

I am writing in opposition of HB2357, because HB2357 would eliminate Oregon Forest Resources Institute (OFRI) and two-thirds of Talk About Tree's (TAT) budget. With such a reduction in funding, Talk About Trees would have to drastically limit classroom programs in the future. This drastic cut in the budget will not only hurt the TAT program, but also have adverse effects on schools and students that the TAT program visits.

Talk About Trees has joined our school, Hands On Art & Play, for many years. The interactive, science-based TAT program is a fun learning tool for our students. It is also often the first time that the children learn about trees and our natural environment.

The TAT programs are presented by experienced facilitators and offered free to schools throughout Oregon. TAT encourages awareness and appreciation of the value of trees and forests in our daily lives. Our students have conversations about forest products, types of trees, pine needles and cones, as well as leaves and flowers. They also learn about the life cycle of a tree. Then we go on a nature walk! It is wonderful to see the kids make a connection between what we are learning with the TAT facilitators to actual trees around us! They can recognize and identify trees we were talking about and start to build a relationship with our natural environment. For preschool children, it is often their first introduction to forest ecology, management practices and forest product use.

Some of the highlights to the program come when the TAT facilitator visits several times a year and the class remembers what they have learned and can build on it. Our class loves going on scavenger hunts, making paper out of recycled materials, finding seed pods, and studying trees as they grow and change throughout the year. This year, due to COVID, Talk About Trees was the one and only enrichment program we could continue having at our school since the program can be completely outdoors. Next year will likely be no different due to the ongoing pandemic, so we truly hope TAT can continue visiting our school and teaching us about trees!

Our students love the Talk About Trees program and we hope Oregon students will continue to have the opportunity to experience this free interactive, science-based program.