

Dear Chair Dembrow and members of the Senate Education Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on SB 854 K-12 Climate Education across the subject areas..

My name is Tana Shepard. I am a 4th generation Oregonian, a mother, a wife, an environmentalist and a public school teacher in my twentieth year serving my community. Currently, my role is K-12 Climate, Energy and Conservation Teacher in Eugene, Oregon. I am a founding member of Oregon Educators for Climate Education (OECE), and have been involved in the creation of Senate Bill 854.

My first 14 years as an educator were spent teaching 4th and 5th grade and leading my school's student Green Team, STEAM team and school garden at César Chávez Elementary, a Title I school in Eugene. I entered the teaching profession in my 30's with my heart set on changing the world by bringing an Earth focused perspective to classroom life, growing gardens and empowering students through action and leadership. I began teaching about our changing planet in regards to climate my first year in the classroom with a geography unit in my 4th blended class. It was an integrated social studies/language arts unit where my students eagerly engaged in research, reports and speeches...this led to studying our local climate, designing our brand new garden and making recommendations for the best plants for the garden. That was 2003.

Over the years at Chávez Elementary, my lessons evolved to year long integrated ecology units utilizing our district language arts, science and math curricula, along with community partner presentations, field trips to local wetlands, farms and forests, as well as getting outside daily in our school garden's outdoor classroom. The engagement and academic success of my students shined brightly through this form of learning experience. ALL learners were excited to learn, grew to understand their interconnectedness in the living system of the planet, as well as appreciation and love for the land and water of their home. In addition, they were excited to be on our school green team learning ways they can help the planet, as well as take action for our school to engage in schoolwide sustainable practices.

This experience led me to my current role, which aims education at Pacific Northwest resource conservation, climate adaptation and mitigation, as well as aspects of emergency preparedness. In my role, I have the pleasure of providing a salmon education experience to elementary students each fall that includes seeing Chinook Salmon spawning in the wild,

working with middle school students around renewable energy with wind turbine blade design and building mini-Electric vehicles, support conservation/waste management education district wide, as well as connect with the 4J Climate Justice team of high school student leaders from each of our highschools every week. Knowing how little science is being taught in elementary classrooms across the state and the high schoolers stories and their wishes for their education are what led me here today to urge you to pass SB 854.

Throughout the pandemic, the 4J Climate Justice Team continued to meet and discuss what climate education should look, sound and feel like across Oregon, meanwhile in real time sharing our collective story of wildfires and drought conditons.. Our little team met with the Oregon Department of Education via zoom to share the students' stories and ideas. All adults on the call were extremely moved and heard the call to action loud and clear. The students were then invited to speak to the Council of State Science Supervisors to help shape their official climate change education statement. That group of students graduated and there was still much work to be done. Up stepped the next couple years of student leaders to keep the momentum going that led us to this day as a concerned group of teachers and students pleading with you to support SB 854 K-12 Climate Education across the subject areas. It's up to us in education to help our students connect the dots and move forward to be the leaders needed for our future here in Oregon.

I often hear that elementary students are too young to learn about climate change, that "it's too scary" and "we should not burden them" with this knowledge. However, I have spent most of my teaching career in elementary classrooms, and I know that elementary students are at the perfect age to understand that they live on a planet, that all living things are connected, and that some changes are being accelerated due to human impacts. When our youngest learners have the opportunity to experience science and environmental education, it engages them to read, write, and have discussions about it.

Through an integrated approach, elementary teachers can effectively integrate climate change related lessons and units of study in ways that overlap with other content standards they are required to teach. With professional development, teachers can learn to take the narrative away from the doom and gloom storyline to one of collective hope and solution-oriented thought patterns. Given the opportunity and resources to weave the topic into the regular curriculum, teachers can help formalize and normalize the topic of climate change across subject areas. A goal of SB 854 is for even the youngest of our learners to have the opportunity to move forward with hope and solutionary strategies.

The nature of a place based education approach ensures that all reaches of the state have an entry point to these topics. All across our state we are unified in drought and forest fire stories. No one is unaffected. When young students develop a deep connection to the place they live, an opportunity to learn about adaptations needed, as well as think in solutionary ways, they will feel empowered to take action and develop resilience for their futures and the futures of their communities.

Nature is medicine, innovation is hope, adaptation is survival and knowledge is power. We, of OECE, are committed to creating educational opportunities across the state that encourage noticing, wondering and questioning to foster an awareness of the interconnectedness of all living things, natural systems and human impacts. ALL students deserve to be seen, heard and offered the opportunity to learn how to be collaborative, critical thinkers and problem solvers gaining knowledge, confidence and voice to take small and large actions toward creating a just, healthy and livable future here on the planet we all share-Earth.

SB 854 encourages school districts across the state to collaborate, support and provide learning opportunities regarding climate change, its effects on the Pacific Northwest, and ways to understand, innovate, and adapt for our future through mitigation, preparedness and resilience. I strongly urge you to vote for Senate Bill 854 on behalf of our youth and the future of our beautiful state, Oregon.

By starting now, we have the opportunity to educate younger generations of Oregonians who stand to inherit this problem, to help them adapt and create a future that is promising and solution-oriented. I strongly urge you to vote for Senate Bill 854 on behalf of our youth and the future of our beautiful state, Oregon.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to comment.