



MEETING NOTES

Region 8 Family Council Meeting

Date & Time: May 25, 2023, 6:30 p.m.

ZOOM: Brooke, Becky, Lauren, Bethany, Casey

Family and Community Engagement Specialist Dean Wright called the meeting to order at 6:31 p.m.

Regional Manager Lou Ann Hayes said the Action Council has wrapped up its work by deciding on recommendations to fix the priority needs regarding child care.

Dean then presented the Family Council members with those recommendations and asked for their input as the subject of this meeting. The first was to improve the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) workforce. Dean explained wages are not set locally, so Birth to Five's role in that issue is more of an advocate. He added Action Council members also targeted training and the lack of Spanish-speaking staff and a shortage of males in the profession. Dean then asked for Family Council members' input on those ideas.

Lauren said many organizations have training for ECEC, but they're always during the day which is inconvenient for both center and in-home providers to attend. She added advocacy is a good place to start. Casey informed the group a licensed Freeport provider is closing its before and after-school preschool program. She said it's another example of how child care options are dwindling in the area.

Dean told the members he's seen the Freeport YMCA becoming more aggressive in this area. The staff has worked with many Region 8 school districts to set up wrap-around care in those towns. He asked members for ideas to recruit and retain ECEC workers. Lauren said a job shadow program for high school students may help get them interested in that career. Brooke said she recently attended a job fair event in Savanna where ECEC had a slight presence, but it could be amplified.

Dean then asked members for thoughts on how to increase the number of spots for child care. Lauren said she was surprised but encouraged Lena library was hosting a program on how to become a licensed child care provider. Brooke said she will help us



get dates in Savanna where we could present a program on how vital more ECEC spots are and how many more are needed. The target group is stay-at-home moms now since many daycare centers and licensed homes started from moms who wanted to expand the number of kids they cared for.

Brooke asked if there was grant money available and there is some, but Freeport is the only one submitting for it. Dean said an educational campaign is needed to stress the importance of preschool lessons and activities. Lauren said she's always puzzled when parents don't seek out information.

Dean then said the Action Council identified supporting parents, caregivers, and families as another priority need. He asked for ways to accomplish this. Bethany said the health department does a great job with home visits. Lauren agreed and said there are some helpful apps available so parents and teachers can communicate directly. Dean said we will reach out to other regions to hear what ideas are working in their areas.

Members also wished there was a way for teachers to keep them updated on what lessons their kids were learning that week in order to reinforce them at home. Brooke suggested a diary or journal be sent home. She did say her kids got a packet of things to work on in the summer with kids.

Transportation is another huge issue, especially in Freeport. Many parents are frustrated with the service available and also no general public transportation. Carroll County does have a great system in place, though, and could serve as a model.

Dean thanked the members for their time and input for this term and reminded them of our thank-you picnic at 5:30 p.m. on June 22 in Freeport.

The meeting adjourned at 8:12 p.m.

Todd McKenna
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Birth to Five Illinois Region 8