

Change for Childcare Deserts

A public interest communications
campaign for the David C. Anchin Center
for the Advancement of Teaching

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Introduction

The David C. Anchin Center for the Advancement of Teaching is launching a grant-funded project to bring early childhood care and family support services to the South St. Petersburg area. Historically, this neighborhood has been known as a “childcare desert” and lacks a sufficient number of quality childcare programs for young learners. The team aims to create a new early childcare center that offers safe and affordable wraparound services for families in the local community. To accomplish this, the team needs to secure financial and legislative support for the project.

Campaign Goal

The project team aims to inform state-level policymakers about childcare deserts and the negative impacts they have on underserved communities, specifically for people of color (POC). The team also wants policymakers to understand how wraparound services for families can help address other social determinants of health in these communities.

If Florida policymakers are informed about this issue and presented with a strong argument for why South St. Petersburg should have an early childcare center that provides wraparound services for neighborhood families, then they will see the center’s value in solving a wide variety of community needs and vote in support of funding the project. Ultimately, this support will allow the center to be built and serve as a valuable resource for the community.

Target Audience

Anecdotal evidence suggests that there is already support at the local and federal levels for this initiative. The team’s more urgent need is to gain state-level support through legislation and funding. Therefore, the primary audience for this campaign is policymakers at the state level in Florida. More specifically, the campaign will target state legislators in Florida who serve local congressional districts and are key decision-makers about funding for community development and early childhood projects. Reaching representatives who sit on the following Florida Senate committees is a potential opportunity.

- Committee on Children, Family, and Elder Affairs (State of Florida, 2021)
- Committee of Education (State of Florida, 2021)
- Committee on Health Policy (State of Florida, 2021)
- Appropriations Subcommittee on Education (State of Florida, 2021)
- Appropriations Subcommittee on Health and Human Services (State of Florida, 2021)

Audience Beliefs and Motivations

If messaging is effective and resonates with the target audience, they will believe that the proposed center will address a wide variety of community needs, such as education, community health, environmental, and social services. Additionally, the campaign will shift the worldviews of state representatives and help them understand the importance of cross-cultural competence and

anti-racist approaches in the development of community support services for underrepresented communities.

Opportunities and Resources

One opportunity available for this campaign is to leverage existing contacts and relationships within Florida politics to reach the target audience. Through the use of these “trusted messengers,” state representatives will be more trusting of the information presented through campaign materials and more likely to pay attention (Wright, Neimand, & Steinman, Finding the Right Messenger for Your Message, 2021). Additionally, influential messengers can serve as a resource to assist with research about the priorities, motivations, and preferred communications channels of the target audience.

Additional resources available from the Anchin Center for this project include previously collected research, expertise from faculty members serving on the project team, and graphic design resources acquired by the USF College of Education. Additional surveys and focus groups with community members will take place later this summer.

Research Overview

To assist in the development of campaign strategy and messaging, primary and secondary research provides insight into state legislators’ research processes and the considerations they make when voting on a legislative issue. Previous research studies were also reviewed to gain insight into the use of narratives for communicating about public health issues, the indicators of success for early child and education bills proposed in state legislation, and which groups both state legislators and low-income communities were likely to trust during public interest communications campaigns. Insights gained from this review are included below.

Legislators’ Constituents can Influence and Persuade Elected Officials on Policy Issues.

Previous research conducted on state legislators’ approaches to public health issues and how they prioritize them during the legislative session found that a primary consideration in whether to prioritize an issue is the “needs and opinions” of constituents (Dodson, et al., State Legislators’ Work on Public Health-Related Issues: What Influences Priorities?, 2013). This indicates that an effective approach for persuading state legislators to support funding the proposed early childcare center would be to leverage the voices and stories from families living within the legislator’s congressional districts. Constituents can be effective messengers for communicating about the need for community resources and financially supporting them, and state legislators will be more likely to value this information if it is coming directly from those who elected them to office.

Leverage Messengers who Legislators Look to for Policy-Related Data and Information.

In previous research exploring where state legislators obtain information, study participants said they seldomly referenced knowledge from university researchers or other institutions of higher learning when researching legislative issues (Dodson, Geary, &

Brownson, 2015). This indicates that the research team working to implement the proposed early childcare center may not be the most appropriate messengers for disseminating their information directly to the target audience unless called upon by that audience directly to share their knowledge of the topic. Instead, utilizing partnerships and collaborations with other influential messengers and information sources may be more effective. These messengers can include members of groups such as lobbyists, advocacy groups, and governmental organizations.

Use effective messengers within the state legislature to spread campaign messaging.

Prior research studies have found that representatives who sponsored successful bills in early care and education have repeated success in getting these types of bills passed in the future (Park & Hassairi, 2021). This indicates that further research should be done on state legislators' voting history related to early childhood and education bills, to determine who may be influential and successful messengers to work with on this campaign. Representatives who have sponsored successful legislation should be approached early to lend their support to the project and to help persuade others to do the same.

Use both individual stories and statistical information to communicate about the issue's impact on local communities.

The use of compelling narratives from parents in South St. Petersburg alongside evidence-based research about childcare deserts can help humanize the issue while demonstrating the greater impact that living within one can have on local communities.

In a previous study on the use of narratives to influence support for health policies, researchers found that the combined use of these tactics elicited a response from state legislators when used to gain support for policies that would combat obesity and food deserts (Niederdeppe & Roh, How Narrative Focus and a Statistical Map Shape Health Policy Support Among State Legislators, 2016). This storytelling approach can be more effective in persuading elected officials to support proposed legislation than if the two approaches of individual narratives and statistical information are used separately.

Shape messaging and proposed legislation to fit the views of legislators voting on it.

Previous research has found that legislation focused on both early child and education finances and programs was more successful in being passed than other types of legislation (Park & Hassairi, 2021). This indicates that a potential strategy for this campaign is to emphasize these aspects of the proposed early childcare center in its messaging, such as the center's proposed funding model, the programs it will provide for young children, and the support services it can offer to families in the surrounding community. Highlighting the importance and benefits of "wraparound services" can help convey to state legislators that the proposed center will address multiple community issues in South St. Petersburg and should receive state funding and support.

Make state legislators' access to information easy and readily available early on.

Previous research findings indicate that state legislators are more likely to reference and utilize research about an issue if the research was easily accessible and discovered early in the decision-making process (Bogenschneider & Bogenschneider, Empirical Evidence From State Legislators: How, When, and Who Uses Research, 2020). This indicates that any messaging or communications developed in support of this campaign should be made available to state legislators as soon as possible, perhaps before the next legislative session begins. Further research should be conducted on the channels and mediums that state legislators use for their communications activities, such as email, social media, local and statewide news publications, and television networks.

Tell stories about how living in a childcare desert impacts the local community.

Legislators are less likely to reference research on issues that they have an emotional connection to. Previous research studies have found that issues with a "morality, ideology, or passion" element to them are more challenging to share research about because legislators are less likely to seek out and review it before casting their vote (Bogenschneider & Bogenschneider, 2020).

This indicates that telling stories about parents and families who face challenges finding early childcare and living in childcare deserts may be a more effective approach for reaching these individuals than through a traditional research findings presentation or publication. To demonstrate the long-term effects of childcare deserts and how they shape local communities, key research findings, and statistical data can be interwoven into the stories to reinforce core messaging and to ensure the target audience receives the facts they need to make an informed decision about the proposed early childcare center.

Identify influencers within the local community to engage in outreach and storytelling.

