

Good morning. My name is Meghan Duff, and I live in Morristown. My husband and I have three children (currently 6.5-year-old twins and a newly three-year-old). I have worked in the hospitality industry for 20 years and my husband for a software company based in Stowe. We moved to Morristown 11 years ago from Colorado to be closer to our families and with hope raise children in a state that strongly values education. I was born and raised in Pomfret and I knew Vermont was where we wanted to be.

Our family has been connected to Appletree Learning Center (ATLC) in Stowe since fall of 2016 when my twins were just 11 weeks old. In June 2019, we found out that we were pregnant with a surprise third child. We were thrilled but also panicked. Would we get a spot in child care? If we could get a spot, how would it work financially?

Fortunately, Appletree has a great policy that allowed us top of the list for a spot for our expected baby, because we were already enrolled with our other children. This was a huge relief as finding a child care spot in Lamoille County can feel like winning the lottery, let alone a place that is as good as Appletree – Five Star Rated, NAEYC accredited, and full of loving and caring teachers and staff. Once we knew we had a spot, paying for child care for three children was still a concern. Our twins were attending ATLC three days a week at the time and the other two days, my parents drove up from South Pomfret, an hour and a half away, to be with them. They did that every week from when the kids were born, so my husband and I could work full time and afford child care the other three days. Three kids at Appletree full time each month would have been about 45% of our monthly income. Fortunately, my twins had just turned three years old and were entering into the pre-K three classroom in the fall of 2019. This meant that we would start to benefit from the universal pre-K funding from Act 166 which ATLC directly discounted each week from October – June, nearly \$800 a month – for 10 months. For us, even both having good paying jobs, this was a huge savings. The idea that we could stay at Appletree and our children could be in their familiar program, as well as benefit from the pre-K curriculum and funding was incredible. We knew we were so lucky and fortunate to have a child care program that allowed for our family to be together and for our three children to learn and grow in one place.

Appletree was truly the best option for our family. My twins are summer babies. This means they are towards the cutoff for their age group and will always be the younger ones in their class. One of my children is also very petite, so I liked that they were able to stay at ATLC, a place designed with facilities, playgrounds and classrooms, specifically for young children.

If my twins only had access to one year of pre-K funding and were only able to attend pre-K in a public school, I don't know what our family would have done. It certainly would have caused a larger financial strain on our family. Additionally, we would have had to figure out after school programming a year earlier than we already did. It was hard enough with two five-year-olds in kindergarten, and by that time, at age 5, they were a little more mature. Even at age 5, transitions were still difficult. I believe that it would

have created major challenges emotionally for my kids if at age 4 if they had to end the day at school and then go to an afternoon program elsewhere.

I do not know all the details in the current proposed legislation, but I do know what worked best for my family. The value of a center based childcare program for ages 0 – 5 to be able to grow and develop for many years is immeasurable. I hope that you will consider expanding Vermont's mixed-delivery pre-K, rather than shrinking it, and expanding child care financial assistance to more families, even beyond the levels proposed in the bill so that more families can access and afford programs that work best for them.