

POLLUTING EDUCATION

The Influence of Fossil Fuels on
Children's Education in Canada

**Report
Summary**

**FOR OUR
KIDS**



CAPE
Canadian Association
of Physicians
for the Environment

Association canadienne
des médecins
pour l'environnement
ACME



Cover image: Chris Matzner

**A report by the Canadian Association of Physicians for the
Environment and For Our Kids**

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* This is a summary of *Polluting Education: The Influence of Fossil Fuels on Children’s Education in Canada*. The report explores the involvement of the oil and gas industry in schools and climate-related education in Canada. Given that comprehensive, evidence-based climate education is essential to addressing climate change, and that youth will be the most affected by climate breakdown, it is imperative that the industry most responsible for driving the climate crisis be prevented from influencing the education young people receive on subjects related to climate, environment, or energy.

This research documents the history and extent of industry involvement and the effect this has had on the messages conveyed—and not conveyed—in the educational programs the fossil fuel industry supports. One of our key findings is that fossil fuel companies have, through their involvement in education, effectively obscured the industry’s role in driving climate change while also limiting public understanding of the urgent need to transition away from fossil fuels. The report describes governmental and institutional policy levers that could be used to protect climate change education from the fossil fuel industry, and puts forward steps that parents, teachers, and concerned citizens could take to effect these policy changes.

The report aims to promote informed discussion of the fossil fuel industry’s influence on climate education among all those concerned about the welfare and education of youth in Canada. We hope that this report will also contribute to global understanding of the need for fossil-fuel-free education to protect young people and safeguard their future.

This report is supported by funding from **The Raffi Foundation for Child Honouring**. It was commissioned by the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (CAPE) and For Our Kids, and is intended to generate awareness about the involvement of oil and gas companies in K–12 climate-related education.



◆ **Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (CAPE)** is a physician-led organization with over 36,000 supporters across the country. It plays a unique role at the intersection of health, the environment, and justice, to bring a credible, evidence-based perspective delivered by the trusted voices of doctors, other health professionals, and researchers to enhance equity and support planetary health. Recognizing that fossil fuel companies, like tobacco companies, are promoting products that threaten human health, CAPE doctors have called for a ban on all fossil fuel advertising and led a campaign to ban fossil fuel sponsored curricula from schools in British Columbia in 2022.¹



◆ **For Our Kids** is a parent-led network of volunteers who are driven to advocate for action on the climate crisis to protect children, grandchildren and all future generations. As parents and caregivers, they want to ensure that the education children receive in school equips them with the knowledge, skills, and values to address climate change and build resilience in the face of climate threats.²

* For the health and safety of younger generations, both CAPE and For Our Kids are committed to ensuring that education be protected from oil and gas messaging.

Executive Summary

Oil and gas companies are actively shaping children's understanding of climate science and climate change solutions while they are a captive audience in classrooms across Canada.

At least 39 oil and gas companies and 12 industry-tied organizations are using a variety of methods to influence how climate, energy and environmental education is taught across the country, including: providing branded educational materials to schools, establishing partnerships with government to develop curricula and resources, sponsoring school activities, and funding and supporting third-party environmental education providers.

Fossil fuel companies engaged in K–12 education in Canada include Cenovus Energy, Suncor Energy, Imperial Oil, Canadian Natural Resources, ConocoPhillips, Enbridge, TC Energy, Fortis, and many others.

While fossil fuels produce the majority (>75%) of climate-heating greenhouse gas emissions, industry-supported education materials were found to consistently muddle scientific evidence about the causes of climate change, and failed to address the urgent need to transition away from fossil fuels. They routinely presented present climate concerns as a “perspective” alongside pro-industry counterarguments, and emphasized individual actions while ignoring corporate responsibility. This is a direct conflict of interest, akin to tobacco companies teaching health or McDonalds sponsoring nutrition classes (they did) and ensuring that the lessons include their “side” of the story.³

Fossil-fuel driven climate change is the most significant threat to children's health and future.⁴ Children are especially vulnerable to

climate impacts, with greater exposure to air, food, and water pollution per unit of body weight than adults. In addition, youth in Canada are facing mounting climate anxiety, with 78% reporting that concern about climate change affects their mental health.⁵ Research shows that education is key to avoiding the most severe impacts of climate change and that evidence-based climate change education—that also addresses mental health harms and climate anxiety—best equips students with the knowledge and skills required to build a more just, sustainable, and low-carbon future.