Previous research indicates that gaining local support for the proposed early childcare center will be critical in the pursuit of gaining state-level funding for the initiative (Dodson, et al., 2013). The campaign team should conduct further research to learn more about who the influential messengers are within the South St. Petersburg community so these individuals can be engaged to help share the benefits the center will offer to families in the area.

Previous research shows that low-income communities are less likely to trust elected officials, but more likely to trust community groups, religious congregations, and schools (Park, Mosley, & Grogan, 2018). Therefore, a partnership with these organizations may be an effective approach for engaging with the local community, conducting further research about community members' experiences seeking quality early childcare services, and leveraging their personal stories to win the support of state legislators and achieve the campaign's goals.

Campaign Strategy

To effectively reach the target audience, evidence-based strategies should be used when developing messaging, themes, and tactics that will be implemented to achieve the campaign's goals and objectives. This memo provides an overview of the campaign's strategic objectives, a focused audience of state legislators to target, suggested messaging themes and appeals for reaching this audience, and potential tactics for distributing messaging and calls to action.

Two primary strategies have been identified to help this campaign achieve its goal:

1. Lean on trusted messengers to influence the target audience and persuade them to answer the campaign's calls to action.
2. Engage with local constituents to generate demand for the proposed center and persuade state legislators to vote in support of funding the initiative.

Campaign Objectives

The primary goal for this campaign is to gain financial support from state legislators in Florida to build and open a quality early childcare center that also offers wraparound community services in the South St. Petersburg community. The campaign team aims to inform state-level policymakers about the negative impacts of childcare deserts and how the proposed center can help solve this issue while also providing additional services to families in the center's immediate area. This work of informing and educating policymakers about the issue and its impact on Florida residents will in turn garner their support for funding the initiative.

The objectives identified for this campaign are a combination of motivational—such as persuading state legislators to vote in support of funding the proposed early childcare center and inspiring the general public to share campaign messaging about the negative impacts of childcare deserts within their networks—and statutory—such as shaping policy and legislation that would provide funding in support of the proposed project.

More specifically, objectives identified for this campaign include growing state policymakers' knowledge of and support for projects that address childcare deserts in Florida, growing the public's knowledge of the issue, and convincing local constituents to contact their state representatives to express their support for the campaign. By accomplishing these objectives, the campaign will thus acquire the needed support within the Florida House and Senate to obtain funding for the proposed early childcare center.

Target Audience and Outreach Strategies

Three primary groups of state legislators should be targeted through this campaign: state legislators serving the South St. Petersburg community, state legislators who have previously sponsored successful bills in early childcare and education, and state legislators who sit on relevant subcommittees in the Florida House of Representatives.

State legislators who Represent the South St. Petersburg

Community

State legislators who serve constituents in the South St. Petersburg community should receive personalized campaign communications due to the immediate and direct impact of the proposed legislation on their congressional districts. Legislators who fit this criterion include Sen. Dennis Ervin Rouson (D) and state Rep. Michele Raynor-Goolsby (D). It should be noted that Rep. Raynor-Goolsby is the spouse of Bianca Goolsby, an education activist who previously taught in the Hillsborough County school district and has gained notoriety in recent years for her advocacy work related to classroom issues and Title I schools in Florida (Bianca Goolsby, 2021). This indicates that Goolsby may be an influential messenger who can effectively reach some members of the target audience.

State Legislators who Previously Sponsored Successful Early Childcare Legislation

Previous research suggests that state legislators who were successful in passing early childcare and education-focused legislation are more likely to have repeated success in future endeavors (Park & Hassairi, 2021). Therefore, it would be advantageous for the campaign team to target Florida state legislators who have sponsored recent successful legislation in these areas. Legislators who meet this criterion include Sen. Gayle Harrell (R), Rep. Erin Grall (R), Sen. Ana Maria Rodriguez (R), and Rep. Vance Arthur Aloupis, Jr. (R) (Florida Education Association, 2021). It is noteworthy that Rep. Aloupis, Jr. is also chair of the Leadership for Early Learning and Elementary Education Subcommittee in the Florida House of Representatives, making him a strong candidate for targeted campaign outreach (Florida House of Representatives, 2021).

State Legislators Sitting on Relevant Subcommittees

The campaign team should conduct targeted outreach to state legislators in the Florida House of Representatives who sit on either the Early Learning and Elementary Education Subcommittee (Florida House of Representatives, 2021) or the Children, Families & Seniors Subcommittee (Florida House of Representatives, 2021). Legislators who meet this criterion include:

- Rep. Thad Altman (R)
- Rep. Vance Arthur Aloupis, Jr. (R)
- Rep. Robin Bartleman (D)
- Rep. David Borrero (R)
- Rep. Robert Charles "Chuck" Brannan III (R)
- Rep. Joseph A. "Joe" Casello (D)
- Rep. Linda Chaney (R)
- Rep. Tracie Davis (D)
- Rep. Tom Fabricio (R)
- Rep. Elizabeth Anne Fetterhoff (R)
- Rep. Jason Fischer (R)
- Rep. Brett Thomas Hage (R)
- Rep. Fred Hawkins (R)
- Rep. Christine Hunschofsky (D)

- Rep. Sam H. Killebrew (R)
- Rep. Traci Koster (R)
- Rep. Chip LaMarca (R)
- Rep. Andrew Learned (D)
- Rep. Travaris L. “Tray” McCurdy (D)
- Rep. Fiona McFarland (R)
- Rep. James Vernon Mooney, Jr. (R)
- Rep. Angela “Angie” Nixon (D)
- Rep. Spencer Roach (R)
- Rep. Felicia Simone Robinson (D)
- Rep. Anthony Rodriguez (R)
- Rep. Rick Roth (R)
- Rep. Tyler I. Sirois (R)
- Rep. Dana Trabulsy (R)
- Rep. Keith L. Truenow (R)
- Rep. Patricia H. Williams (D)
- Rep. Susan L. Valdes (D)
- Rep. Marie Paule Woodson (D)

Research indicates that state legislators should be reached early in the legislative process to ensure research about the issue is considered during the decision-making stage (Bogenschneider & Bogenschneider, *Empirical Evidence From State Legislators: How, When, and Who Uses Research*, 2020). Additionally, campaign messaging and materials should be easily accessible without legislators having to spend a lot of time searching for them. Examples of tactics that can be used to achieve this are discussed later in this section, and in greater detail within the tactics section of this report.

Messaging and Framing Suggestions

It is recommended that the campaign team develop messaging and themes that include both logical and emotional appeals to reach state legislators who possess a wide range of political beliefs. Research suggests that state legislators who feel an emotional or moral connection, or a “passion for” an issue are less likely to consult further research about it and will vote based on their previously held beliefs (Bogenschneider & Bogenschneider, 2020).

However, those who do not have a strong emotional or moral connection and do seek out research will consult trusted sources for this information, such as government entities, advocacy organizations, lobbyists, and industry groups. This provides an opportunity for the campaign team to present logical messaging appeals that articulate why the proposed project should be funded.

Emotional messaging appeals

Research suggests that state legislators consider their constituents’ opinions and beliefs to be the top factor they consider when voting on health issues (Dodson, et al., 2013) and this insight may also apply to issues relating to early childcare and education. Messaging that creates an emotional response from the target audience by leveraging the perspectives and experiences of their constituents—specifically, those living in and impacted by childcare

deserts, or “the affected,” (Wright, Neimand, & Steinman, 2021)—can reach state legislators who have an interest in and personal connection with early childcare and education-related projects.

