



Board of Education  
Nanaimo Ladysmith Public Schools  
395 Wakesiah Avenue  
Nanaimo, BC V9R 3K6

Re: The unacceptable use of educational materials provided by corporations.

“If you're not paying for the product, you are the product,” according to Tristan Harris, a former Google design ethicist. In a school setting, that means a corporation’s payback for providing free lessons is name recognition in what has been called “Trojan horse marketing” and implied trust in the brand. If the brand name is attached to the material presented by the teacher, it must have integrity, right?

Using branded corporate materials in schools gives corporations the opportunity to promote and normalize a product for a whole new generation of Canadians. In fact, schools are giving implicit approval of those products or that industry. Imagine the outrage if Marlboro was the brand logo on a lesson about agriculture. Why do we care? Because the tobacco industry knowingly sold products that killed billions of people and we don’t want savvy marketers using schools to normalize smoking.

Equally, normalizing the use of fossil fuels cannot be allowed at this time of climate crisis. Emily Eaton and Nick Day<sup>1</sup> at the University of Regina found that educational materials from the fossil fuel industry highlight their use in everyday life and, if actions to reduce greenhouse gases are mentioned, the emphasis is on individual actions, such as taking shorter showers or turning off lights. Focusing on individual actions rather than introducing the concept of system-level changes that are needed to transition off fossil fuels and electrify everything is another subtle form of misinformation meant to delay broader climate action. We no longer have the luxury of delaying climate action.

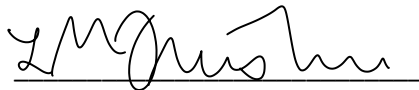
Nanaimo Ladysmith Public Schools’ Environment Stewardship Action Plan (ESAP)<sup>2</sup> lists as an objective: “Ensure professional learning resource collection represents diverse resources for supporting our Environmental Sustainability Action Plan.” Promoting the status quo, with respect to burning fossil fuels, is not consistent with current climate science and contradicts the ethos of the Environment Stewardship Action Plan.

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres said: “Our planet is fast approaching tipping points that will make climate chaos irreversible. We are on a highway to climate hell with our foot still on the accelerator.” In BC, we are already seeing the devastating effects of climate change, well in advance of what the climate models predicted. A deadly heat dome and devastating wildfires in all regions. Record high temperatures that led to the town of Lytton burning to the ground. An atmospheric river that destroyed highways, caused landslides and deaths, flooded vast areas, and cost us billions of dollars. Ellen Field<sup>3</sup>, Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Education at Lakehead University, says there is a “moral imperative to educate young people about the world that they will be graduating into.”

The sole purpose of a corporation is to make money for its shareholders. We should never expect them to educate our children about abolishing the burning of fossil fuels because it is not in their best interest.

The [NLPS Energy Cup toolkit](#) currently recommends FortisBC Energy Leaders lessons "to be used by teachers to support curriculum and core competencies in grades K-12." We urge the Nanaimo-Ladysmith Public Schools Board of Education to evaluate the educational materials provided by FortisBC to determine their appropriateness given the extraordinary situation we face. "Every year of insufficient action to keep global warming below 1.5 degrees Celsius drives us closer to the brink, increasing systemic risks and reducing our resilience against climate catastrophe."<sup>4</sup>

Sincerely,



Laurie Friskie  
Secretary, Nanaimo Climate Action Hub



Heather Baitz  
Chair, Nanaimo Climate Action Hub

#### References:

1. Emily M. Eaton & Nick A. Day (2020) Petro-pedagogy: fossil fuel interests and the obstruction of climate justice in public education, *Environmental Education Research*, 26:4, 457-473, DOI: 10.1080/13504622.2019.1650164
2. Nanaimo Ladysmith Public Schools. (2022). Environment Stewardship Action Plan (ESAP). Retrieve from: <https://indd.adobe.com/view/e877e599-04ff-4109-9b7e-fa6956507e4d>
3. Cruickshank, Ainslie. "Why Are Oil-and-Gas Companies Developing Lesson Plans for Teachers?" *The Walrus*. Aug. 26, 2022.
4. "Climate change making Earth 'uninhabitable' Guterres warns" *UN News Global Perspective Human Stories*. 23 March 2023.