

4J educators take cues from students in emphasizing climate change curriculum

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Body

Feb. 03--Teachers and students in Eugene School District came together to collaborate on a new curriculum surrounding one of the most top-of-mind issues for students: **climate change**.

Educators gathered Thursday for the **Climate Change** Summit -- an all-day event at Sheldon High School -- to discuss how **climate change** can be taught across grade levels and disciplines.

The summit was supported through a grant from Eugene Water and Electric Board, and was about the importance of having **climate** education included in curriculum.

People in Eugene have been enthusiastic when it comes to action around **climate change** -- especially with students in the driver's seat.

Students have participated in walkouts and marches, and Eugene's youth have been the faces young **climate change** activists, even before 17-year-old Swedish environmental activist Greta Thurnburg came on the scene.

Kelsey Juliana of Eugene was the lead plaintiff on the "**climate** kids" case, Juliana v. U.S. filed in 2015, which argued that the government's promotion of fossil fuel production disregarded impacts to the Earth and denied youth constitutional rights to life, liberty and property.

Five more Eugene students joined Juliana as plaintiffs on the case, which was thrown out by a federal appeals court in January.

Students still are driving the conversation in Eugene and urged educators to develop comprehensive **climate change** curriculum Thursday.

"We have a lot of (student) activists, but we want everybody to be an activist in a sense," said Abraham Luedtke, a senior at South Eugene High School and member of student environmental group Earth Guardians 350.

"We're not going to get any of this **change** if we have a couple people from different high schools who are doing all the heavy lifting," he said. "This is a holistic issue."

Something as simple as considering the environmental footprint of your breakfast and the resources it took to make it can have impact, said Jenoge Khatter, who works in the district as a teacher on special assignment for social sciences and the talented and gifted program.

"We talk a lot about how identity is intersectional, but a lot of these decisions are too," he said.

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In his social sciences classes, Khatter said he tries to help students understand how economic pressures are affecting human uses of land, and the many factors that impact **climate change** and "exacerbate emissions."

"Most students want to engage but they also want to know they're being told the truth," he said. "If there's deviation from fact, it interferes with learning."

Climate change, while based on science, is an inherently political issue. Khatter said the best way he's found to teach this when the conversation begins to veer toward politics is to recenter students with a foundation of facts.

"A lot of older people think that people who care about the planet are 'hippies,' and that it's kind of a bad thing to care about the planet," said Maya Scott, a senior at Churchill High School and the Rachel Carson Environmental Science Academy. "But I'm just a normal kid who really cares about my future and is really looking forward to having a family and having children."

"The way I'm looking at it now is, I need to sacrifice my life to save the planet for other people because no one else is doing it, especially people older than us," Scott said. "We're supposed to be kids. This is not supposed to be our problem -- and it is."

Taking the students' cue, educators on Thursday discussed the school board's **climate change** resolution, teaching and content standards and ways some teachers already have incorporated **climate** in their units.

Students presented some ideas such as requiring classes with a field-study component and using art as a way to inform people about **climate change**. These would "foster a sense of stewardship" to the Earth among students and emphasize hopefulness.

"It's really, really vital work -- students are telling us this is the most important issue facing our world," said Daniel Gallo, who teaches global health at Eugene International High School.

Gallo said it's a topic that crosses all disciplines, because "every individual is connected to it."

"It's a big lift to move our curriculum in this direction," Gallo said. "One of the challenges is to not divide it up and say it's the science teacher's job or another teacher's job -- that's not true."

Another teacher who participated in the summit, Angie Ruzicka -- who teaches math and science at Cal Young Middle School -- said the group talked about **climate** anxiety and **climate** grief, and how to teach this subject while still supporting students' mental health.

"Not minimizing (impacts), but trying to empower kids to take action and know they can make a difference," she said.

Gallow acknowledged the many tasks needing to be done every day in a school, with limited time, but said it's important to recognize students are concerned about **climate change** and give attention to their mental health as well.

"We have to acknowledge it," he said. "You can't address a problem you don't acknowledge."

Tana Shepard is 4J's teacher on assignment focused on Energy, Water & Conservation and the EWEB grant coordinator.

The group on Thursday didn't get as far into the curriculum mapping as they had hoped, Shepard said, but there was energy among participants to keep it as a priority, so the group has plans to meet again before spring break.

"We want to go into it with solutions and hope, not doomsday," Shepard said, and teachers are ready to listen to students. "We can learn a lot from them, but it's not all their responsibility."

Follow Jordyn Brown on Twitter @thejordynbrown or email at jbrown@registerguard.com

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