



William N. Neff Center for Teacher Education
Emory & Henry College
P0 Box 947 Emory, Virginia 24327-0947 276-944-6214

To whom it may concern,

My name is Dr. Lauren Dotson, and I am a former teacher and administrator from Watauga County Schools; I am also a product of the school system, as I attended as a student from kindergarten through high school. As someone who has a deep understanding of the needs of the students of the system, I am writing in support of the local High Country Horse Helpers educational program.

As a former administrator at Hardin Park School, I worked closely with Dr. Tom Pace with the High Country Horse Helpers to develop an educational program for our first grade students. By reading the story "Chester's Barn" with students, first graders developed an understanding and awareness of the need for an equine rescue in the high country while also developing emergent literacy skills. Further, when students were able to meet the abused miniature horses, they learned more about the horses' traumatic histories and expressed wonder at how kind and loving the horses were even after the terrible events they had lived through. Despite the children's young ages, I observed them making connections regarding traumatic events the horses went through and difficult situations students themselves experience at home. The educational program developed with High Country Horse Helpers is so much more than just a "petting zoo" opportunity for students; students develop an awareness of social justice, community, and resiliency in the face of adversity by learning that these abused and neglected ponies are capable of love and human connection after everything they have suffered.

I cannot advocate enough for the importance of this program, both from a literacy and trauma-informed care perspective; as a current professor in teacher preparation, I continue to share this program and its benefits with my teaching candidates to emphasize the importance of programs such as this in helping educate the whole child in a holistic manner. High Country Horse Helpers is a tremendous non-profit that seeks not only to save its local equines in need, but it also serves to give back to the local community by utilizing its rescue horses to help educate the district's children in a myriad of ways. I hope this program continues to flourish, and I would be happy to speak to any teacher or administrator with Watauga County Schools or faculty members at Appalachian State University to further explain the importance and positive benefits of this program.

Best,
Dr. Lauren Dotson

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lauren Dotson".

Assistant Professor of Education
Chair, Education Department
Director, Neff Center for Teacher Education
Emory & Henry College
Emory, VA