

A Primer on **Red for Ed**

What is **Red for Ed**?

The Red for Ed (education) campaign has several key goals, all aimed at improving public education. No matter which union or community has adopted the motto and action, the main objective has remained the same: to send a clear, visible message to decision-makers. ETFO's message about the importance of adequately funding public education is targeted at the provincial government and school boards.

Why the colour red?

Red was selected because it symbolizes:

- the urgency of the crisis in public education
- that the need to improve supports for students through an immediate investment has become an emergency
- visibility as the colour stands out, signals our collective concern, and demonstrates a broad movement reflecting our union power

Wearing red is a recognizable, familiar, and effective way to express our bargaining demands in schools during the instructional day and in the community when we are not in the workplace.

Let's be visible!

On April 29 and on designated ETFO days, wear **Red for Ed and your smaller classes **BIG DIFFERENCE** button/sticker.**

Be sure to post photos of your action on your personal social media and include the hashtag #BigDifference. You never know who might see your post and start a conversation about the importance of protecting and investing in public education.

Is wearing **Red for Ed** permitted at work?

Yes! Canadian courts have established that workers, including educators, who wear a button, T-shirt, or other accessory in the workplace in support of a lawful union action/campaign, are exercising their right to freedom of expression in connection with a Charter-protected activity.

An employer that attempts to restrict union activity and these types of expressions would be violating your Charter rights.

However, there are limits. Items worn at work must include messaging that is acceptable in a school environment (no profanity) and should not disrupt normal work activities or your professional duties.

Origin of **Red for Ed**

This visual campaign concept originated in early 2018 among educators in the United States who were entering bargaining amid messaging from state lawmakers that education budgets needed to be balanced or profitable as priorities shifted away from meeting actual student needs. The grassroots movement began online with a social media campaign, primarily on X (formerly Twitter), using the hashtag #RedforEd to unify the message that budgets should go into the red to meet students' educational needs.

As #RedforEd gained traction and momentum, it evolved into in-person actions in which educators, students, and supporters of publicly funded education wore red clothing - often on Fridays - to demand increased school funding, higher teacher salaries, and better classroom resources.

As with all good campaigns, it is important to have a visible demonstration and growth that captures decision-makers' attention.

Red for Ed exemplifies how a broad movement develops. It began as a bargaining demand that turned into a hashtag, spread to collective action in person and online, and evolved into a unifying movement among education workers, educators, parents, and allies across North America. In 2026, the movement remains a force.

ETFO's involvement in Red for Ed

Education unions in Canada embraced the Red for Ed campaign, making similar demands for increased funding for public education and resources for student needs, as well as smaller class sizes. During the 2019 round of central bargaining, ETFO encouraged members and parents to wear red on designated days, typically on Fridays. Wearing Red for Ed quickly spread across communities as a signal of support for the bargaining team and educator demands.

Images of an impressive sea of members in red from schools across the province appeared online. Many locals even created their own red apparel for members and shared the hashtag. Over the years, our union has continued to utilize the Red for Ed tactic as a unifying force.

Red for Ed progression

During the 2019 central bargaining round, several parent groups handed out red felt squares to wear as a symbol of solidarity with educators. This community action increased awareness of the bargaining campaign and boosted unity. Outside of ETFO, other education unions in Ontario also took up the action by wearing red to convey a unifying message. At times, education affiliates organized a joint action, selecting a common day to wear red and post messages on social media.

After 2019, numerous education unions across Canada embraced Red for Ed, and it was frequently used as a solidarity action to support other unions in bargaining. Examples of union participation that have continued Red for Ed include the BC Teachers' Association, the Alberta Teachers' Association, the Manitoba Teachers' Association and the Nova Scotia Teachers' Association.

The Canadian Teachers' Federation also held a National Day of Action in February 2020, and teachers, education workers, students, and parents joined in, wearing red. This collective action demonstrated to governments from coast to coast to coast that public education is one of the most important investments in supporting our future.