This investigation reveals that fossil fuel industry influence has filled the government funding gap in climate education, creating a situation in which oil and gas funded programs ensure that the industry is well placed to influence public opinion on climate change, climate solutions, and the impact of the fossil fuel industry. The industry's strategy of being in schools is part of a long history of trying to shape the public's understanding of climate change through misinformation, and trying to position fossil fuels as benign in order to protect industry interests and delay climate action.

This summary presents the key findings and ideas of a longer report, *Polluting Education: The Influence of Fossil Fuels on Children's Education in Canada*. The report calls for immediate action to remove fossil fuel industry influence from schools in Canada and implement comprehensive, science-based climate education across all provinces and territories.

Preface

Oh, what a time to be an educator on planet Earth!

The climate crisis is now the biggest public health threat humanity faces, and scores of studies have shown that our precious children, always, are the first to bear the brunt of these impacts. Yet hardly any educational system is honestly nor adequately preparing kids to navigate the severe challenges they must now face and transform into leadership opportunities that can help mitigate further warming and support communities to adapt along the way.

It's critical that we teach children and youth about the climate crisis in age-appropriate ways that follow authoritative science instead of corporate propaganda, for they're the ones who will be most impacted by whatever we choose to do—or not do—as a collective. Our young have the most to lose or gain.

While many students are being prepared for jobs that may not exist when they grow up as society wobbles under compounding threats, at schools across the country, the topic of climate change is too often overlooked because “nothing matters and the world is ending, anyway.” As this report shows, when climate change does enter the classroom, the curriculum in Canada has been tainted by the fossil fuel companies that sponsor it. They manipulate teaching materials to try and mold perceptions of oil, coal, and gas for their benefit, at a time when we clearly must phase out fossil fuels so our children can have a chance at a safe and secure life. We must call this out for what it is: shameful.

As a researcher and author working to defend young people from debilitating mental health challenges as the planet heats up, and as a children's troubadour known for bringing joy and calm to families all over the world through songs like “Baby Beluga” and “Big Beautiful Planet,” we are greatly troubled by what this report describes. We are disappointed in Canada's education sector for granting the fossil fuel industry all-access passes to pump our kids' classrooms full of petro-pedagogy. Read this report, and let it fuel you for changing this situation.

*Decades of lies, decades of denial,
turned up the heat, engulfed us in fire. Decades of obstruction,
though people knew better.
Caused this climate emergency and we gotta set ourselves free:
From this climate emergency!*

◆ From Raffi's climate song, [“Young People Marching.”](#)

Canadian educators can play an important role in helping us all to set ourselves free. We can find a third path between “passive optimism” and “doom and gloom”—one that is not naïve nor nihilistic—leading the next generation towards greater purpose and meaning as they find ways to help stop the climate crisis at this critical time to be alive. Lessons approved by fossil fuel companies indoctrinating students are unacceptable.

◆ From the Raffi Foundation's [Covenant for Honouring Children:](#)

We commit ourselves to peaceful ways and vow to keep from harm or neglect these, our most vulnerable citizens. As guardians of their prosperity we honour the bountiful Earth whose diversity sustains us. Thus we pledge our love for generations to come.

Will Canadian educators honour this agreement? To do right by our young, we must all declare: it's time to clean up the oil spill in the classroom!

With fierce love for this planet and all its children,

Britt and Raffi

Britt



Britt Wray, PhD is a researcher and author working at the intersection of climate change and mental health. She is the Director of CIRCLE at Stanford Psychiatry, a research and action initiative focused on community-minded interventions for resilience, climate leadership, and emotional wellbeing in the Stanford University School of Medicine. She is the author of Generation Dread, a book about climate anxiety that was shortlisted for the Governor General's Award, and Founder of Unthinkable, a newsletter and nonprofit tackling the hidden mental health crisis within the climate crisis. Britt is a winner of the Canadian Eco-Hero Award and top prize in SciComm Excellence from the US National Academy of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine.

Raffi Cavoukian, C.M., O.B.C., is known to millions by his first name alone. A renowned children's troubadour for five decades, he is also an author, music producer, ecology advocate and climate activist with five honorary degrees. Raffi is the founder of Child Honouring, an original philosophy for restoring ecosystems and building community by respecting the universal and irreducible developmental needs of the very young. He co-edited the 2006 anthology, Child Honouring: How To Turn This World Around, in which he wrote the introduction and conclusion. Raffi is founder and board chair of the Raffi Foundation For Child Honouring, working to advance Child Honouring as a universal ethic. In 2024, Raffi released his latest kid's album, Penny Penguin.

