

## An Enriching County

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These objectives relate to all the things we do to enable individuals to flourish and to reach their full potential and lead lives that are healthy, stimulating and fulfilling.

- Funding Quality Education
- Alternative Education
- Arts Education
- Regional Arts Center
- Access to Open Space
- Open Access for Recreation

### Funding Quality Education

A quality education is critical to ensuring that all children have opportunities to lead successful and fulfilling lives. A well-prepared and skilled workforce is essential to the economic growth and competitiveness of the county as well (see the Workforce Development objective). All Champaign County school districts need the resources required to provide a quality education to the children that they serve. The ability to provide quality education to all students requires political support for raising sufficient revenues. This is difficult under the current funding system, which relies very heavily on a regressive and unpopular property tax and creates great discrepancies in the tax base available to different school districts.



### Objective

**All public schools will provide excellent instruction and student services in state-of-the-art facilities to all children, and will have the necessary financial resources, funded from a balance of sources that significantly reduce dependence on property taxes.**

### Starting Point

**Develop a strong county-wide coalition to work for systematic reform of public education funding by means that reduce or eliminate reliance on property taxes.**

Significant reform of the school funding system will require action by the state legislature. Legislative proposals to address this issue will arise from many quarters. What is needed is the ability to formulate our own proposals and to respond effectively to those put forward by others. The coalition would identify the principles and basic features an alternative school funding system must have to be broadly supported in the county. It could then seek widespread endorsement of those principles. The coalition would also provide the organizational framework to act effectively to support or oppose legislation based on this shared set of principles.

To be effective, the coalition would need to include educators, parents, business leaders, University of Illinois and Parkland College representatives, those engaged in agriculture, elected representatives, local government leaders, and civic groups. The coalition could be part of a broader state effort aligned with the same goals.

### Other Actions

- Evaluate the local impact of tax-exempt properties and work to mitigate their impact.
- Develop a program for consolidating health insurance costs for all county public and private K-12 employees.
- Support the University of Illinois master teacher program as described in the University of Illinois Strategic Plan.

### Alternative Education

Students come to school from varied settings and with widely divergent skills. A wide array of learning options can best accommodate these varied needs.



### Objective

**All students will have access to a range of alternative forms of schooling that meet their educational needs and enrich the learning environment.**

### Starting Point

**Develop more individualized learning programs for diverse student populations that incorporate a variety of learning styles and take place both in formal classroom settings and community-based learning centers.**

Work within the system of existing learning institutions to identify opportunities to add or expand program options or make existing alternatives more widely available.

A volunteer team of advocates would work in specific settings to develop proposals utilizing technical assistance from expert sources including the University of Illinois and Parkland College.

### Other Actions

- Create an “apprenticeship” program with opportunities in a broad range of job settings where technology, computer, and basic skills are infused into the apprenticeship experience, especially at the middle school level.
- Allow individuals to move forward in learning environments according to their developmental readiness.
- Explore multiple approaches to student evaluation that includes parent and student input.
- Offer team teaching at all ages. At younger ages, teachers’ skills will span multiple ages, at older ages, teachers’ skills will span multiple subjects.

### Arts Education

Experiences in and development of skills in the visual, literary, and performing arts enhance participants' quality of life, prepare individuals for employment in an economy reliant upon creativity, and nurture life skills such as problem-solving, collaboration, leadership, discipline, and positive self esteem. Study of the arts also enhances learning in other subject areas. Arts education supports the broader importance of the arts in the community and local economy. Arts programs are often undervalued and their funding is vulnerable to cuts due to school funding limitations and decisions.



### Objective

**A consecutive program in all arts disciplines will be an integral part of the curriculum at every grade level in all Champaign County schools.**

### Starting Point

**Develop a plan and program to support and expand arts education.**

Determine the current level of arts education offered in Champaign County districts and the public funding currently available and being used. Solicit administrative input as to the best course of action to take to improve funding and arts education county-wide.

A panel of knowledgeable advocates could develop the plan with the participation of the Regional Office of Education, school district administrators, and art teachers.

### Other Actions

- Plan and conduct a series of teacher in-service training programs to encourage a broader, multicultural arts focus in the schools.
- Conduct an assessment of other providers of arts education in the county to determine the scope of their programs and identify other areas of focus.
- Identify private funding sources for arts education and create a database of information to assist districts with applying for grants.
- Fund and hire a Champaign County Arts Grants Coordinator to work with various districts and look for funding to meet their various needs.
- Create a web-based portal where information can be accessed with respect to grant opportunities, resources, programs, and experts in the field.

### Regional Arts Center

Art and creativity in all forms enrich the quality of life. The arts are also a catalyst for economic development and a vehicle for social change, collaboration, education, and more. The arts are essential to building an attractive, healthy and vibrant community.



### Objective

**Champaign County will have a reputation throughout the Midwest as a center for art and entertainment and will be a model for its public and private financial support of the arts.**

### Starting Point

**Generate sustainable public and private funding for the arts through increased public support and awareness.**

Recognize arts funding as an economic development engine and incorporate it into the plans, policies, and programs of all relevant local governments and other entities. Use public incentives to leverage additional private sector support and identify expanded arts support as a community priority with philanthropic organizations. Publicly recognize private support for the arts as a valued civic contribution. Incorporate public art into major public works or publicly-financed private development.

### Other Actions

- Create and nurture a geographic nexus of the arts with arts districts, gallery walks, and music venues.
- Provide services that are supportive to artists including a central news source, listservs, and a central calendar.

### Access to Open Space

Access to parks is a key element of the quality of life and helps promote a more active and healthy life style especially for children. A connected network enhances the value of existing parks and open spaces and provides for additional trail-based recreational opportunities.



### Objective

**All communities and residents will have access to quality neighborhood and regional parks that are connected through trails, greenways, and public sidewalks to all major cultural facilities and schools throughout the county and adjacent locales.**

### Starting Point

**Create public/private partnerships and incentive programs to connect and integrate green space, open space, parks, greenways and trails with new and existing development.**

A panel of stakeholders can develop a set of recommendations for local and regional development of an expanded network of open spaces with technical assistance from trade associations, local park agencies and other governments.

A working group would include representatives from municipalities, park districts, the forest preserve district, developers and other interests.

### Other Actions

- Implement the Champaign County Greenways and Trails Plan.
- Complete the C-U to Danville trail.

### Open Access for Recreation

Meeting the demand for recreational facilities is increasingly difficult. Cooperative use of existing facilities can maximize the community's return on investments in existing facilities while improving the quality of life and encouraging healthy active lifestyles.



Credit: Georgeanne Hume

### Objective

**Government entities will cooperate to provide all county residents with open access for recreation at all appropriate public facilities.**

### Starting Point

**Provide residents county-wide with open access to appropriate public facilities for recreation through intergovernmental agreements.**

Identify areas of greatest need and facilities that could help meet unmet demand. Develop model agreements that meet the needs of facility owners while providing significant recreational opportunities.

Park and recreational professionals can undertake the assessment of potential shared use and opportunities to develop agreements with facility owners.

### Other Actions

- Conduct a county-wide assessment of recreational facility needs to identify resources and gaps in active recreation.
- Provide incentives for property owners to offer easements for walking trails and natural areas.
- Develop green space or recreation space guidelines specific to the community.
- Increase activities for the 12-15 year old age group.