An example of an emotional messaging appeal that may be effective is that living in a childcare desert creates undue stress and hardship. This message can be supported through anecdotes and stories from families living in the South St. Petersburg community who have struggled to find affordable and quality childcare in the local area. Messaging developed to create an emotional appeal should come from a first-person point of view to ensure authenticity and build a sense of empathy within the target audience.

Logical Messaging Appeals

Research suggests that bills with a focus on early care and education policy were most successful in being passed if they prioritized either finance or programs and services within the context of the legislation (Park & Hassairi, 2021). This takeaway provides insight into how the campaign team may be able to craft a logical messaging appeal, which will be attractive for audiences who are looking for a practical justification to support the proposed project (Bobbitt & Sullivan, 2014).

An example of a logical messaging appeal is that the proposed early childcare center can solve a variety of pressing social issues in addition to its primary purpose of providing affordable and quality childcare in the local community. This can be supported through the use of testimony from experts in childcare deserts and early childhood education who can also attest to the long-term consequences that a lack of quality childcare can have in underserved communities.

Logical messaging appeals can also explore the numerous wrap-around services that the proposed childcare center will provide and demonstrate its intrinsic value to the community in areas such as education, public health, food security, and economic development— issues that may be of equal or greater importance to policymakers who are more swayed by logic than emotion.

Further Considerations for Campaign Messaging

Research suggests that the combined use of individual narratives and statistical data about the broader impacts of social issues can be used to persuade state legislators to support policies introduced to combat the issue (Niederdeppe & Roh, 2016). This insight should be considered by the campaign team because it can help guide a potential campaign tactic—telling stories about people who struggle to find quality childcare in the South St. Petersburg area and using quantitative data to argue that it is a broad issue that impacts the overall community.

Consideration should also be given to the development of messaging that can be used by influential messengers, advocates, and partners to share with the target audience in online communications, written communicators, and face-to-face interactions such as subcommittee meetings and public hearings. A potential tactic for accomplishing this could include the creation of a resource toolkit for advocates who wish to individually support the campaign.

Strategic Opportunities and Proposed Tactics

As previously stated, two primary strategies have been identified to help the campaign achieve its goal: lean on trusted messengers to influence the target audience and engage with local constituents to build demand for the proposed center, and persuade state legislators to take action on funding the project. Further detail about what each of these strategies may look like in practice is provided below.

Lean on Trusted Messengers to Persuade the Target Audience

Previous research suggests that partnerships and collaborations with those who have developed positive relationships with the target audience can be an effective approach for distributing campaign messaging to the right people (Dodson, Geary, & Brownson, 2015). Additionally, leveraging trusted messengers can help create “mental shortcuts” that are used when evaluating whether a message is credible and should be listened to (Wright, Neimand, & Steinman, 2021).

After developing partnerships with influential messengers—such as lobbyists, advocacy organizations, and government agencies—the campaign team should create a series of communications materials that discuss the campaign’s proposed project and inform the target audience about the South St. Petersburg community, childcare deserts, and their effects on underserved communities, and how the proposed early childcare center can tackle multiple pressing needs within the community.

Engage With Local Constituents to Generate Demand for the Proposed Center

By using a combination of mass communications channels, such as local news outlets and social media websites, the campaign team should work to increase constituents’ awareness of the negative effects of childcare deserts and how South St. Petersburg’s status as such is impacting the lives of those living in the community. A proposed call to action for this strategy is to urge constituents in the local community to contact their state representatives and demonstrate their support for funding the proposed childcare center. This can be accomplished through a variety of activities such as calling campaigns, social media campaigns, and letter writing.

Proposed Campaign Tactics

To effectively reach the target audience, there is a variety of tactics that the campaign team can leverage. Suggested tactics, such as video storytelling, producing compelling visual communications, writing op-eds for publication in local news media, conducting social media outreach, and hosting letter writing and calling campaigns for motivated community members, are discussed in greater detail in the tactics section of this report.

Calls to Action

Although a campaign’s calls-to-action can often be an afterthought for social change organizations (Wright, Neimand, & Steinman, 2021), the development of specific, achievable, and easily completable calls to action is critical to a public interest

communications campaign’s success. Four calls to action have been identified to support the goals and objectives of this campaign.

Ask State Legislators to Vote to Fund the Proposed Early Childcare Center

To help achieve the campaign’s goal, the primary call to action for this campaign will be aimed at the target audience of state legislators, who will be asked to vote in support of funding the proposed early childcare center. To support state legislators in completing this call to action, the campaign’s tactics should include developing a suite of resources that provide information, such as statistical data, individual narratives, and testimonials from members of the South St. Petersburg community, and illustrate why legislators should complete the desired behavior.

Collateral developed for this purpose should include messaging that explains what the requested funding will accomplish and the long-term impact the proposed early childcare center will have on the South St. Petersburg community. This approach will help the call to action “feel achievable,” and because the target audience will believe their support makes a positive difference, they will be more likely to take part (Neimand, Wright, Steinman, & Christiano, 2020).

Ask Constituents to Write to Their Representatives and Urge Them to Take Action

Because state legislators have indicated in previous research that they consider the opinions of their constituents before deciding on proposed legislation (Dodson, et al., 2013), one of the campaign’s calls to action should include an ask of Florida voters that urges them to write letters to state representatives to show their support for the proposed childcare center.

Individuals who are writing these letters should address them to the state legislators who represent their district and to representatives who the campaign team identifies as likely to vote “yes” in support of funding the proposed center. This call to action should also be targeted at members of the South St. Petersburg community, who would directly benefit from the campaign’s success.

To support constituents in completing this call to action, the campaign’s tactics should include letter templates and sample messaging that constituents can use when writing to policymakers. Additional collateral that can be developed includes a database to help constituents find their representatives and send their correspondence to the correct email or physical address to ensure it is received by the target audience.

Ask Supportive State Legislators to Start a Conversation about Childcare Deserts

Previous research indicates that legislators who were previously successful in passing early childhood and education-focused bills are more likely to be successful in sponsoring related legislation in the future (Park & Hassairi, 2021). A call to action that supports the efforts of this campaign is to ask state legislators who have sponsored early childhood and education legislation in the past to

start a conversation with other policymakers about childcare deserts and how underserved families in Florida are negatively impacted by them. To make it easier for legislators to complete this call to action, the campaign's tactics should include a suite of resources that offer talking points and research they can use to engage in this work.

Encourage Social Sharing of the Campaign's Messaging and Materials

To increase the reach and visibility of the campaign's messaging, a final call to action proposed is to encourage both state legislators who are in support of the proposed childcare center and their constituents to share stories on social media about their experiences seeking quality childcare in their communities. This activity can help show target audiences that there is a widespread need for addressing childcare deserts in communities like South St. Petersburg, that funding these initiatives should be prioritized, and that a large number of people are participating in online conversations about this issue.

This storytelling approach should be conducted on Facebook because of its widespread use for connecting personal networks, Twitter, because of its use by politicians and the media, and Instagram, because of its emphasis on visual storytelling through photos and videos. To make completing this call to action easier for target audiences, the campaign's tactics should include a branded campaign hashtag and a social media toolkit that users can reference when crafting their posts and sharing their stories.

