



MEETING NOTES

Region 8 Action Council Meeting

Date & Time: March 1, 2023, 1:00pm

IN PERSON: Stephanie K, Ashley, Emily.

ZOOM: Sarah, Janine, Robbie, Amanda, Amiee.

Regional Council Manager Lou Ann Hayes called the meeting to order at 1:03 p.m.

Lou Ann explained this meeting would focus on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) workforce issues. With not as many people entering the field, and still more leaving it after only a short time, she asked council members what would help convince people to stay in the ECEC field? Members answered with increased pay and for the ECEC field to be seen by the community as a profession and not simply just babysitting.

Lou Ann did say there is some positive news regarding the shortage of child care openings. According to data, there are seven more licensed ECEC locations in our region, but the process to open one is long and meticulous especially considering the DCFS requirements to be certified.

Even though there may be additional openings in the future, Sarah said that doesn't necessarily fix the problem. She said just having open slots doesn't entirely meet the needs of the child. We need to focus on the family and what the child's needs are more than just creating open slots and filling them with kids on waiting lists.

Another huge need identified by members is wrap-around preschool that offers services both before and after school hours. An all-day preschool option also would be extremely helpful.

Returning to workforce issues, members said finding people to hire particularly in our region is difficult because of our geographic location. Competition from Iowa, Wisconsin and the Chicago area is strong because these places pay more. As a result, entry-level people will go here to work and also current staff here will quit to take jobs in these locations. So we're losing staff and then can't replace them.



There needs to be more flexibility and child care workers should be paid higher than a desk job employee. Work culture also is an important factor in attracting new hires.

A glaring hole in the child care workforce in our region is the lack of bi-lingual staff and providers. Currently there are only three people at Amity and Head Start that speak a second language which is Spanish. With a growing Hispanic population, there is a huge need for Spanish speakers and even Hispanic staff. Also, there needs to be more men that work in the ECEC field.

Members discussed the best ways to recruit people entering the child care workforce and all agreed word-of-mouth was the best way. Another strong idea was a marketing campaign operated by United Way that would promote the benefits of working in the child care field.

Another idea to grow the workforce is to start a community service program for high school students to come help at an ECEC center. This would expose them to what goes on in the field and also provide needed help to the center.

Members listed other needs in solving the workforce shortage as a marketing plan to attract new people, retaining those already working in the field and an overall appreciation of staff.

Barriers to getting more people to pursue ECEC as a career include behavior issues in the classrooms and parents failing to teach their kids life skills and behavior from infants to age 5. Also negative treatment of staff by parents.

The meeting adjourned at 1:58 p.m. The next meeting is at 1 p.m. on March 15.

Todd McKenna
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Birth to Five Illinois Region 8