Raffi



Introduction

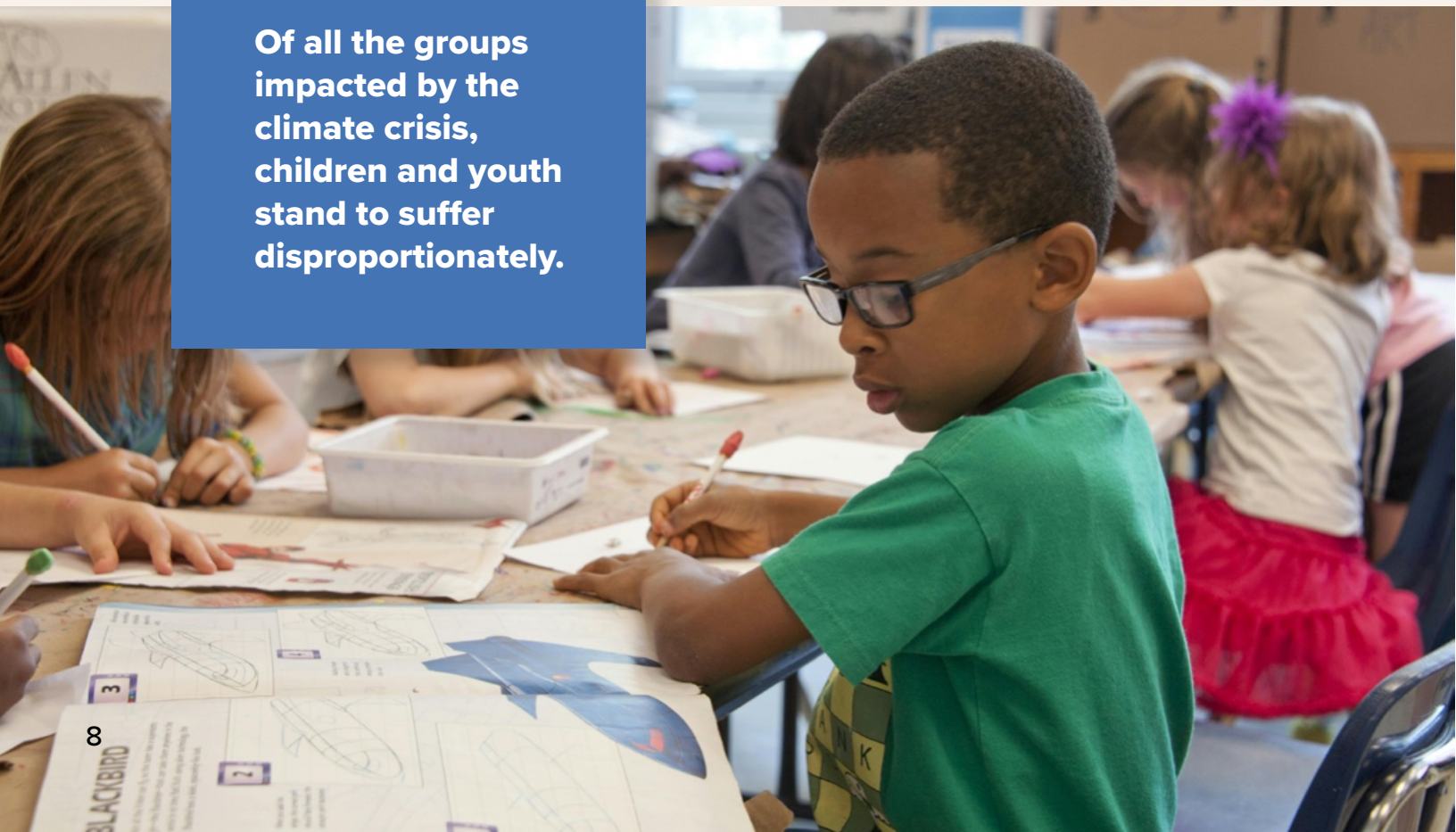
Climate change is widely recognized as the most significant threat facing humanity.⁶ The impacts of climate change are already costing lives and livelihoods, and they are falling hardest on those impacted by structural inequities in Canada and around the world.⁷ Moreover, of all the groups impacted by the climate crisis, children and youth stand to suffer disproportionately.⁸ These risks are further heightened for Indigenous children, children in racialized and low-income communities, and disabled children, which serves to exacerbate existing inequities in health outcomes.⁹ In addition to their physical health, many youth report that in the face of an increasingly uncertain future, climate anxiety is impacting their mental health and well-being.¹⁰