Tactics and Implementation Timeline

Research shows that it is not enough for public interest communicators to raise awareness about an issue and hope that their audience will take action. Instead, practitioners have learned it's not just a lack of knowledge that keeps people from answering a campaign's call to action—audiences need to be provided with compelling messaging and clear calls to action that appeal to their beliefs and worldviews (Christiano & Neimand, 2017). Furthermore, communicators need to provide simple, easy-to-follow actions that audiences can take in support of a cause or issue.

Because this campaign's primary goal is not to only increase the public's awareness about childcare deserts and the impact they have on local communities, this section provides an overview of core messaging and tactics that can be used by the project team to connect with impacted communities, to empower individuals who wish to take action in support of the campaign, and to reach state legislators and win their support for the proposed early childcare center. Recommendations for campaign collateral and visual samples are also included in this section.

Core Theme of Campaign

The core theme message for this campaign centers around the project team's primary goal of getting state legislator support for funding the proposed early childcare center. This core theme message is, "with the right resources and support, we can change South St. Petersburg's status as a childcare desert and provide quality and

affordable childcare for families in the community."

This message supports the Anchin Center's work on this campaign by getting to the heart of the campaign's primary objective. The campaign's marketing collateral and other tactics will have a consistent visual identity with a visual theming related to deserts, to remind audiences that childcare deserts are created through a lack of options available to families in the area, resulting in a scarce and barren situation that can be dangerous to the community's long-term growth and development.

Supporting Messaging

With a visual identity centered around desert climates and the emptiness that can occur in this type of environment, supporting messaging for this campaign will follow a similar theme to elicit an emotional response of concern and wanting to help those affected so target audiences are persuaded to take action to solve the issue.

Three supporting messages developed for the campaign are:

- 1. Show our children we care through quality childcare.** Tactics utilizing this messaging will provide information about what local families need to overcome their journey through a childcare desert, and the different attributes of a childcare center that make it a quality facility for children to attend.
- 2. South St. Petersburg children deserve access to quality, affordable childcare.** Tactics utilizing this messaging will focus on residents of the South St. Petersburg community who have struggled with finding quality childcare and who are working hard to provide for their children. This supporting messaging is an opportunity for the campaign team to tell the stories of those who are directly affected by this issue.
- 3. Florida families shouldn't have to "sweat" about quality childcare.** Tactics using this messaging will demonstrate the challenges faced by those who are living in childcare deserts and what the long-term impacts are for children living in these communities. This messaging will show audiences why a sense of urgency is needed for action on this issue.

Campaign Tactics

The following tactics are recommended to help the project team achieve its strategic goals:

Create an advocacy toolkit for supporters to use when sharing with others about the campaign. This toolkit will be hosted on a campaign website and shared by both the project team and supporters of the initiative. The toolkit's primary purpose will be to provide a suite of resources that can be used to reach state legislators targeted by the campaign and share the dangers of childcare deserts and the campaign's calls to action. The toolkit should include informational materials that legislators can reference while completing their decision-making process about proposed legislation, and letter-

writing templates for campaign advocates and supporters to use when contacting their representatives.

Components of an effective letter-writing template include:

- **The recipient's contact information.** The campaign team should create a searchable list or database of state legislator's contact information so that participants can easily find the information they need to send their letters.
- **A subject line that specifies the topic of the letter.** A consistent subject line across all letters can create repetition that catches the attention of state legislators and is an opportunity to immediately present the campaign's call to action. An example of a subject line to include in the template is "Vote 'Yes' on funding quality childcare in South St. Petersburg."
- **An introduction paragraph.** Provide a space for the author of the letter to introduce themselves and their connection to this topic. The author of the letter should specify if they are a resident of the legislator's congressional district, if applicable.
- **A paragraph about the author's support for the campaign.** This section should include talking points that the letter writer can use to support their argument for why the proposed childcare center should be funded. This is also an opportunity to include evidence-based research or other logical appeals that will resonate with the recipient.

- **Include space for personal stories.** The template should provide space for the writer to share about their own experiences seeking childcare in their communities, or about why they feel strongly enough about this issue to take action. This leaves room in the letter for an emotional appeal that the recipient may relate to and remember later on.
- **A clear call to action.** Like all other campaign materials, the template should include a clear call to action in the conclusion that urges state legislators to support funding the proposed childcare center. This section of the letter can also provide a link to the campaign toolkit for those who wish to learn more about this issue.

Design infographics and branded social media imagery to share core messaging and logic appeals online. Marketing collateral should be created for digital communications about the campaign, specifically for social media channels and email communications to state legislators. The collateral should communicate the campaign's core messaging and highlight relevant research and facts about childcare deserts and how South St. Petersburg's status as one is impacting local children and families. These resources can also be included as part of the advocacy toolkit for supporters to share with their networks.

Samples of these materials can be reviewed in Figures 1 and 2.



Figure 1: Sample social media graphics. Information sourced from ChildCare Aware of America (Dobbins, Tercha, McCready, & Liu, 2016).

It Takes a Village to Change Childcare Deserts

Why we need quality childcare in South St. Petersburg, Florida

The research is clear—children who don't have access to quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) programs are more likely to experience developmental risks and physical, cognitive, and social delays.

Experts have identified critical characteristics of ECEC programs, including:



Well-trained, professional educators



Developmentally appropriate & responsive curriculum



Quality learning environments



Strong collaboration with families & the community

Source: Karoly & Auger, 2016; NAEYC, 2021



Florida currently ranks among the lowest five states in ECEC quality indicators and 43rd in the public spending for these programs.

Source: NIEER, 2017

With the right resources and support, we can change South St. Petersburg's status as a childcare desert and provide quality and affordable childcare for families in the community.

How can you help?

Contact your state representatives and urge them to vote yes on funding a quality childcare center in South St. Petersburg. Together, we can end the drought causing this childcare desert.

Visit usf.edu/anchin to download a free digital advocacy toolkit and learn more.



Figure 2: A sample one-page information sheet.

Create print and video stories about local families who struggle to find quality childcare for their children. These stories will help humanize the issue of childcare deserts and give audiences a more in-depth understanding of the insufficient solutions families have had to turn to as a result. Examples of these insufficient solutions that can be explored through storytelling include relying on family members for childcare, in-home daycares, families who commute to another community to enroll their child in quality childcare, or families opting to not use any of these options and keep their child at home.

In addition to presenting easily understood examples of how the issue is impacting local families, these stories can also create an emotional appeal through the use of relatable characters and experiences. Video stories should be brief and approximately 1-2 minutes each but can later be combined to create a longer-form documentary about South St. Petersburg's status as a childcare desert and what that means for its residents. The longer-form video can be used at community outreach events and in email communications to state legislators about the campaign.

Host an event for community members to discuss the lack of quality childcare in the area and what they can do to take action. This event could be hosted as part of a series the Anchin Center is developing, titled Anchin Community Talks (ACT), and would be open to the public, with elected officials and trusted community members receiving personalized invitations to attend from the campaign team. Its format would include a community conversation about childcare deserts and the impact this issue has on the South St. Petersburg area. The project team can share video stories collected as part of the campaign's marketing collateral and conclude the event with a call to action urging attendees to write letters to state representatives about the proposed childcare center and why they should support funding it. This event should be hosted in a venue trusted by members of the community, such as a community center, religious organization, or local school (Park, Mosley, & Grogan, 2018).

Timeline and Implementation

Below is a recommended timeline for implementation of the campaign's tactics to ensure that all activities are completed promptly and before the state of Florida's legislative session in Spring 2022. Florida's legislative session deadline for submitting requests for drafts of general bills and joint resolutions is December 3, 2021, (The Florida Senate, 2021), and it is recommended that all distributions of marketing collateral, hosting of campaign events, and outreach to targeted state legislators is completed by this date.

