforts, and shape policy directions.

4. **Teacher Pay for Performance** The Denver Public Schools and the Denver Classroom Teachers Association are developing a total compensation system for teachers. The intent is to link teacher compensation, in part, to student achievement. After a national search, CTAC was selected to be the primary technical assistance provider to this effort. This assistance then focused on (a) designing, developing, and implementing the Pay for Performance pilot, and (b) conducting a comprehensive study of the impact of the pilot on student achievement and systems change.

5. **Parents as Partners** CTAC has launched a project with the Seattle Public Schools to strengthen the collaboration of parents, school staff and community organizations in support of student achievement and school improvements. This initiative focuses on improving results for low-income, non-native English speaking and/or ethnic minority children. Using surveys in eight different languages, CTAC assessed awareness and involvement among a representative sample of parents in the 47,000-student district as well as school and district staff. CTAC also interviewed teachers, school administrators, parents and representatives of local community-based organizations. Based on the results, CTAC is guiding a training the trainers process to prepare a corps of culturally and linguistically diverse school staff, community organization representatives and parent instructors who will train others across the district and community to better understand and assume their roles as partners in school improvement. The project builds capacity to use the accountability provisions and reporting requirements of No Child Left Behind for concrete improvements in student learning and school/community collaboration.

6. **Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team (FCMAT)** CTAC is assessing pupil achievement, making recommendations for improvement, and monitoring progress in the Vallejo Unified School District, a school district under state takeover. CTAC is evaluating the degree of implementation of standards representing key requirements for the education of California Youth. Based on data collected in interviews, student assessments, demographic analysis, artifacts, and classroom observations, CTAC is examining improvement at six-month intervals, reporting findings and conducting on-going monitoring. CTAC has also been engaged by FCMAT to assess and monitor pupil achievement in the Berkeley Unified School District. The authority and funding for these interventions is provided to FCMAT by the California legislature.

7. **National Urban Reform Network** The National Urban Reform Network is a fifteen-city coalition that has focused on national and state public policy. The Network was organized to (a) directly link effective reform initiatives with key local practitioners to shape public policy; (b) focus on the actual practices of school reform and health/human service integration on outcomes that strengthen student academic and social growth; and (c) provide an activist forum through which cities implementing reform can interact. Based on a national competition, participants to date include: Akron, Ohio; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Allentown, Pennsylvania; Cleveland, Ohio; Denver, Colorado; Des Moines, Iowa; Indianapolis, Indiana; Jackson, Mississippi; Long Beach, California; Louisville, Kentucky; Newark, New Jersey; Sacramento, California; Salem-Keizer, Oregon; Salt Lake City, Utah; and Savannah, Georgia.

8. **Impact of the State Takeover of Newark, New Jersey Public Schools** As accountability becomes a dominant movement in education, states are moving to reconstitute schools and intervene in districts they determine to be failing. CTAC's Comprehensive District Accountability system provides states with the tools they need for determining the actual success of schools and districts in helping children learn. CTAC has also developed broad expertise in the management of school districts under receivership. Based on this experience, CTAC conducted a longitudinal study

of the impact of the takeover of the Newark Public Schools by the State of New Jersey. The study indicates areas of improvement, what factors contributed to that improvement, barriers to school and district success, next steps for Newark and New Jersey, and criteria and strategies that states should adopt if they are contemplating school district takeovers.

9. **California Accountability Project** CTAC has implemented a model initiative with five school districts and the county offices of education in Los Angeles and Santa Clara counties. The project fundamentally changes how schools improve educational services to children by focusing on the three primary components of successful school improvement. These components are: (a) comprehensive district accountability that thoroughly assesses and disaggregates student performance, student factors, and contributing school conditions at each individual school; (b) school improvement planning and implementation that engages the entire school community in examining conditions and their causes at each school, builds on strengths and corrects weaknesses, and ties accountability to real improvement in student achievement; and (c) strategic management of the district that allocates resources based on identified school needs and recurring school issues, and that holds professionals accountable for contributing to improved student learning. Through a consortium of school districts, the county offices of education, and CTAC, the project has created a model for accountability-driven reform that reaches beyond current practice both in California and nationally.

10. **Underperforming Schools** CTAC was selected by the State of California to assist schools through the Intermediate Intervention/Underperforming School Program. CTAC assisted schools in two districts that were identified as underperforming. Through this program, CTAC assessed student achievement, current conditions, instructional strategies, and parent involvement. Then, CTAC assisted each school to develop a plan to address issues identified and to increase student achievement in the subsequent year.