Instead of transitioning into renewable energy systems, the oil and gas industry

has responded by funding misinformation campaigns that make their operations appear sustainable and that downplay the threat posed by the climate crisis.¹¹ The ubiquity and persistence of industry misinformation have diminished the political will for effective climate policies, delayed government action, and stalled the transition to clean energy.¹²

Education has long been an arena where fossil fuel companies exert their influence. Through the provision of educational resources and the sponsorship of school activities, the industry normalizes fossil fuels as integral to modern life and promotes the perception they are addressing climate change, thereby securing support for their continued consumption.¹³

Of all the groups impacted by the climate crisis, children and youth stand to suffer disproportionately.





Oil and Gas are Polluting Climate Change Education

Education policy experts have identified climate change education as essential to enabling the transition away from fossil fuels, advancing social equity, and developing more sustainable ways of living.¹⁴ In addition, as a signatory to the 2015 Paris Agreement, Canada is required to support the development of climate change education. However, recent surveys have shown that climate change education in Canada is uneven and climate literacy rates remain low.¹⁵

Youth in Canada are asking for an education that empowers and equips them with the knowledge and skills to address the climate crisis and take action¹⁶. As well, educators interested in teaching about climate change lack publicly funded resources and relevant professional development. Only one-third (34%) of educators feel that they have the knowledge and skills needed to teach climate change.¹⁷ Meanwhile, external providers are offering resources and training—many of which are funded by the industry that is driving the climate crisis.



The Extent of Fossil Fuel Involvement in Environmental/Climate Change Education

Our research indicates that there are at least 39 oil and gas companies, 10 industry-related companies, and two industry associations involved in funding climate, energy and environmental education in Canada.¹⁸ They include all six members of the Pathways Alliance—Cenovus Energy, Suncor Energy, Imperial Oil, Canadian Natural Resources, ConocoPhillips, and MEG Energy—as well as companies such as Enbridge, TC Energy, FortisAlberta and FortisBC. The subject areas they fund include climate change education, as well as biodiversity, energy, and science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). By funding education in these areas, fossil fuel companies ensure that they are well-placed to influence public opinion on climate change, climate solutions, and the impact of the fossil fuel industry.

There are at least 39 oil and gas companies, 10 industry-related companies, and two industry associations involved in funding climate-related education in Canada.

Historical Trends

In 2015, Farida Shaheed, the UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, submitted a report to the UN General Assembly in which she called for a ban on all commercial marketing and advertising in schools, saying, “Schoolchildren offer a captive and credulous audience,” and that marketing and advertising programmes are “normalised and given legitimacy when embedded in the school context...”¹⁹

Unfortunately, commercialization has a long history in most school districts across Canada. Since the 1920s, companies have looked to schools as a site for “a future market of loyal consumers.”²⁰ In the late 1980s and 1990s, government funding cuts and the rise of neoliberalism paved the way for more extensive corporate involvement.²¹ Corporations moved from advertising in schools on selected products to providing

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Education scholars have labelled this development a form of privatization from within: as governments cut funding, schools and school boards increasingly turn to private entities—corporations, foundations, charities and non-governmental organizations—to provide educational activities and services.²³

Oil and gas companies have been prominent providers of branded education materials. Since the early period of commercial intervention in schools. Expanding from branded maps and sponsored films, to providing input on curricula and funding third-party environmental education organizations.



Fossil Fuel Influence In Education

Historic Trends

1920s Imperial Oil produces branded maps for classrooms.

Fossil fuel companies begin to look to schools as a site for “a future market of loyal consumers.”

1950s & 1960s

Oil & gas companies cultivate relationships with government education departments.

The British American Oil Company makes a free kit for elementary students to build cardboard models of the stages of oil production

Audio-Visual Aids Branch of Alberta Department of Education included Shell’s films in its listings.

Companies advertise their materials in teacher magazines, promoting decreased prep time and the interactive learning experiences recommended by progressive educators.

In **1977**, Exxon scientists accurately predicted future warming of about 0.2°C per decade due to fossil fuel emissions.

With Shell Canada, SEEDS launches a Summer Institute for teachers and an Energy Literacy Series for grades 6-12.