August 2021: Develop branded materials for the campaign toolkit and digital communications graphics. Select families to feature in stories about the project and write those stories. Different assets that would be helpful to create through these efforts include infographics, brief video stories (1-2 minutes each), and short written stories (500-800 words each).

September 2021: Produce a longer-form video about South St. Petersburg's status as a childcare desert and the long-term

impacts it has on those living in the community. The campaign team should also begin promotions for the proposed Anchin Community Talks event and share print stories and testimonials on social media to provide a preview of what event attendees will learn about, discuss, and take action on at the event.

October 2021: Host the Anchin Community Talks Event and premiere the longer-form video of residents' stories and experiences finding quality and affordable childcare. The timing of this event coincides with Head Start Awareness Month (National Day Calendar, 2021), programs that promote school readiness for young children from low-income families (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2021). During this month, the campaign should also launch its letter-writing campaign to engage supporters and advocates in contacting their representatives.

November 2021: Continue social media outreach about the campaign and continue promotions of letter writing resources to those who didn't attend the in-person event but wish to lend their support. The project team should also share the campaign's toolkit directly with state legislators, ask for their feedback about these resources, and share on social media about small victories to keep supporters motivated. Examples of small victories to highlight include updates on how many letters have been written in support of the campaign and thank you messages to state legislators who have publicly endorsed funding the proposed childcare center.

Evaluative Measures

A variety of strategies and tactics have been proposed as part of this campaign guide. To ensure each activity undertaken is meaningful and productive, it is important to develop a measurement and evaluation plan that can be referenced before, during, and after the campaign is complete. This section includes four indicators that have been identified to help the campaign team measure success in reaching its strategic goal. Each indicator includes suggestions for how to track relevant data and recommended timeframes for collecting this information.

Indicator 1: The frequency in which primary and secondary audiences are accessing the campaign's toolkit and sharing the information with their networks and state representatives.

The campaign team can track the number of downloads of the campaign toolkit to measure interest in reading and using the materials. It is recommended that the campaign team use unique links, such as UTM tracking and URL shortening services (Zote, 2019), for each platform that the campaign materials are distributed. This practice allows the team to measure which sources of traffic—for example, email marketing, social media posts, or print marketing—are most successful in reaching target audiences and getting them to engage with campaign collateral.

This indicator is important because it provides insight into whether the campaign's tactics and distribution plan are effective in reaching target audiences and persuading them to complete

the campaign's call to action. In addition, this indicator can help streamline the campaign team's focus and which platforms to prioritize in future outreach activities.

For example, if most toolkit downloads are coming from email marketing and only a marginal amount is coming from social media, the campaign team may consider placing a stronger emphasis on building its email distribution list or instead choose to rethink its approach to social media outreach. The path chosen by the campaign team can be determined by reviewing whether current progress is a result of various factors such as timing, political climate, execution, or messaging (Spitfire Strategies, 2021).

This indicator should be part of the campaign team's ongoing evaluation process because it will provide an opportunity to make modifications to the campaign in real-time and improve its importance while there is still time to create change (Bobbitt & Sullivan, *Developing the Public Relations Campaign: A Team-Based Approach*, 2014). Therefore, the recommended timeframe for collecting data is from September 2021 until early 2022.

Indicator 2: The total number of people living in the South St. Petersburg community who contact their representatives about the campaign—and the growth of this number over time.

This indicator will be measured through multiple sources, such as campaign event attendance, and a review of how many people have sent letters to their state legislators about the campaign's focus. To help track this information, participants will sign-up for campaign events in advance through an online RSVP system, and they will also be encouraged to inform the campaign team when they have sent a letter using the toolkit's templates. The practice of sharing advocacy milestones through email marketing and social media will help illustrate to supporters that this behavior is popular (Marketing for Change, 2021) and that it contributes to the campaign's success.

This indicator is important because it directly correlates to the campaign's call to action of asking secondary audiences to contact their state legislators and ask them to support the proposed childcare center. If the campaign is performing as the research team intended, the number of supporters will continue to grow as the campaign's reach expands.

Similar to the first indicator, this activity will continue throughout the campaign and should be part of the research team's ongoing evaluation activities. The recommended timeframe for collecting data on this indicator is from September 2021 until early 2022.

Indicator 3: An analysis of media coverage and online audience sentiment about the campaign and its focus on South St. Petersburg's status as a childcare desert.

This indicator will be measured by tracking media coverage through tools such as Google Alerts and media monitoring software. Additionally, online audience conversations and sentiment will be tracked and analyzed through social media and social media monitoring tools, such as Hootsuite or Sprout Social. Online audience sentiment will be analyzed to review if public comments and

reactions have a positive, neutral, or negative tone in response to the campaign's core messaging and calls to action.

This indicator is important because traditional media and social media can help shape the public's discussion of current events and social issues, and both traditional and online media sources can influence the campaign's reach and exposure to target audiences. However, the practice of "counting clips" on its own is not a true indicator of success and can be misleading (Bobbitt & Sullivan, *Developing the Public Relations Campaign: A Team-Based Approach*, 2014). For this reason, the campaign team should analyze any received media coverage by reviewing its tone and sentiment, and not focus solely on how many published articles or online mentions are achieved.

More specifically, looking at whether media coverage or online discussions are framing the campaign in a positive, neutral, or negative light can provide insight into how target audiences are responding to core messaging. Measurement of online sentiment also the campaign team to review audience feedback within an environment where users are provided with a level of "anonymity" (YouGov, 2016) that can allow for more authentic and honest feedback than other research activities. It is recommended that this data is collected throughout the campaign, but a more thorough analysis of media coverage and online sentiment can take place after the campaign is complete in early 2022.

Indicator 4: The total number of state legislators who are supportive of funding the proposed childcare center, and if support has grown since pre-campaign research was conducted.

A practice that is often referred to as a "pretest and posttest" study (Bobbitt & Sullivan, 2014), this before-and-after comparison will allow the campaign team to measure changes in attitudes and behaviors held by state legislators who were exposed to the campaign's messaging and materials before the 2022 legislative season.

This indicator will be measured through a review of voting records for early child and education-related legislation during the 2022 session, including records from when the funding request for the proposed childcare center is presented. In addition, a post-campaign survey will be distributed to state legislators in follow-up to the pre-campaign survey that is discussed in the research methods section of this guide.

This indicator is important because measuring whether the attitudes and beliefs of state legislators have changed since the start of the campaign can help indicate whether the messaging and tactics employed by the research team were successful in persuading the target audience to complete the desired behavior change. Also, if the campaign is unsuccessful in acquiring state funding for the proposed childcare center, this post-campaign research will be valuable in determining which messages did not resonate with the target audience and will help the campaign team refine its approach in future activities.

Of the four indicators of success outlined in this plan, this final

indicator will require the longest period to be measured because it will not be complete until after the campaign has concluded. It is recommended that the research team continuously review state legislators' public comments and online media activity to determine whether they are expressing any opinions about the campaign's focus, but a greater understanding of the target audience's attitudes and beliefs may not be possible until after the post-campaign study is distributed and the results are received and analyzed. The post-campaign survey should be distributed after state legislators have made a formal decision about funding the proposed childcare center during the legislative session in early 2022.

