

S4 E3: From Climate Awareness to Collective Action

Episode Highlights

This episode explores the various angles of climate change and discusses:

- Canadians' perceptions of climate change;
- Direct impacts of climate change on teaching and learning;
- An example of how teachers' unions are advocating for improved classroom conditions.

From building climate change awareness to adapting classrooms and advocating for better learning and working conditions, this episode underscores that we all have a role to play in addressing the effects of climate change.

Learning for a Sustainable Future (LSF): Canadians on Climate Change and Education

The national surveys from LSF aim to address the research gap in climate change education, which is recognized as one of the most powerful tools to address this crisis. Survey co-authors Jenn Stevens and Dr. Karen Acton detail the key findings.

The 2025 survey revealed that 44% of Canadians reported personally experiencing climate change effects, yet slightly more believe its seriousness is exaggerated.

A resounding 87% of Canadians are willing to make personal changes to address climate change, while only 20% believe governments are effectively addressing the crisis.

Canadians strongly support climate education across all subjects and are asking for climate education that is holistic, science-based, and solutions-focused. They want climate education to not only address the science, but to look at the social, economic and political impacts of climate change. However, teachers need more time, professional development, and classroom resources, with only 22% feeling supported by school leadership.

Over two thirds of Canadians believe that the work and voices of young people can inspire meaningful climate action – a view held most strongly by the educators and the students themselves. While young people can be powerful catalysts for change, we must not leave the burden on youth to solve these problems alone.

In comparison with other demographic groups surveyed, educators were the most likely to say that climate change poses a risk to Canadians and were the most willing to change their own lives to help reduce the effects of climate change.

Clint Johnston: Teaching and Learning While Experiencing the Effects of Climate Change

Climate change is no longer a distant environmental issue. It's a public education issue as teachers and students are actually living through the impacts of climate.

Right now, there are regulations in most jurisdictions that set minimum temperatures for classrooms. We know how cold a classroom is allowed to be before it's considered unsafe, but there are no regulations for maximum temperatures.

Canadians also understand that this is a problem. Our polling with Abacus Data in September 2025 found that 67% of Canadians support creating a national maximum temperature standard for K to 12 classrooms.

We must ensure that students can learn safely, and that educators can work in environments that support their health and well-being.

Sarah Lowes: Classroom Perspective and Bargaining for Change

Educators are dealing with a dual challenge: managing the very real physical disruptions caused by extreme weather, and then simultaneously supporting students who are struggling emotionally. We're seeing rising levels of "eco-anxiety": students feel afraid, sad, angry, and sometimes deeply helpless about the future. As teachers help students make sense of those fears, they're carrying an intensified emotional workload, adding strain to a profession that's already incredibly demanding.

As a part of CTF/FCE's Work Group on Climate Change, educators across the country are advancing climate action in education. The Work Group is developing a "green bargaining guide" to help educators address climate change as a health and safety issue through collective agreements, including establishing maximum classroom temperature thresholds.

Equity and climate justice in education can't be treated as separate conversations. Climate change is a human rights issue that disproportionately impacts marginalized communities, particularly Indigenous communities that do not have access to clean drinking water. Climate action in education must work for everyone, or it just doesn't work at all. Collective bargaining can help make sure our responses are fair, inclusive, and grounded in local realities



Selina Pellerin: From Advocacy to Action – PEITF’s “Keep Cool, Keep Learning” campaign

The Prince Edward Island Teachers' Federation (PEITF) spent five years advocating for heat safety measures in schools after record-breaking temperatures in June 2021. Educators lacked adequate protection from extreme heat, and it became an occupational health and safety issue.

Despite extensive collaborative efforts involving school boards, the Workers' Compensation Board, the Home and School Federation, and the Department of Health, PEITF achieved virtually no progress until launching the “Keep Cool, Keep Learning” campaign in spring 2025. They asked members to use hygrometers to document the temperature with humidity in their classroom and publicly share actual classroom temperatures on social media. Before the campaign was launched, PEITF met with Minister and Deputy Minister of Education and gave them a heads up about the public awareness campaign. Within four days, the Deputy Minister committed to providing fans for all teachers demonstrating that public pressure and parent awareness can effectively move stalled policy issues.

PEITF continues pushing for short-term policy development, medium-term climate-controlled areas in all schools by 2028, and long-term full climate control across all schools by 2035, recognizing that climate change will make extreme heat an ongoing challenge requiring systemic investment, mitigation, and adaptation.

Please note – this document was produced with some assistance from Descript’s in-app AI tool. The author reviewed, verified, and is responsible for all content.