Canadian schools given low marks on climate education



By Karen S. Acton

Only nine per cent of Canadian students learn about climate change often in school, while 42 per cent say it's rarely or never discussed in the classroom.

These are some of the concerning findings from the 2025 national survey at the nonprofit Learning for a Sustainable Future (LSF), where I serve as a research consultant. Our team surveyed over 4,200 people, including students, educators, parents and the general public.

The report, called *From Awareness to Action: Canadians' Views on Climate Change and Education*, reveals a widening gap between public concern and the education system's lack of response.

We conducted the survey in partnership with the pollster Leger and supported by the federal government. It comes at a critical moment as Canadians grapple with increasingly severe climate impacts and growing recognition that education is vitally important to addressing climate change.

The message is clear: Canadians want schools to do more. A strong majority of respondents (62 per cent) believe climate change should be a high priority in education. More than half (56 per cent) believe it should be taught by all teachers.

Understanding is slipping

According to the survey, 80 per cent of Canadians accept that climate change is real and impacting their lives. Most (67 per cent) believe we are in a climate emergency, yet this belief has declined from 72 per cent in 2022.

Also slipping is Canadians' understanding of climate change, as the pass rate for the survey's 10-question quiz dipped to 57 per cent in 2025 from 67 per cent in 2022.

Fewer respondents correctly identified human activities as the primary cause of climate change, or named greenhouse gas emissions as the predominant factor. Many still mistakenly believe the ozone hole is to blame, highlighting one of many

persistent climate misconceptions.

Also concerning was the increase in Canadians who felt that the seriousness of climate change is exaggerated.

A recent report by climate communications centre Re.Climate noted a similar decline in public perception of how much of a threat climate change poses. In 2023, 44 per cent of Canadians said reducing carbon emissions was a top energy policy priority. By 2025, that number had dropped to 31 per cent.

Concern about climate change seems to have declined due to competing economic pressures, global instability and political polarisation.

Misinformation adds to the challenge

The LSF survey highlights Canadians' dissatisfaction with climate education. When asked to grade schools on how well they were addressing climate change issues, only four per cent gave schools an "A." Three-quarters of Canadians gave a "C" or lower.

One dominant concern included addressing the spread of climate misinformation. Only 17 per cent of Canadians felt confident in their ability to distinguish between real and false climate news.

Misinformation is a growing barrier to public understanding and action on climate issues. For many young people, social media is a dominant source of climate information, but it's not always a reliable one.

To address this, almost 80 per cent of respondents, and in particular 87 per cent of educators, agree that climate education in schools should focus more on critical thinking and media literacy.

Teachers willing, but under-supported

The good news is that almost half of the educators we surveyed felt confident about their ability to teach climate change. Many are incorporating more climate-related projects and lifestyle and consumer changes into the classroom.

However, many barriers remain. Most educators still spend fewer than 10 hours per year on climate topics and 42 per cent rarely address it at all. A full 60 per cent of teachers told us they want to do more but need professional development to feel equipped.

Teachers need more time, resources and strategies to address how climate change connects to broader issues like mental health, social justice and Indigenous knowledge.

Educators are also seeking a school-wide culture that promotes climate change education, but nearly half said they lack support from their principal or school boards.

Unsurprisingly, given the global nature of climate change, the challenges voiced by educators are not unique to Canada. Surveys of teachers in England and the United States found they face similar obstacles, compounded by low teacher confidence, the complexity of the topic and leadership not supporting climate change as a priority.

Students need the opportunity

One of the most hopeful takeaways is that students want to learn more about climate change at school, beginning in the early grades. When asked what they would tell their teacher, students told us they wanted lessons that go beyond the science to include real-world solutions and personal empowerment.

They called for open classroom discussions, a clearer understanding of the impacts of climate change and concrete strategies for action.

As one student put it: "Present it to me in a way that's relevant that I can understand and tell me how I can personally make an impact."

Another added: "Everyone needs to do their part, or nothing will change!"

These appeals echo those from the recent *"Voice of 1,000 Kids"* survey, which found young people [across Canada and the USA] want adults to take the climate crisis more seriously and step up to help solve it.

A path forward

The LSF survey found that 76 per cent of respondents recognise that systemic change is needed to address climate challenges, yet only 19 per cent believe government is doing a good job.

This suggests strong public demand for policy action. Canadian governments must introduce mandatory climate curriculum standards, increased funding for teacher professional learning and resources and transformative teaching strategies to foster critical thinking and empowerment.

Almost 70 per cent of respondents said they believe young people can inspire important climate action. Supporting school-wide cultures that embrace sustainability isn't just good teaching – it's a pathway to broader social change.

Now more than ever, we need a reimagined education system that values climate learning as a core competency. Policymakers and education leaders must rise to meet this challenge before another generation of students graduate feeling unprepared to face the defining issue of their time.

Karen S. Acton is Assistant Professor, Educational Leadership and Policy, OISE, University of Toronto. She is also a consultant for Learning for a Sustainable Future (LSF). The opinions expressed in this article are that of the author and do not necessarily reflect any official policies or positions of the AEU or SSTUWA. This article was first published on The Conversation *website and has been reproduced here with permission.*

This article is republished from The Conversation under a Creative Commons license. Read the original article.

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
ABN 54 478 094 635 © 2026