Key Findings and Conclusions

The primary finding of the project's secondary research is that it will be challenging to reach members of the target audience who have a previously established view about early childhood and education funding in the state of Florida and who are not actively seeking to support funding new initiatives in this area. However, the campaign's development and findings indicate that there is opportunity for the research team to reach state legislators who are either already supportive of legislation in this area or who are part of the "moveable middle," and can be persuaded to lend their support when the messaging for proposed legislation aligns with their political views.

Another finding that will be beneficial to the project team is that state legislators have indicated in previous research studies that they are likely to listen to their perspectives of their constituents before deciding on proposed legislation (Dodson, Geary, & Brownson, 2015). This insight can become an opportunity for the research team to leverage motivated members of the campaign's secondary audience, who can advocate for the proposed early childcare center and serve as influential messengers who are more likely to persuade the target audience than the research team would be themselves. This approach can serve as an opportunity to educate secondary audiences on the benefits of quality childcare and support them in their pursuits of securing it for their children.

After secondary research was conducted for this campaign, an additional research study was published that explored the use of narrative messages as a means for support of early childcare policies. This study's primary findings were that narratives can have "unintended effects" on a campaign's efforts, and if not utilize strategically, can negatively impact efforts to rally support from state legislators (Winett, Neiderdeppe, Xu, Gollust, & Fowler, 2021). This study found that there are risks associated with narrative storytelling, specifically in how the core message of the narrative is framed and whether it persuades the audience to believe that early childcare is a "professionalized industry" and not meant to serve solely as "child storage" or a place where children are sent to when their parents must work (Winett, Neiderdeppe, Xu, Gollust, & Fowler, 2021).

Therefore, in addition to the proposed messaging and tactics for this campaign, it is also recommended that the campaign's narratives emphasize that early childcare centers such as the one that will be

constructed in South St. Petersburg will be quality, affordable, and accessible for families who would not otherwise be able to access the benefits of them.

Limitations

The primary limitation of this campaign was a timing constraint related to the expedited timeline created through a summer term campaign development. More specifically, there wasn't time in the campaign development cycle (12 weeks) to conduct primary research with target and secondary audiences. Further research, such as target surveys and focus groups to these groups to refine messaging, may be helpful for the research team to engage in before campaign implementation.

Ethical Implications

There were no ethical implications or conflicts of interest identified by the research team at the time that this document was written, reviewed, and published. The author of this report is employed by the host institution of the David C. Anchin Center for the Advancement of Teaching, the University of South Florida. However, no competing interests were reported by the author upon production of this report.

Project Reflections

I believe this campaign will help make an impact on the South St. Petersburg community, but it can also extend to local communities as a model for other groups seeking support for creating quality childcare options in their communities. The research and insights found through the campaign's secondary research can guide public interest communicators who are seeking to reach a seldom studied target audience—state legislators, and particularly those in the state of Florida.

Throughout this project, I have developed a newfound enjoyment for the research process that a team must complete before embarking on a public interest communications campaign. Before starting my capstone project, the part of the campaign that I didn't feel confident about was the research stage and putting together an annotated bibliography of my findings. Throughout the research and discovery part of developing this campaign, I learned that many people, including state legislators, already have a preconceived belief or view about early childhood and education-related issues. This can change the approach taken by public interest communicators when conducting campaigns to create change on issues within this focus area.

I believe the insights about state legislators' considerations when voting on proposed legislation will be helpful to the research team. Additionally, the approach of communicating to both a primary audience of state legislators and a secondary audience of constituents affected by the issue will have a stronger impact than a campaign focused solely on reaching state legislators. Secondary research shows that the opinions of constituents are important to state legislators, so winning this audience over as advocates and supporters of

the campaign will help ensure the its success in reaching target audiences.

I was surprised to learn that state legislators seldom reference academic research when deciding how to vote on proposed legislation (Dodson, Geary, & Brownson, 2015). As someone who works at a public research university, it is a part of my workplace's culture to review academic research and consult expert opinions before taking action on larger issues. It was interesting to learn that the research team for this campaign, which is primarily comprised of faculty at a university, are unlikely to influence the target audience by communicating with them directly. This knowledge led me to do further research into the effects of influential messengers and develop a strategy that partially focuses on identifying influencers who can serve as a voice for communicating the campaign's core messaging and calls to action.

Later this summer, towards the conclusion of the semester, new research related to the focus of this project was published that found state legislators may be more resistant to early childcare campaign messaging because of previously held beliefs and viewpoints (Winett, Neiderdeppe, Xu, Gollust, & Fowler, 2021). Furthermore, this new research indicated that campaigns focused on this issue can backfire and make target audiences less likely to complete a campaign's call to action of support the proposed childcare center. The study's findings reaffirmed my suggested approach of developing partnerships with influential messengers and those trusted in the local community. The findings can also be useful for teams conducting similar public interest communications campaigns, and serves as a reminder that these teams should conduct solid messaging research before developing campaign tactics and outreach strategies.

Another important insight from this newly published research that is relevant to this project is the idea that by collaborating with members of the secondary audience (i.e., constituents of state legislators), their influence on state legislators can provide "permission" for elected officials to support the campaign's goals (Winett, Neiderdeppe, Xu, Gollust, & Fowler, 2021). For situations in which state legislators have already formed an opinion about early childhood and education issues, a strong outcry from constituents can help persuade them to reconsider their position and endorse funding a project like the proposed childcare center.

If I were to do anything differently while developing this campaign, it would be to engage with local communities early and frequently throughout the research and messaging development stages. Another activity that would be beneficial for this project is additional research about who is considered an influencer or trusted messenger within the South St. Petersburg community. This knowledge can help the research team connect with these individuals early in the campaign, and hearing their perspectives on how to engage with secondary audiences can further improve the team's outreach strategies.

This campaign adds to the body of literature about early childcare and education because it provides researchers and practitioners with

insight into how to take peer-reviewed research and apply it to a public interest communications campaign that can positively benefit local communities. While the insights gained from academic literature on this issue can be useful in better understanding state legislators and their attitudes, beliefs, and motivations, this project provides contributes to this by offering actionable strategies and tactics that can help create meaningful change for communities identified as "childcare deserts" or that lack quality and affordable childcare options for local families.

A major takeaway from this project is that sometimes primary audiences may be hard to reach, especially when the campaign's team is not considered a trustworthy or influential messenger. Therefore, when working on social issues where the beliefs and attitudes of the target audience are strongly solidified, a strategy that may be effective is the use of effective messengers or those who are likely to influence the target audience. Therefore, in a campaign such as this one, several of the proposed tactics may focus on engaging a secondary audience that will, in turn, communicate directly with the target audience to spread messaging and calls to action and ultimately help the campaign team achieve its goals.

Recommendations

The primary recommendation for the research team's next steps is to conduct intentional primary research with two groups: families with young children who live in the South St. Petersburg community and state legislators from across the state of Florida. Further research targeting these two groups directly can provide further insight into their beliefs, attitudes, and motivations and can help further refine campaign messaging and outreach strategies. This research can also help the research team identify narratives from local families to share throughout the campaign.

The David C. Anchin Center for the Advancement of Teaching would benefit from continuing to engage in advocacy work and policy research to help further its brand recognition as a state-wide resource for the education community and to strengthen its credibility while working with stakeholders and community partners to tackle community issues such as those explored throughout this campaign. For example, the Anchin Center has identified in debrief conversations that it plan to continue hosting "Anchin Community Talks" as an ongoing series that will encourage attendees to engage in action, collaborations, and transformative efforts to advance the field of education. This initiative would serve the Anchin Center well in achieving its goals for both this campaign and future endeavors within the public interest communications field.

