

## The earlier the investment, the greater the return.

This mantra centers Barancik Foundation's approach to investing in children and families. In March 2020, when the pandemic shut down life as we knew it, we watched childcare centers close, upending the preschool and workforce routine of many families. Closures also displaced classroom teachers who became unemployed or took jobs in other sectors. This rupture broke the back of an already beaten-down early-learning system.

But, in the spirit of a passionate underdog, a dedicated core of early learning professionals remains. Barancik Foundation was inspired by the resilience of the early-learning industry. We also understand childcare centers are the converging point of society's biggest challenges and greatest opportunities. Think about the dividends of investing in childcare:

- Child safety and well-being
- Parent education and empowerment
- Economic prosperity, especially for the teachers who are often working-poor
- The foundation of literacy, learning and all other types of childhood development
- Healthy relationships and patterns of attachment
- A sense of community and support for families

Barancik Foundation researched Sarasota County's system of early learning to better understand how to invest in this resilient and essential industry. Our research process was

three-part: 1. interviews with key stakeholders; 2. a survey of teachers and center directors; and 3. geo-maps showing center quality, capacity and price point by ZIP code. This effort was done in partnership with the Early Learning Coalition, area foundations, and the school district. Here is a summary of what we learned and how we plan to invest in the system of early learning.



### RECRUIT AND RETAIN TALENTED TEACHERS

The greatest influence on student success is the quality of the teacher. Unfortunately, the early-learning industry is experiencing a workforce shortage, with an estimated 25% attrition rate during the pandemic. This shrinkage places significant strain on the remaining teachers.

We have proposed a recruitment campaign to identify new teachers. We also will award retention bonuses to loyal educators, who for too many years have been paid below a living wage.

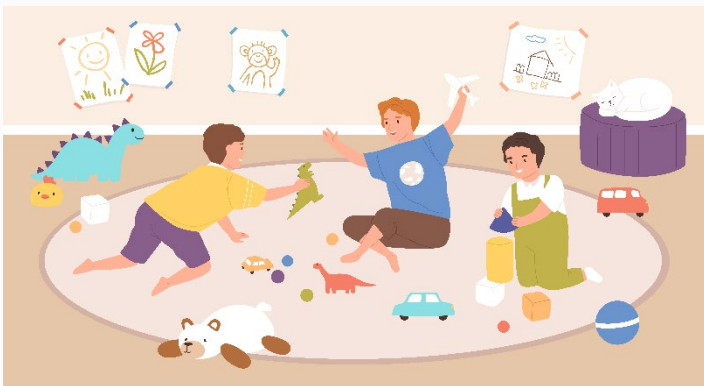
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The top challenges reported by center directors were workforce shortages and turnover.

- There aren't enough teacher candidates for jobs — 89% agree.
- Constant turnover consumes too much time — 58% agree.

Relative to the supports teachers and directors need to do a good job:

- Better pay was very important to 90% of respondents.
- Additional help and staff in the classroom were very important to 77% of respondents and moderately important to 19%.
- Having more staff available to hire was very important to 80% of respondents and moderately important to 16%.
- Better recognition of their value rated as very or moderately important to 94% of respondents.



Retention bonuses are an immediate intervention to retain teachers because the highest-rated idea for ways to improve the early learning system was to provide better pay for teachers (32%). The fourth highest rated idea on ways to improve early learning was to recruit more teachers (17%).

#### INCREASE BEHAVIORAL DEVELOPMENT SUPPORTS

Teachers report an increase in behavioral health needs for students and families. One child's behavior can tilt the entire learning environment. Communicating with parents about their children and reaching shared strategies to support healthy development is an important part of a childcare center's role. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends newborns and young children receive routine screenings to monitor physical, cognitive, emotional and social development. Yet not all children receive these screenings in pediatrics settings, leaving opportunity for childcare centers to be a point of intervention and support.

In most instances, behavioral issues identified at an early age can be remedied before they impede a child's relational or academic performance.

We plan to expand a proven model already in existence in the community, where trained behavioral coaches work alongside teachers, students and families to help work with behavioral challenges. We will draw upon a network of caring professionals who are experts in childhood development and parenting education.

The majority of teachers/directors agreed classroom challenges are related to kids needing more behavioral health support than currently provided.

- Agree, 51%
- Neutral, 29%
- Disagree, 21%

Overwhelmingly, respondents said behavioral health support for early learners is important to their ability to do a good job.

- Very important, 86%
- Moderately important, 14%

The large majority of teachers and directors also agreed the quality of early learning could be negatively impacted by children needing more mental/behavioral health support.

- Agree, 84%
- Neutral, 12%

#### LEADERSHIP AND ADMINISTRATION TRAINING FOR CENTER DIRECTORS

It's often said, "It all comes down to leadership." This holds true in childcare. Our research revealed teacher satisfaction and the quality of the childcare center is heavily dependent upon the Center Director. Directors wear many hats, including teacher, registrar, bookkeeper, compliance officer, HR, facilities manager — the list goes on. This is overwhelming.

Directors expressed strong desire for supportive mentor relationships with other directors. They also said they want to continue to develop their own leadership and business acumen in order to benefit the children and families they serve.

Directors were asked, "What are your future aspirations in your career?"

- Grow in my current role, 52%
- Mentor early learning professionals, 43%
- Teach early learning professionals, 26%

Of concern — and pointing back to the need to recruit more talent into the industry — 43% of directors said their aspiration is to retire. Also of worry, 56% of directors said the business model for their center is not sustainable.

Despite the challenges of the job, 87% are extremely or very satisfied in their job. And, when asked if they would choose the early learning profession again, 80% of directors said "Yes!"

In response to these findings, Barancik Foundation and its partners will establish a director mentorship cohort that offers business training. We will work with center directors to craft the specifics of this program and provide them with resources to meet their leadership development goals.



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