

Dear Chair Dembrow and members of the Senate Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on SB 854.

My name is Tana Shepard. I am a 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.

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.

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.

Thank you, again, for this opportunity.