Conclusion

To address the widespread issue of "childcare deserts," the David C. Anchin Center for the Advancement of Teaching wishes to embark on the development of early childhood care and family support services center in the South St. Petersburg area, a community identified as lacking quality and affordable childcare options for local communities.

To assist the research team with acquiring the necessary funding and political support for the project, a public interest communications campaign was developed with a target audience of Florida state legislators and a secondary audience of constituents living in the South St. Petersburg family, specifically, families with young children who are directly and immediately impacted by this issue.

The key takeaways from this campaign are as follows:

- The core message developed for this campaign is: “With the right resources and support, we can change South St. Petersburg’s status as a childcare desert and provide quality and affordable childcare for families in the community.”
- Two main strategies were identified to assist with the implementation of the campaign:
 1. Lean on trusted messengers.
 2. Use the community to generate local demand.
- The following tactics are recommended for the distribution of campaign messaging:
 1. Build a digital advocacy toolkit that supporters can use to support the campaign.
 2. Create social media content, such as stories and branded imagery, that can be shared to increase campaign reach.
 3. Tell stories about how the community is affected, and why a lack of quality and affordable childcare is negatively impacting local families.
 4. Host a community event to create conversation and rally support for the campaign’s calls to action.

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Appendix

Research Instrument

To successfully reach and win support from the campaign's target audience, additional research is needed to learn about state legislators' attitudes, beliefs, and opinions about top issues within the state of Florida and whether they believe funding early childcare programs like the proposed center should be a top priority in the next legislative session.

A survey was developed as the primary research instrument to gather more information about this topic. The survey format was chosen for this research because quantitative and precise results are needed regarding which topics and social issues legislators believe are the greatest priorities for their congressional district, and which factors and sources they consider when voting on proposed legislation.

The survey will allow the campaign team to learn about the attitudes, beliefs, and opinions of a greater number of state legislators than other research formats would offer. Additionally, questions included in the survey about the respondent's beliefs regarding childcare options in their congressional districts and whether they feel their community is a "childcare desert" can provide insight into legislators' knowledge and understanding of the issue, and which messaging about the issue would capture their attention.

The below questionnaire includes a variety of questions related to the campaign's goals and would be distributed to the offices of state-level legislators across Florida. Following the research instrument outline are two audience personas developed to capture the lifestyle and beliefs of the target audience.

Sample Survey

1. Which political party are you registered with or belong to?
 - Democratic Party (DEM)
 - Republican Party (REP)
 - Constitution Party (CPF)
 - Ecology Party (ECO)
 - Green Party (GRE)
 - Independent Party (IND)
 - Libertarian Party (LPF)
 - Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL)
 - Reform Party of Florida (REF)
 - Unity Party (UPF)
 - Other:
2. Are you a parent or legal guardian to a child who is of early childhood age (infant through age 8)?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Decline to Answer
3. What do you feel are the greatest priorities for your congressional district at this time? (Select the top three choices)

- COVID-19 Relief
 - Crime
 - Drug Addiction
 - Economic Development
 - Education
 - Energy and Environment
 - Employment and Jobs
 - Healthcare
 - Housing
 - Infrastructure
 - Police Reform
 - Poverty
 - Public Safety
 - Systemic Racism
 - Technology and Data
 - Other:
4. Please rank the priorities you just selected based on their level of importance.
- PRIORITY 1:
 - PRIORITY 2:
 - PRIORITY 3:
5. Have you spoken with or received feedback from your constituents about early learning experiences and the availability of quality childcare within their community?
- Yes
 - No
 - Don't Know/Unsure
6. [SKIP LOGIC, ANSWERED YES TO Q5] What barriers or challenges have your constituents shared regarding childcare and early learning experiences available within their community?
[OPEN RESPONSE QUESTION]
7. What factor(s) do you consider when reviewing and preparing to vote on proposed legislation about early childhood education and childcare services? (Select all that apply)
- Constituents' opinions/beliefs about the issue
 - Financial impacts of the proposed legislation
 - Legal viability of the proposed legislation (i.e., whether it follows the constitution or other laws)
 - Media attention or coverage about the issue
 - Opinions/beliefs of other state legislators/colleagues
 - Personal beliefs about the issue
 - Scientific research or data about the issue
 - Other:
8. Which sources of information do you consider or review when researching proposed legislation? (Select all that apply)
- Advocacy Groups
 - Colleagues/Other State Legislators

- Constituent Feedback Surveys
- Government Sources
- Lobbyists
- Traditional News/Media Outlets
- Personal Network (family, friends, etc.)
- Private Industry
- Social Media
- Universities/Institutions of Higher Learning
- Other:

9. How likely is it that you would support legislation that provides state funding for an early childcare center offering wrap-around services to the local community?
- Very unlikely
 - Unlikely
 - Don't know/unsure
 - Likely
 - Very likely

Read the following statements and identify how strongly you agree or disagree with them.

10. I believe that early childcare funding should be a top issue in the next legislative session.
Disagree : 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : 6 : 7 : Agree
11. I believe that my congressional district is negatively impacted by the lack of quality and affordable early childcare options.
Disagree : 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : 6 : 7 : Agree
12. I believe that my constituents would support the development of a quality early childcare center in their community.
Disagree : 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : 6 : 7 : Agree

Annotated Bibliography

Bogensneider, K., & Bogenschneider, B. N. (2020). Empirical Evidence From State Legislators: How, When, and Who Uses Research. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 413-424

The study used qualitative interviews with state legislators to evaluate the factors that determine whether research was used by this group in policymaking decisions. The theory utilized for the development of this study was community dissonance theory. The main findings from the study are that legislators who were in the minority party and had developed expertise on an issue were more likely to consult research in their decision-making process. The authors also found that “issues driven by morality, ideology, or passion,” resulted in legislators being less likely to use research when evaluating policy decisions. When a legislator was unfamiliar with an issue or they did not already have an established position on the topic, they were more likely to consult research about it. The authors also found that research use was more likely when it was introduced early in the process and made readily available to policymakers.

The study's findings can be applied to this research topic because

they provide insight into what state legislators would like to see regarding communication from researchers about policy and social issues. Simple tactics such as making research easily accessible and available to legislators during legislative sessions can have an impact on whether they consult this information. Additionally, these findings support the idea that doing in-depth research about state legislators, their position on early childcare and education funding, and any areas of expertise they have might be useful information when evaluating who may be a supportive ally and opinion leader who can help persuade others to support the campaign's goals.

Dodson, E. A., Challfour, S., Stamatakis, K. A., Haire-Joshu, D., McBride, T., & Brownson, R. C. (2013). State Legislators' Work on Public Health-Related Issues: What Influences Priorities? *Journal of Public Health Management and Practice*, 25-9.

The primary goal of this study was to provide researchers with a better idea of what factors influence the decision-making of state legislators regarding public health issues. Participants in the study included legislators from Mississippi, Missouri, New Jersey, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina. In total, 75 legislators completed the research team's surveys. The study's findings were that the top-rated factor when determining what health issues to prioritize was constituents' needs and their opinions. The second greatest factor was scientific evidence that shows potential solutions or policies would be effective.

This source is useful to the research topic because it demonstrates that there is value in creating messaging and communications that reach state legislators' constituents directly to help gain policymakers' support on the issue. In the context of this research topic, the studies conducted by Hirshberg, Huang, & Fuller and by Park can be reviewed in conjunction with this study to gain insight into how to reach community members and constituents in a way that would win their support for the issue and ultimately influence the target audience of state legislators.

