

Distribution of this Bulletin

Please ensure this bulletin is circulated to all administrative staff in both the district office and schools who must rely on the collective agreement in the performance of their duties.

Red for BC Ed Campaign (#RedforBCed)

We have received questions from school districts regarding the “#RedforBCed” political campaign being supported by local teachers’ unions and the BC Teachers’ Federation (BCTF).

This offshoot of the “Red for Ed” campaign, which was started by teachers in the United States, is intended to focus advocacy on increased funding for public education as well as a “...demand that BC teachers receive an equitable salary increase.” Teachers are asked to wear red in support of the campaign and districts may become aware of teachers participating in rallies or coordinating wearing red clothing to school on certain days of the week.

Districts’ questions have centred on what teachers are allowed to do while at school. The issues as to whether a teacher can carry out such activities are complex and directly relate to a 2013 arbitration award. A brief overview of the award is provided below for your information. In general, teachers do have the right of freedom of expression as long as their actions do not potentially cause harm or bias to students and/or disruption to the education system.

The following guiding questions are provided to assist districts in considering whether the particular circumstances they are encountering are of concern and whether BCPSEA should be contacted:

- Does the wearing of the red shirt promote engagement of students in union/political discussions in the classroom?
- Is there any evidence that the school curriculum was not taught or that there was disruption or disturbance in the classroom?
- Does the message on the red shirt attack or blame the employer or government?
- Can the employer demonstrate a detrimental effect on its capacity to manage or on its reputation?

If your district has evidence that the campaign has clearly negatively impacted students or if you encounter situations where teachers are engaging students in discussions of a union/political nature, please contact your BCPSEA [labour relations liaison](#).

Districts may also wish to consider direct communication to schools to ensure that teachers are aware of their professional obligations and, in particular, that they:

- must ensure the educational process is not disrupted as a result of the Union’s campaign
- must not encourage students to wear red to support teachers

- must refrain from any acts or communications which give the impression that students who are perceived to support teachers' political campaign will be favoured
- must ensure they do not engage in activity which could undermine the public's confidence in the school system.

Background

❖ Union Political Messages on School Grounds

Although the Court of Appeal determined that insulating students **in general** from political messages is not a pressing and substantial objective to prohibit freedom of expression, it also re-confirmed that teachers' right to freedom of expression in schools is not unlimited (see [@issue No. 2013-04](#) dated May 21, 2013).

This means that while the employer is not entitled to impose an absolute ban on all political messages in schools (such as wearing red shirts), each case is unique and must be evaluated on its own specific facts to determine whether the viewing of political materials or discussion of topics with students had caused or could potentially cause harm or bias to students and/or disruption to the education system.

The court commented that,

“at a minimum... the professionalism of teachers includes their obligation to ensure that any discussion in which they engage in the school setting concerning the education of children must be a reasoned one. Where the issue upon which teachers choose to exercise their rights to free speech is a political one, their rights must be balanced against the rights of their students to an education free from bias.

While exposing children to diverse societal views and opinions is an important part of their educational experience, exposure to only one view of an issue, where there are legitimate competing views could represent a failure to uphold the principles of tolerance and impartiality that the education system must promote and foster.”

❖ Distribution of Union/Political Materials to Parents

The procedure regarding distribution of union/political materials to parents on school grounds can be found in [@issue No. 2019-06](#) dated September 5, 2019 and [@issue No. 2019-03](#) dated June 24, 2019.