1980s

In response to a growing public awareness of climate change and possibility of government action to stop it, the industry sows doubt about climate science and secures public support for the continued consumption of oil and gas.

1985 British Petroleum (BP), Cenovus, Suncor, and ConocoPhillips Canada establish Inside Education with a mission to provide environmental education with an industry-friendly focus on “energy literacy.”

Industry education strategies include: sponsoring school activities, providing branded materials to schools; partnering with government to develop curricula; and, indirectly funding and supporting third-party education providers.

Past 20 Years

As early as **1954**, scientists were informing industry leaders that the burning of fossil fuels was affecting atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide.

By **1959**, nuclear scientist Edward Teller was warning the American Petroleum Institute about global warming risks from fossil fuels.

1976 Society of Environment and Energy Development Studies Foundation (SEEDS) established by Calgary Power and other Alberta energy affiliates. SEEDS is still running today.

The industry turns to third-party education providers as a way to promote industry perspectives on environmental issues.

1970s

By **1979**, Exxon privately acknowledged that fossil fuel consumption would cause “dramatic environmental effects before the year 2050”.

The rise of neoliberalism and government funding cuts paved the way for corporate involvement in education.

In **1988**, the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change was established.

In **1989**, Exxon helped create the Global Climate Coalition to question the scientific basis for concern about climate change.

The Global Climate Coalition identified education as a field they wanted to influence.

1990s

Government funding cuts continue. Corporations provide schools with fully developed curriculum materials, classroom equipment, and teacher training.

In **2015**, the UN Special Rapporteur in field of cultural rights calls for a ban on all commercial marketing & advertising in schools



Fossil Fuel Industry Strategies in Education

Over the last twenty years, with the increasing frequency of climate-related disasters and the rise of youth activism on climate change, the oil and gas industry shifted from their previous tactic of sowing climate doubt to a strategy of delaying climate action. Industry stakeholders have developed relationships with an expanding number of third-party education organizations and have added this approach to their repertoire of strategies for engaging in education, which include three main modes of influence:

- ◆ Sponsoring school activities and providing branded educational materials to schools

- ◆ Establishing partnerships with government to develop curricula and resources

- ◆ Indirectly funding and supporting third-party environmental education providers.

Direct Involvement

By directly funding school events, oil and gas corporations can present themselves as supporters of education and build brand loyalty. Through branded educational materials, the oil and gas industry benefits from the respect and influence that schools enjoy and secures legitimacy for the content of the materials. Their presence and power in schools work to normalize fossil fuels as integral to modern life.²⁴

Sponsorship

Sponsorship of school events and activities is a common strategy used by the fossil fuel industry to directly engage with school communities, particularly in regions with extensive oil and gas operations. For example,

- ◆ In Saskatchewan, SaskEnergy, a Crown corporation that delivers fossil gas, is a leading sponsor of public-school science fairs.²⁵
- ◆ In Alberta, Chevron sponsors expenses-paid class field trips to the Chevron Open Minds Zoo School at the Calgary Zoo, for “an educational adventure...students will never forget.”²⁶
- ◆ In Sarnia, Ontario, where Imperial Oil has one of its largest refinery operations, the company partnered with Forests Canada to host information sessions at a local Sarnia high school about the importance of tree planting in their communities, one of the company’s many community outreach activities.²⁷





▲ Image from The Abbotsford News

Energy Champions is presented by FortisBC and the BC Lions. Using “heroes” to deliver their message is an effective way for companies to not only normalize their products, but to elevate them.

Having been driven to close one school program, FortisBC simply moved on and is now supporting another environmental education program called Live It Earth, which can also be accessed through the company’s website.³⁰

Some oil and gas companies deliver presentations in classrooms. FortisBC’s Energy Champions program for K–7 is delivered by BC Lions football players under the FortisBC brand. The stated goal of the program is “to share information with students about saving energy and how we’re working toward achieving a lower-carbon energy future.”³¹

Oil and gas companies also connect with educators through teacher and student conferences. At the Central Alberta Teachers’ Convention in 2023, representatives from the Pathways Alliance presented on “how Canadian Natural and industry are collaborating towards net zero through the Pathways Alliance and what it means to Canada.”³² The organization Ten Peaks, which receives industry funding, runs a conference for grade 7–12 students and teachers that often features speakers from oil and gas companies.³³