Dodson, E. A., Geary, N. A., & Brownson, R. C. (2015). State legislators' sources and use of information: bridging the gap between research and policy. *Health Education Research*, 840-848.

This study aims to identify what types of information legislators find helpful when making a policy-related decision so that researchers can better communicate this information to them. The study's methodology includes key-informant interviews with 25 U.S. state legislators. The main findings were that state legislators preferred to review statistical data when making health-related policy decisions, and when asked about their most trusted sources, they mentioned government sources, advocacy groups, lobbyists, and industry. Universities and institutions of higher learning were seldomly referenced by the study's participants. This study's findings correlate with those from Niederdeppe and Roe because it shows that statistical data is beneficial to developing a persuasive argument, but it is not the only factor that should be considered when developing campaign

messaging.

While this study's topical focus is centered on health issues, the main idea of which sources of information state legislators look to for trusted information can be applied to this research study through the use of opinion leaders and influencers to communicate the campaign's core messages to the target audience. Based on the results of this study, there is reason to believe that instead of the research team communicating directly with state legislators, it would be more effective for the team to use a trusted advocate as a medium, such as an advocacy group partner, lobbyist, or an ally who also works in state-level government that has an established relationship and reputation with the target audience.

Hill, Z., Gennetian, L. A., & Mendez, J. (2019). A descriptive profile of state Child Care and Development Fund policies in states with high populations of low-income Hispanic children. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 111-123.

This study explores Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) policies and how despite changes in policy attempting to make CCDF subsidies more accessible to low-income families, Hispanic families' use of them is still low. The authors offer an expanded conceptual framework that can be used to address racial and ethnic disparities and other factors that prevent Hispanic families from utilizing these services. The study analyzed policies from 13 states, including Florida. These states were chosen because combined, they represent more than 80 percent of low-income Hispanic children living in the United States. Methods used for this study include analysis of policy databases, websites, and manuals using quantitative coding techniques.

This article is relevant to the research topic because it explores some of the different environmental factors that influence whether families from low-income backgrounds engage with resources provided through the CCDF, including quality childcare and education. Through this study, the authors identified potential barriers to entry such as eligibility and documentation requirements, a lack of materials being offered in Spanish, and the prioritization of families from this population in receiving available funding. Campaign messaging that informs about these common barriers to entry and how the proposed childcare center will address and solve these challenges may help illustrate to the target audience about the greater community need for this project.

Hirshberg, D., Huang, D. S.-C., & Fuller, B. (2005). Which low-income parents select child-care? Family demand and neighborhood organizations. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 1119 – 1148.

The authors of this study aimed to explain how parents from diverse, low-income backgrounds make decisions about childcare options for their children. Through interviews conducted with more than 1,900 employed parents in California who were previously on welfare, the authors' main findings were that "married parents, Latinos, Vietnamese, and non-English speakers" from low-income backgrounds were less likely to choose formal programs for their

children and instead selected home-based providers. Factors that contributed to a parent's decision to use a formal provider included their education level, if they were working longer hours, and if they earned more income that made it possible for them to afford the formal option. The age and the total number of children a parent was selecting childcare for were also considering factors.

These findings are related to the research topic because they help identify situational factors that determine whether a low-income family will enroll their child in a formal childcare program like the one proposed by this project. The study's findings compare to the article published by Hill, Gennetian, and Mendez because the results can be used to identify potential barriers that prevent families living in South St. Petersburg from using the proposed childcare center once it is available to the community. Campaign messaging that informs about these challenges and how the project team plans to solve them in the community can help illustrate the importance of this project receiving funding support from the state legislature, and therefore gain support from the target audience.

Niederdeppe, J., & Roh, S. (2016). How Narrative Focus and a Statistical Map Shape Health Policy Support Among State Legislators. *Health Communication, 242-255.*

The methodology used for this study was a survey emailed to state legislators who were randomly assigned to read different types of stories about food deserts and how policy can help address them. The main idea of this article is that the combined use of narratives and statistical information was effective in producing different responses from state legislators when they were presented with information about obesity and food deserts. When used separately, the individual narratives (i.e., stories) and statistical maps (i.e., numbers and data) were less effective at persuading state legislators to support policies that would combat the issue. While this study focuses primarily on the issue of obesity and food deserts, the authors' findings have the potential to be applied to other social issues as well, including early childhood education and reducing childcare deserts.

The study's findings highlight the importance of combining individual narratives with quantitative data about larger communities to demonstrate the broader impact of an issue while also eliciting an emotional response in the audience. This insight can help inform the campaign strategy by identifying a potential tactic for messaging—tell stories about individuals who are negatively impacted by the childcare desert in South St. Petersburg and use data visualization to show state legislators how the issue impacts the broader community and not just an isolated number of families.

Park, S. (., Mosley, J. E., & Grogan, C. M. (2018). Do Residents of Low-Income Communities Trust Organizations to Speak on Their Behalf? Differences by Organizational Type. *Urban Affairs Review, 137– 164.*

The main argument of this study is that low-income populations living in urban communities often face a higher level of political inequality and poor representation in politics, and because of this,

these populations have become less trusting of elected officials to represent their interests. The study's methodology was a survey conducted with residents on the South Side of Chicago about which types of organizations they trust to speak on their behalf. The survey's findings were that community organizations, religious congregations, and schools were viewed as more trustworthy than politicians or individuals holding public office. Overall, nonelected officials were viewed as more understanding and likely to promote the community's interests compared to elected officials.

These findings are relevant to the research topic because while influential messengers selected to reach state legislators may include other government officials or lobbyists, these groups may be ineffective when communicating with local families and community members who would directly benefit from the proposed early childcare center. This information is useful because of the takeaways from the study published by Dodson et. al, which found that constituents' needs and opinions were a top factor that influenced legislators' priorities on health issues. If state legislators are influenced by the needs and opinions of their constituents, the campaign team may need to reach local communities to garner support for the development of the early childcare center, and to do so will require the use of different messengers than those used for reaching the target audience directly.

Park, S. O., & Hassairi, N. (2021). What predicts legislative success of early care and education policies?: Applications of machine learning and Natural Language Processing in a cross-state early childhood policy analysis. *PLoS One, 1-36.*

Using machine learning techniques, this study examined thousands of early care and education (ECE) bills from across all 50 states to identify key factors associated with legislative success in this area. The bills analyzed were from the 2015–2018 period. The main findings were that bills prioritizing ECE finance and ECE programs or services were more likely to be passed into law. Additionally, the effectiveness of the bill's primary sponsor also has an impact on whether the bill was passed. Policymakers who had a greater number of previously passed bills were more likely to see continued success.

The study's findings can be applied to this research topic because it provides additional insight into which topics or themes state legislators consider to be higher priorities regarding early childcare and early childhood education. Additionally, the authors' findings that a bill's primary sponsor and their prior success in getting legislation passed is a factor in whether they will get future bills approved can be an effective strategy for this campaign. For example, by conducting further research about state legislators who have sponsored past early care and education bills and which legislators saw success from these efforts, the campaign team can narrow its focus on key legislators who should be targeted early in the campaign's implementation so that they can serve as messengers who go on to influence others. This study compares to the article published by Dodson, Geary, and Brownson because it reemphasizes the importance of choosing an appropriate and influential messenger for communicating campaign materials.

