

To: Senate Education Committee
From: Eco-School Network
Date; February 21, 2022
Subject: SB 426, Toxic-Free Schools

The Eco-School Network is a small nonprofit that equips parents and students to lead school communities toward sustainability. We train parents who then carry out projects in schools that involve students in sustainable practices. Currently we support district networks in Portland, Beaverton, West Linn-Wilsonville, and North Clackamas.

In the spring of 2018 West Linn parents became concerned about the spraying of pesticides in school yards near areas where children play. They began bringing up the issue at school board meetings. The district had an IPM policy, but after observing the little flags posted after spraying, the parents questioned whether the chemical sprays were only being used as last resort. Glyphosate, dicamba, and 2,4,D were being sprayed about once/year, particularly on curbs and fence lines. In researching the issue, the parents found that

1. Pesticides are increasingly recognized as being unhealthy, and many communities and organizations are moving away from using them;
2. In 2016 the World Health Organization listed glyphosate as probable carcinogen; and
3. Practices were taking too long to catch up with the science, just like they had for DDT, tobacco, and asbestos.

The parents sent a petition to the school board. The Eco-School Network wrote a letter of support because we believe that part of preserving a healthy environment is employing the precautionary principle and discontinuing the use of chemicals that may be (and in some cases have been proven to be) harmful to the health of people and the environment. We're particularly concerned about potential health impacts of pesticides on our youngest members. Children learn about their environment through touch, smell, rough-and-tumble on-the-ground play, and hand-to-mouth behaviors. Research has found evidence of a link between pesticides and lower IQs, developmental delays, cancer, autism, and ADHD.

Not having any luck with the board, the parents began talking to facilities staff, trying to convince them to use alternatives to pesticides. Nothing worked until one of the primary schools began having family weeding events in the spring of 2019. The district made no formal agreement not to spray, but as long as parents kept the weeds down throughout the whole year, facilities staff avoided sprays and also supplied mulch. The following year another school began holding weeding events with the same results. Now, five schools are organizing regular weeding sessions. This is a good holding pattern but not sustainable. It takes a lot of work for parent volunteers to plan and host these regular community volunteer events, and they just can't continue this indefinitely. We all can imagine the effort it takes for these parents, most of whom work full time and take care of their families, to keep up this effort.

While parents in our other school districts care just as much about the pesticide issue, many of them don't have the time or capacity to organize regular weeding events. This obviously isn't something we can expect of parents around the state.

We strongly encourage the state to help school districts reduce pesticide use without relying on parent volunteers. We urge you to pass SB 426 out of committee. Thank you for your leadership.