Government Partnerships

In some provinces, fossil fuel corporations have partnered with governments to develop curricula and other resources. In 2024, the Alberta government published a curriculum framework that appears to have been developed with oil and gas industry involvement and includes the expectation that students should “know the global significance of Alberta’s vast oil reserves and Alberta’s reputation as the most ethical producer of oil in the world.”³⁴ A report by the Investigative Journalism Foundation, published in *The Tyee*, found that the Safety in Schools Foundation (SiS), a nonprofit funded by TC Energy and Canadian Natural, had been lobbying to include “oil and gas studies” in Alberta’s curriculum. Alberta Energy Minister Brian Jean is featured on SiS’s website “congratulating the organization on its oil and gas education initiatives.”³⁵

A curriculum framework published by the Alberta government includes the expectation that students “know the global significance of Alberta’s vast oil reserves and Alberta’s reputation as the most ethical producer of oil in the world.”



Indirect Involvement: Third-Party Organizations

The industry's most common means of influencing education is by funding third-party education nonprofits. These organizations need funding to pay staff, create resources, and run programs. In the absence of other sources of funding, they may rely on large donations from the oil and gas sector to continue operations. As well, having an education system that is open to commercialization has normalized corporate involvement. While it is certainly the case that many of the educators employed by industry-funded organizations make valuable contributions to environmental and climate change education, the evidence suggests that industry involvement influences the topics that are covered, and those that are omitted.

Third-party organizations can be divided into three categories: a.) organizations founded and funded by the fossil fuel industry; b.) industry-funded organizations that also include industry representatives on their boards; and c.) organizations to which the industry contributes some financial support.

Fossil Fuel Influence in Third-Party Education Organizations

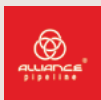


- Industry-Funded Nonprofits with Industry-Connected Boards
- Non-profit Organizations Founded and Funded by Industry
- Environmental education nonprofits that receive funding from the oil and gas industry



Organizations Founded and Funded by Industry

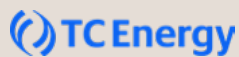
Nonprofit environmental education organizations founded and funded by industry typically convey positive messages about fossil fuel use, while limiting education on environmental and climate issues. With funding from the oil and gas industry, such organizations are generally able to produce educational materials, run professional programs, and sponsor events free of charge for teachers and students. Moreover, they can do these things on a much bigger scale than other environmental education nonprofits, giving them an outsize influence. The two most prominent examples are SEEDS Connections and Inside Education.



SEEDS Connections:

Founded as SEEDS by Calgary Power in 1976 with support from other oil and gas companies, they currently receive support from ConocoPhillips, Cenovus, Imperial Oil, Alliance Pipeline, ATCO and Rife Resources, as well as other companies with investments in oil and gas extraction, such as RBC and TD Bank.³⁶ By 2006, SEEDS was offering its programs to “over 8,000 Canadian elementary, middle, junior high, and senior high schools.”³⁷ In 2014, SEEDS changed its name to SEEDS Connections³⁸ and expanded its topics to include climate change, conservation, and water.³⁹

Generate 2025 Sponsors



Inside Education:

Inside Education has the staff and resources to reach large numbers of teachers and students across Canada. According to their Impact Report, in 2023 alone Inside Education reached 24,961 students, hosted 417 teachers at their professional development programs, and had 1,089 teachers and students attend youth summits and innovation days.⁴⁰ These numbers are down from 2019 when they reached 32,518 students across Canada. Inside Education's programming covers energy, climate change, and conservation.⁴¹

One of Inside Education's initiatives, a "climate and energy education" summit called Generate, offers a clear example of the reach and resources of industry-funded education events. This free, four-day summit for high school students is sponsored by some of the largest oil and gas companies in Canada, including Cenovus, Canadian Natural and Suncor. Generate includes meals, accommodation, and a travel subsidy, and promises to help students

- ◆ gain a better understanding of Alberta's energy and climate story from experts, innovators, and young leaders;
- ◆ participate in immersive tours, speaker sessions, and hands-on workshops;
- ◆ expand networks and create lasting memories with like-minded students and teachers; and
- ◆ become empowered and supported to make a meaningful difference in [their] school and community with an environmental leadership project.⁴²

Industry-Funded Nonprofits with Industry-Connected Boards



Some environmental education nonprofits receive industry funding and have representatives with close ties to industry on their boards. As governing members, these industry representatives can play a role in defining an organization's mission, strategy, and goals, while also overseeing programming. Examples include:

