

Barancik Foundation/Early Learning Coalition of Sarasota County
Early Learning Initiative R&D
Studying Child Care Access in Sarasota County

The Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation, in collaboration with area foundations, the Sarasota County School District, and the Early Learning Coalition of Sarasota County engaged in a scan of community strengths and needs to identify critical issues and improvements necessary in the early learning system in Sarasota. One of the 5 primary issues identified by this community scan included concern regarding the projection that future population growth will exceed the enrollment capacity of the early learning system. According to the Early Learning Initiative R & D roadmap, the decision-making stakeholder group has identified additional needs for information to guide impactful intervention design or selection.

The purpose of this contract is for Dr. Knopf and the policy research team at the Anita Zucker Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Studies (AZC) at the University of Florida to refine their existing tool, the Florida Index of Child Care Access (FLICCA), to adequately account for local policy and practices that are unique to the early learning system in Sarasota County. Specifically, the stakeholders from the Barancick Foundation and the Early Learning Coalition of Sarasota County are interested to learn how the use of the community-specific Quality Rating and Improvement System (Look for the Stars; QRIS) rather than the Classroom Assessment Scoring System as a measure of quality augments the community understanding of access to childcare services. Additionally, the Sarasota stakeholders are interested in learning about the extent to which families have to pay higher prices to access quality childcare in different communities in Sarasota County.

The AZC research team will use available administrative data provided by the Early Learning Coalition of Sarasota County coupled with publicly available socio-demographic data to conduct geospatial and statistical analyses that describe the potential impact that different Look for the Stars performance thresholds, and different provider price and payment policies have on the accessibility of available infrastructure for children and families that receive child care subsidies. These analyses will inform the leadership team as they determine: (1) whether or not quality child care is available to children in different communities, (2) whether or not quality child care is affordable to families in different communities, and (3) what, if any, accommodations should be made to maintain or increase access to child care services throughout Sarasota County.

The research questions guiding this work have been developed collaboratively with the ELC of Sarasota County and the Barancick Foundation to inform local policymaking to support reasonable access to quality child care for vulnerable children and families in Sarasota County. The AZC research team will conduct analyses using geospatial and statistical methods to answer the following questions:

- Do families in Sarasota County have reasonable access to quality childcare when using a more nuanced measure of quality, namely the local Quality Rating and Improvement System, Look for the Stars?
- Do families in Sarasota County have reasonable access to affordable quality childcare when using a more nuanced measure of quality, namely the local Quality Rating and Improvement System, Look for the Stars?

Deliverables

The findings from this project will be shared with the Barancick Foundation and the Early Learning Coalition of Sarasota County through a formal presentation and written report. The results of the analyses will be reported through maps illustrating patterns of access as well as tables and a narrative report to describe the research methods, results, findings, and recommendations. Each map will include multiple layers to illustrate child care accessibility by provider type and size, the number and ages of children impacted, and highlight geographic areas that have inadequate childcare infrastructure.