



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **A \$4.9 million grant to the Environmental Education Pathways Project expands access to high-quality environmental education for Title I students in Sonoma County.**

SANTA ROSA, CA.— Time in nature for youth has proven benefits. Studies have repeatedly shown that time in nature supports cognitive development, stress reduction, creativity, focus, social skills, and environmental stewardship. But increasingly, because of budget cuts, public school students don't have access to these benefits.

The Environmental Education Pathways Project was established by the Sonoma Environmental Education Collaborative (SEEC) in 2023 to address this problem. Made possible by a \$3 million-dollar grant from a Bay Area family with deep local connections, the project guarantees local elementary school students from Title I schools receive effective field-based environmental education throughout multiple grades. In 2026, the same family granted another \$1.9 million in challenge grant funding to the EE Pathways Project, a testament to the program's success.

With 30 participating schools and 13 local organizations collaborating to provide high-quality, environmental education, the impact is significant. **About 10,500 elementary school students have benefited from the EE Pathways Project this school year.**

“My students have enhanced connections with food webs, climate change, watersheds, native species, and basic camping skills (many of our students have not had experience camping before). I noticed a greater appreciation for natural spaces,” says Ross Hause, a 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher at Luther Burbank Elementary School.

What does this scaffolded, collaborative approach look like in action? To start, students might go on environmental education field trips with Point Blue Conservation Science in kindergarten and then Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. In 5<sup>th</sup> grade, those same students might go on a field trip with Sonoma Water, and in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, an overnight camping field trip at a nature preserve with LandPaths.

While the value of environmental education, especially for students from low-income, underserved communities, is clear, for too long that education has been provided only sporadically for students—or not at all. The EE Pathways Project takes the onus of providing and paying for environmental education off already cash-strapped school districts and

administrators, stepping in to provide the scaffolding, infrastructure, funding and transportation for the field trips.

“Environmental education was brought to life in my classroom and out in nature,” says Anne Vonder Kuhlen, a kindergarten teacher at Cinnabar Elementary School in Petaluma. “It brought science, nature and our collective need to be stewards to our beloved Earth to students who might not otherwise have these experiences due to lower socioeconomic circumstances.”

These consistent dependable environmental education touchpoints are provided by participating partners in the Pathways Project (listed below). Participating organizations collaborate through regular meetings, professional development opportunities, and open communication to create a continuum of productive, consistent environmental education rather than competing for opportunities.

On May 7 from 5:30 – 7pm the public is invited to **Insight and Impact: A New Model for Environmental Education** at the Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation. The evening will highlight school and project outcomes, a panel with educators and environmental education partners, and time to connect with others who care about the future of environmental learning in our region. This event is being offered in partnership with the Community Foundation Sonoma County and organizations from the Sonoma Environmental Education Collaborative.



**Scan the QR code to go to the registration page.**

The following organizations are providers of environmental education through the Pathways Project:

- All Hands Ecology
- Friends of the Petaluma River
- Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation
- LandPaths
- Pepperwood
- Point Blue Conservation Science
- Sonoma County Regional Parks
- Sonoma Ecology Center
- Sonoma Land Trust
- Sonoma Water
- Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods
- Teravana
- Weaving Earth

#### **About Sonoma Environmental Education Collaborative (SEEC)**

The Sonoma Environmental Education Collaborative (SEEC) is a regional consortium of environmental education professionals from organizations, agencies, networks, and school districts with a vision for an environmentally literate Sonoma County. More info: [sonomacountyee.org](http://sonomacountyee.org)