- ◆ **Let's Talk Science** Founded by a scientist, it grew from a small nonprofit into an organization with over 100 full-time staff and connections with dozens of universities, colleges, and research institutes.⁴³ In addition to receiving funding from numerous oil and gas companies, the Let's Talk Science board includes a representative who worked for Enerplus and who now works for U.S.-based oil and gas company Chord Energy.⁴⁴
- ◆ **Ten Peaks** Established by an individual who worked for the oil and gas industry, Ten Peaks receives funding from multiple fossil fuel companies and includes representatives with close ties to the oil and gas industry on its board.⁴⁵



Nonprofits that Receive Funding from the Oil and Gas Industry

Numerous organizations receive industry funding but do not have oil and gas representatives on their boards. While that can be an improvement over other governing structures, many of those boards include representatives from companies that are stakeholders in oil and gas extraction, such as banks that finance the industry. Examples include **Earth Rangers**,⁴⁶ **Ducks Unlimited**,⁴⁷ **Live It Earth**,⁴⁸ and **Green Learning**.⁴⁹

Petro-Pedagogy: How Industry Has Influenced Climate Change Education

By becoming involved in education, oil and gas companies can influence, directly and indirectly, how and what information about climate change and climate solutions is conveyed in classrooms. Emily Eaton and Nick Day coined the term “petro-pedagogy” to describe these fossil fuel industry education strategies, and argue that teaching centred on individual actions serves to insulate fossil fuel industries from criticism and “dissuade young people from questioning or understanding the role of corporate power in the climate crisis.”⁵⁰

We expand their use of the term to include all of the strategies outlined below.

Petro-Pedagogy Strategies



Bias-balancing: learning that includes both environmental and industry perspectives on climate change is presented as “bias-balanced.” However this does not account for the vested interests of the fossil fuel industry, or the outside impact of fossil fuels on driving climate change, and on human and planetary health.



Greenwashing: learning activities that exaggerate the industry’s pro-environmental actions and/or omit discussion of their role in atmospheric harm and biodiversity loss. As well, these materials often provide marketing opportunities by connecting company brands with environmental education programs and materials.



“Redwashing”*: education programming that presents uniformly positive representations of the industry’s relationships with Indigenous peoples, ignoring Indigenous resistance to and harms (to culture, lands, and health) from fossil fuel project, and co-opting Indigenous cultural symbols and languages in their promotion of products, operations, and partnerships. This has been termed “redwashing” by the Yellowhead Institute and other Indigenous scholars and activists.



Individual: emphasizes actions individuals can/should take and typically ignores collective actions, conveying the idea that climate change can be solved by individual consumer choices rather than cultural, societal, and economic changes.



Technological optimism: emphasizes technological fixes rather than education about system-wide change and the need to transition away from fossil fuels toward renewable energy.

*We are using this term in recognition and support of the leadership of Indigenous activists and thought-leaders who named and described this issue.

A prominent example of petro-pedagogy can be found in Energy IQ, a program developed by Canadian Geographic in partnership with the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP). The program launched in 2013, moved online during Covid, and ran until 2022, when over 200 academics from geography departments, together with other educators, students, and parents, sent an open letter to the Royal Canadian Geographical Society of Canada (RCGS), calling on them to “sever your ties with fossil fuels.”⁵¹

As these images from a now-defunct blog on CAPP’s website show, the program used the “bias-balanced” approach to teach about energy, obscuring the dire need to transition to clean sources of energy, while giving the impression that fossil fuels are essential to Canada’s economy.

POWER UP YOUR ENERGY IQ

Presented by Canadian Geographic Education and the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, Energy IQ gives teachers and students a balanced, curriculum-linked look at energy across Canada.



ENERGYIQ



Pushback: Climate Change Education Initiatives Free from Fossil Fuel Influence



In one workshop, a teacher noted her Grade 5 students are very concerned about climate change, convinced that Canada must switch immediately off fossil fuels to renewables only. Through the workshops and the Energy IQ program itself, teachers get information from experts on energy-related topics. Teachers are then equipped to provide a **balanced perspective** in their classrooms — highlighting the pros and cons of different energy sources, able to present energy-related issues with a clearer understanding, recognizing the **role oil and natural gas** play in Canada's economy, and investigating timelines and consequences behind different energy choices.

