

Southern Oregon Climate Action Now

SOCAN

Confronting Climate Change

<https://socan.eco>

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March 7th 2023

Reference SB854

Chair Dembrow and members of the Senate Committee on Education:

I write as both a retired educator and a cofacilitator of Southern Oregon Climate Action Now (SOCAN), an organization of over 2,000 rural Southern Oregonians who are concerned about the climate crisis and urge statewide action to address it. The mission of SOCAN is to promote awareness and understanding of the science of global warming and its climate chaos consequences and stimulate individual and collective action to address it. Since rural Oregonians occupy the frontlines in experiencing this crisis, we are strongly committed to statewide action.

In this vein, I write to urge passage of SB854: Relating to climate change instruction in public schools.

As indicated above, my support for SB854 stems from the intersection between my professional career and my SOCAN connection. As you will note above, a core component of the SOCAN Mission is educational, involving us in promoting understanding of climate science. Our efforts encompass engagement in both community education through community presentations and programs as well as engagement through school and college programs, both for students and teachers. These activities have led us to appreciate the importance of reaching students in our schools and providing them with an accurate understanding of both climate science and the consequences of climate change. In order to avoid descending into depression, students also need to understand that solutions are currently available.

My personal commitment stems from the following: I began my professional career teaching high school math in Portland, OR. Subsequently I moved to Missouri and after earning a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction at Southern Illinois University, I taught pre-service elementary teachers Methods of Teaching Math, Science, and Social Studies at Southeast Missouri State University where I also delivered professional development sessions to area teachers. Following retirement, I returned to Oregon where I co-founded and currently co-facilitate Southern Oregon Climate Action Now (SOCAN). Due to my professional experiences working with teachers, SOCAN established a Climate in the Classroom project where we support area teachers who want to teach about climate change. Through these experiences I have realized

the importance of having climate change concepts clearly integrated into standards so teachers who understand the importance of teaching the science behind climate change have the support and materials they need to help their students understand these complex and important concepts.

I support this legislation for a number of reasons. In southern Oregon, we are experiencing increasing temperatures (especially during summer), reducing snowpack and consequent water shortage followed by drying soils and vegetation and increased wildfire risk. Not surprisingly, students at all levels are experiencing anxiety that results from such threats exacerbated by climate change. Surely, it is our responsibility to provide anxious students with an understanding of what is driving these threats and how we can address it; ignoring the problem and pretending it non-existent is unreasonable.

In 2018 I worked with a team who offered a series of presentations in science classes at a local middle school during a unit on climate change. During these presentations, one of the students talked with her teacher about the stress she felt about climate change and its consequences. The teacher was very understanding and supportive. This later became one of a series of videos titled "Voices of the Valley" (<https://youtu.be/QRqExn75W1s>) as the student and teacher shared their thoughts about discussing this difficult topic.

SOCAN has also held "Teacher Conversations" where interested teachers come together with interested SOCAN volunteers, many with years of teaching experience, to discuss teaching about climate change. The teachers share the 'successes' as well as the 'challenges' they have experienced. In a rural area such as southern Oregon, teachers experience challenges to teaching these important topics as well as resistance from parents and school board members. If state legislators acknowledge the importance of this instruction by passing SB 854, teachers will have access to a localized curriculum for teaching this information. They will have guidance as they make connections to climate change within the scope and sequence of the curricula they already teach. This will also help SOCAN as a nonprofit with an interest in education to better help these teachers as they address this important issue.

We urge the legislature to acknowledge the reality of the climate crisis and help our students understand it and learn how to address it. Ignoring this crisis will not make it disappear!

Respectfully Submitted

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathleen Conway". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kathleen Conway Ph.D.

Co-facilitator, Southern Oregon Climate Action Now (SOCAN)