

Written Testimony for House Bill 376  
Rebecca Morris

My name is Rebecca Morris, and I am the mother of Peter, a student who attended the Notchcliff Forest Preschool one morning a week last school year. Peter has cerebral palsy. He uses leg braces and a walker for mobility, wears hearing aids, and has a variety of language and communication delays.

Peter is now six, and over the years he has experienced a variety of excellent educational and therapeutic settings. He requires the care and expertise of skilled special educators and therapists, and these providers work mostly in indoor settings with structured programs focused on goals and objectives.

When I learned of the outdoor preschool program at Notchcliff, I knew I wanted my son to have the opportunity to learn in a whole new way – to explore and play with peers in a classroom that was unlike any he'd ever experienced.

Because of his needs, he required a dedicated adult assistant for the program. We were fortunate that I could provide that assistance. My support enabled Peter to participate in parts of the program that would have otherwise been inaccessible. Throughout the year, I saw him grow to love the independence of using his walker to travel the forest trail on his own; to play modified games of hide and seek in the meadow; to sled down hills with his classmates; and to enjoy puppet shows and puzzles with outdoor themes.

The outdoor preschool experience gave my son a feeling of confidence and independence, and a sense of control over his learning that he has rarely ever felt. The program allowed him to explore, take risks, and experience natural consequences, all within a supportive and safe outdoor learning environment.

My son certainly benefited from attending an outdoor preschool program, but it was only possible because I could attend with him.

Licensing outdoor preschools is the way to make them accessible for all students, including those with special needs who require dedicated adult support. I have seen the power of outdoor early childhood education for my son, and I know it has the potential to provide enormous benefit for so many other students with special needs.

Thank you for considering HB376.

Rebecca Morris