11. **Collaborative Decision-Making Model** Working with a committee that represents the Board of Education, Denver Classroom Teachers Association, the administration and the broader Denver community, CTAC conducted a comprehensive study of the effectiveness of Collaborative Decision-Making (CDM), Denver's strategy for site-based management and community involvement. This included conducting an extensive, multi-lingual survey of more than 4,000 respondents, individual and group interviews of several hundred people, and the thorough analysis of school by school student achievement, improvement plans, training materials, and related records. CTAC assessed the relationship between customer satisfaction, perceived effectiveness and actual student performance, and presented a full report to the Denver community.

12. **Research: The Factors That Influence Reform** CTAC is conducting a research project designed to identify those factors that are most critical in influencing the success of district-wide reform initiatives. While there is much speculation about contributing influences, there is little research that shows which factors enable successful districts to overcome the odds. CTAC's research methodologies involve collecting and analyzing extensive longitudinal data – both quantitative and qualitative – from urban school systems, using a range of schools and school districts as an informational base. This project will provide reform-minded district leaders with a clear delineation of the specific factors that must be addressed before and during any systemic attempt to improve student achievement.

HEALTH

13. **National HIV/AIDS Capacity Building Project** CTAC conducted a national initiative to help diverse communities throughout the United States to develop effective, comprehensive strategies to address the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and to shape national policy that is more supportive of integrated care and prevention strategies at the local level. In so doing, the project provided field-tested

examples for improving community health care and social service planning – in the AIDS field, and with learnings applicable to other health care arenas.

14. **AIDS Consumer Advisory Boards Project** CTAC built the capacity of more than thirty AIDS Consumer Advisory Boards throughout Massachusetts. The Consumer Advisory Boards, comprised of individuals with the HIV infection or AIDS virus, have sought to become effective consumer advocates by evaluating services, recommending new programs, changing existing services and participating as board members of social service agencies. CTAC assisted the boards to define the role of consumers in the delivery of services, increased their skills as consumer advocates, establish priorities and strategies, and build productive partnerships with the Department of Public Health, human service agencies and collaborative throughout the state.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

15. **Community Development Leadership Project** This project is tailored to provide community-based organizations with the expertise necessary to conduct development activity from a strengthened position of credibility and professionalism. The project builds proficiency in all phases of the development process, from neighborhood planning, organizing and financial packaging to management and leadership development. The project has assisted more than forty groups working to (a) preserve and rehab 5,864 units of at risk housing, (b) produce 1,117 units of new affordable housing, and (c) develop more than 20 minority-owned businesses.

16. **National Model for Neighborhood-wide Revitalization** CTAC assists community-based organizations, inter-agency collaborative, foundations and statewide government agencies to become effective community partners in comprehensive neighborhood revitalization. CTAC's work is predicated on its nationally acclaimed assistance to the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative – the broadest-based effort to revitalize a neighborhood in the United States – which consists of more than 30 groups and 2,000 residents focused on affordable housing, business development and service coordination. A particular emphasis is to strengthen the capacity of residents to shape, steer and influence the renewal of their neighborhoods. This initiative is also designed to identify and document the substantive changes generated by the revitalization efforts on the lives of families and neighborhoods.

17. **Small Grants Program: Intermediary Support for Organizing Communities** CTAC directs the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation's small grants program in select cities nationally and in the nine state northeastern region. CTAC provides seed grants and on-site technical assistance to emerging neighborhood-based, multi-issue groups.

18. **Regional Assistance Division** Despite the pressing problems confronting low-income groups in the Northeast, very few support resources are available. In response to community requests, CTAC is implementing the Regional Assistance Division. This makes it possible to provide assistance to low-income, underserved groups throughout New England, New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania. The Division particularly assists groups focusing on issues of health and welfare, hunger, the environment and the disabled. Accomplishments range from developing a coalition to advocate for more effective drug programs to organizing a network of human service providers to coordinate a master plan for service delivery in Roxbury. The Division also serves as the catalyst for building statewide and regional coalitions. CTAC assisted such groups as the Minority Elder Coalition, New England Elder Coordinating Council, Medicaid Access Coalition, Vermont Anti-Hunger Coalition, National Coalition of Injured Workers, et al.

19. **Management Information Center** The Management Information Center targets the widening gap and need for new linkages between the non-profit and profit sectors. It is a result of an intensive assessment, which revealed the need to increase the high technology capabilities of non-

profits, strengthen managerial effectiveness and improve corporate/community collaboration. The Management Information Center is a specialized division of CTAC focusing on mid-to-large- size non-profits that are based in low-income neighborhoods. Among the areas addressed are: computerization, personnel and financial management, and strategic assistance to executives.

DISSEMINATION

CTAC shares training and programmatic information with more than 6,000 organizations, policy-making entities, and philanthropic institutions, nationally. The particular focus is on disseminating replicable components of CTAC's training models. Please visit www.ctacusa.com/publications.html for a complete list of our publications.