



REGION 8 FAMILY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

6:30 p.m. Dec 15, 2022, Stewart Centre Freeport

MEETING ON ZOOM: Casey, Brooke, Bethany, Becky.

Family and Community Engagement Specialist Dean Wright called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. and proceeded with introductions.

Dean then asked members attending what we do well in Region 8 regarding early child care and kindergarten readiness. Members all said their communities do a good job of hosting activities for younger kids through schools or libraries.

Dean then asked them what our region does not do well and members mentioned daycare options are limited if any in the rural areas and the existing ones are overwhelmed with long waiting lists. The Freeport ones need to promote activities better. Carroll County members emphasized the lack of daycare options – especially after school – is an ongoing problem. Also a concern is the lack of transportation from daycare to school and then back to daycare again after school.

Since there are few, if any, childcare options in rural areas, that forces at least one parent to stay home with their young kids instead of going to work. Lack of jobs also is a big concern as most parents must travel several miles to a job.

Dean then showed slides with demographic information for our region and asked members who lives in our region? Answers from rural members were farm families and families with a parent who travels for work. Brooke said in her town it's young families and if the moms work, it's only part-time. However, she added Savanna has the highest population of elderly people per capita in the State. Bethany said in Lanark it's two types – farm families and families who live in a nearby lake community that have significantly higher household incomes.

Becky also said in Chadwick it's a small rural town so farm families and older residents, although a few young families. Casey said in Freeport there is a vast economic gap where both parents work or just one parent. There is a wide cultural



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mix, but either younger families or senior citizens that creates a gap with few middle-aged residents. She has seen a lack of social and emotional skills in young kids especially after COVID and not much done to address that.

Dean then showed a slide depicting the number of kids aged 6 and under in the region and how ready they are for kindergarten. All agreed it was no shock most of them live in Freeport since it's the highest population by far in the region.

Dean presented information on family poverty levels in our region. Casey asked to get more details on these numbers for the next meeting. As for kindergarten readiness, members were a bit surprised at how high the numbers were of kids not ready. Becky said if kids can get in a pre-school environment at a local school, that helps a great deal to assess them and prepare them accordingly.

Casey agreed saying those that can get into a childcare program usually do better entering into kindergarten, while the high number of kids on waiting lists and staying home tend to be behind a bit. Lack of staff at childcare centers also is a factor. Dean emphasized the numbers aren't an indictment on existing childcare centers. Currently there is no requirement for parents to enroll their kids in a childcare program, so may just show up and be unprepared due to a lack of training at home.

Finally, Dean asked how affordable is childcare in our region? All agreed the cost is high, so many families rely on relatives for childcare while parents go to work. Becky said cost was a factor for her to stay home while her husband works.

Members were asked what information they would like brought to the next meeting and answers included how numbers were determined in the slides, how to find out what's available for childcare in the region, household makeup of the families in the region, and a breakdown of childcare centers and the school districts their kids go on to when old enough to go to kindergarten.

Next Family Council meeting was scheduled for 6:30 p.m. Jan 12, 2023 in the Stewart Centre.

Meeting adjourned at 8 p.m.

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