Although petro-pedagogy in its various forms exerts enormous influence, it is not all-encompassing. There are many groups calling for critical climate justice education and a number of youth, Indigenous educator, and teacher groups are developing their own programs and initiatives. These programs differ significantly from those developed by industry-funded organizations. For a start, they do not obscure the role of the oil and gas industry in driving climate change, or define climate action primarily in terms of individual behavioural change. While there is considerable variation, broadly speaking, the characteristics of these programs include:

- ◆ A commitment to evidence-based climate change education;
- ◆ Attention to the root causes of the climate crisis in political, social, economic and colonial systems—and the role of the oil and gas industry within these systems;
- ◆ A focus on intersectional approaches to climate justice with particular attention to decolonization and Indigenous justice;
- ◆ Honesty about the need for urgent action to avoid the worst impacts; and
- ◆ A concern to engage students in meaningful collective action that attends to their well-being.



The Way Forward

Although public education falls under provincial and territorial jurisdiction, action is needed at all levels of government, and by civil society advocates as well as by professional societies, to implement the necessary changes.

The federal government can play a more active role in strengthening climate change education and limiting fossil fuel influence, primarily by providing leadership, convening experts from the field of environmental education and provincial Ministries of Education, and providing funding. Moreover, the federal government has a responsibility to advance climate change education in keeping with its commitments to international agreements.

At the provincial and territorial level, Ministries of Education are responsible for writing overarching education policies and

goals, developing the curricula taught by teachers, and overseeing teacher training and professional development.⁵² In each of these domains, the ministries could exercise their authority to limit oil and gas industry influence and develop policies to strengthen climate change education.

At the local level, as schools and their school boards are closely connected to their communities, they can be responsive to community voices on these issues. In addition, they can develop climate action plans that prioritize robust education strategies, and regulations to prohibit corporate influence over education.

Refer to the full version of [*Polluting Education: The Influence of Fossil Fuels on Children's Education in Canada*](#) for detailed recommendations and ideas for action.

Conclusion

Through sponsorship, partnerships, and funding of organizations, the fossil fuel industry has gained significant influence over how climate change and energy issues are taught in schools. Their involvement presents clear conflicts of interest, and has limited education about the causes of climate change as well as the solutions.

The scientific consensus is clear that emissions from oil and gas operations are the leading cause of climate change, but this important fact is left out of many of the materials produced with industry support. Petro-pedagogy strategies, including the “bias-balanced” approach to energy education, and greenwashing the industry as environmentally friendly, all serve to promote a positive view of the oil and gas industry, while masking the urgency of the climate crisis.

In terms of solutions, the focus on individual actions and technological fixes works to obscure the responsibility of the industry and discourage discussion of systemic climate solutions and the urgent need to transition away from fossil fuels.

Misinformation practices are part of the fossil-fuel industry playbook and have caused critical delays to climate action around the world. In Canada, the greenwashing amendments that passed as part of Bill C-59 are intended to address false and misleading statements in advertising. However,

misleading information in classrooms is even more insidious, and fossil-fuel influence in climate education is not covered by greenwashing laws. Of all the groups impacted by the climate crisis, children and youth stand to suffer disproportionately. To put an end to climate miseducation, the institutions responsible for education and children’s well-being need to intervene with policy leadership and funding.

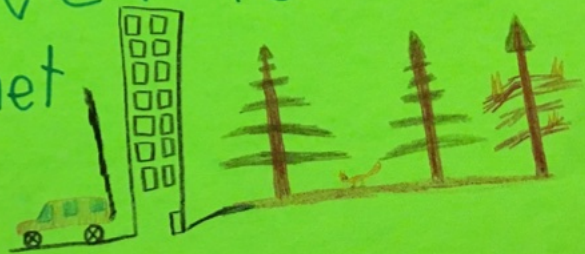
The climate crisis demands transformative change across society. And education has been cited as a key component of this work. Comprehensive climate change education—based on science, centred on justice, and free from fossil-fuel industry interference—is possible, and it’s essential to give youth the tools they need to build a better future.

Already, students, teachers, parents, and civil society groups are pushing back against the fossil fuel industry’s involvement in education. Youth-led initiatives are calling for climate justice education that addresses root causes and empowers students as agents of change. Indigenous educators are developing programs that centre Indigenous knowledge and values. And some teachers are creating their own climate education resources, free from industry influence. These efforts point the way forward to an education that empowers youth and catalyzes the next generation of informed, engaged climate leaders.



help ocean

Save the planet



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*This paper is the summary of a longer report: *Polluting Education: The Influence of Fossil Fuels on Children's Education in Canada*. The full report can be found here: <https://www.forourkids.ca/pollutingeducation>