

Dear Senate Committee on Education: Chair Senator Michael Dembrow, Vice-Chair Senator Suzanne Weber, Senator Dick Anderson, Senator Lew Frederick, Senator Sarah Gelser Blouin, Senator Art Robinson and Senator Rob Wagner.

My name is Darin Henry. I retired from Sheldon High School in Eugene in 2021. I advised the school's environmental club for 14 years. Our students completed an arduous list of tasks over a two year period working with district officials to become an official Oregon Green School. Our recycling program was extensive recycling bottles and cans, paper, scrap metal, electronics, toner cartridges, and marker pens.

Our program's mission was to reduce usable resources from entering landfills and to educate students, staff, and the community to reuse, recycle and reduce their personal CO2 emissions through alternative transportation. If judged on the amount of materials saved from the landfill, we were enormously successful. Educating staff and students proved much harder. Our students made informational announcements at all sporting events and school assemblies for how to recycle on campus. They put up posters, and sponsored ride your bike and carpool campaigns. Try as they might, recyclables were still being thrown in the trash and trash into recycling containers.. And, every morning, about ten students arrived at school an hour early to drop off a sibling with an early morning class. The drivers, whose classes didn't begin for an hour, would sit in their cars for that hour, engine idling to power their heater, play their radio and charge their phone. Some of these students lived only three blocks from campus. Students also sat in cars during lunch, alone or with friends, engines idling. Administration was unable to curb this behavior. After school, parents likewise, arrived half an hour early to pick up their kids and avoid long lines, engines idling in spite of the numerous NO IDLING ZONE signs students paid to have installed.

Our twenty five well intentioned club members came to the painful realization that modeling behavior was not enough; our capacity to educate was no match for student and staff apathy. When students were not in class, all they wanted to do was socialize, study, or rest. Our group was unable to convey the **why**, behind reducing personal CO2 emissions, reusing and recycling. It was agreed that integrating climate change and related lessons into all subjects would be the most effective way to teach stewardship. Most of our club members were International High School students whose teachers were already integrating such lessons into social studies. Reading, writing and math could all be taught through a climate lens without compromising course content. And, if students could see that math, for instance, was a necessary and powerful tool for creating a sustainable future, they may be more motivated to strive, even if math wasn't "their thing".

The following year, Sheldon High School hosted the 4j School District's first city wide Climate Education Symposium hosting students from five high schools and an auditorium full of K12 teachers of different subjects from across the district. Our students set the tone when they opened the symposium by asking all present to "integrate climate change lessons into as many subjects as possible". Oregon Educators for Climate Education was born and our mission was to fulfill the student's request.

The next year COVID hit and our growing coalition began meeting virtually making it easy for educators from across the state to attend, and the coalition grew. We began drafting legislation. We also began meeting with teachers from different states that were charting their own climate education paths.

Schools are existing infrastructure, ready and waiting to deliver the why behind the importance of reducing personal CO2 emission and making land friendly consumer choices. Schools would collaborate with watershed councils, and other state agencies to teach stewardship and adaptations that communities could adopt to insulate their homes, economies, and ecosystems from the particular climate impacts experienced in their region of Oregon. Career and Technical Training opportunities for tomorrow's green economy are numerous. Oregon schools would become breeding grounds of innovation allowing our state to take full advantage of the emerging markets for green energy, agriculture, tech, etc. Oregon graduates would be ready to step into these high paying jobs.

All of these potential opportunities would allow Oregon to achieve its carbon reduction goals set into motion two years ago with the passage of House Bill 2021.

For all of these reasons I implore you to vote YES on SB 854.

Thank you for your best efforts to serve Oregon students.

Sincerely,

Darin Henry  
Oregon Educators for Climate Education