

No Sweat Actions for high school teachers & students



Most high schools bulk-purchase clothing. Some have school uniforms, and most have team uniforms, band uniforms or staff uniforms. Many schools bulk purchase sweatshirts or caps bearing the school name and insignia. High school students and teachers concerned about sweatshops can raise awareness about sweatshop conditions in the apparel industry while lobbying their school and school board to take a stand against sweatshop practices. Here's how.

Objective

To convince your school or school board to adopt a No Sweat purchasing policy and, through your campaign, educate students about sweatshop abuses.

Who's responsible?

The first step is finding out who decides what to buy and from what companies. For most schools, policy decisions on student uniforms are made at the school board level. In some cases, purchasing decisions are made by the school or the athletics department. You can find out by asking coaches and school administrators.

If the school board makes the purchasing decisions or sets policies for such decisions, contact your local trustee. She or he can tell you about the current policy (if there is one) regarding school uniforms, and the steps you need to take to change it. If your trustee isn't very sympathetic, call another trustee who might be more helpful.

Getting Started: The Four Basics



Research: Find out what uniforms and other school clothing are used at your school, and check the labels. Who makes the clothing, and in what countries? Make a list for future reference. Then find out who's responsible for policy decisions about uniforms (see above).



Organize a No Sweat group: At some schools, students have organized a lunch-time talk on sweatshops. At others, they have worked with teachers to arrange in-class discussions, or to organize a school assembly. At the event, circulate a sign-up sheet for students interested in joining the campaign. Depending on your school, you might be able to organize as a school club and thus have easier access to school space and resources for your events. Or, there may be existing groups you can work through – like the Student Council, OXFAM Canada, or Amnesty International.

Call students who've expressed interest in joining a group and arrange a meeting.

A No Sweat purchasing policy requires companies supplying school uniforms and bulk-purchased apparel for the school to abide by international labour standards and local laws, to make public the names and locations of the factories where those goods are made, and to accept independent monitoring of factory conditions.

A model No Sweat purchasing policy is available from the Maquila Solidarity Network at: www.maquilasolidarity.org





At your first meeting: Discuss what you're trying to achieve and who you need to influence in order to win a No Sweat policy. Then brainstorm ideas for education and action. We've included a few suggestions. You'll probably come up with ideas of your own. Choose your first actions and divide up responsibilities.



Contact other organizations: Student clubs, parent organizations, teacher and support staff unions, sympathetic school board members. Invite them to join with you in making a formal request to the school administration or school board.



Teachers

Teachers are playing a key role in campaigns for No Sweat purchasing policies. Below are some suggestions for teachers:

- ★ *Incorporate sweatshop issues into your curriculum.*
- ★ *Help organize classroom talks or student assemblies.*
- ★ *Provide support to students in researching companies and identifying decision makers.*
- ★ *Make contact with other teachers, staff and parents who might support a No Sweat policy.*
- ★ *Work with other teachers and students to adapt the model No Sweat purchasing policy to your situation.*
- ★ *Arrange meetings with sympathetic school board trustees.*
- ★ *Involve your union and the support staff union in lobbying your school board.*
- ★ *Urge your union to endorse the campaign and promote it at the city and provincial levels.*
- ★ *Make contact with sympathetic outside organizations that might support the campaign.*
- ★ *Work with other teachers, students and supporters in drafting and presenting a brief to the school board.*

Who's involved in the No Sweat campaign?

Organizations currently active in the No Sweat campaign include: the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), the Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN), OXFAM-Canada, Students Against Sweatshops-Canada (SAS-C), and the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE).

Action Ideas:

- ★ Ask students and teachers to sign a petition urging your school or school board to adopt a No Sweat purchasing policy.
- ★ Stage a Sweatshop Fashion Show at your school.
- ★ Ask permission to put up a clothesline in a hallway with information about working conditions written on T-shirts or other clothing hung on the line.
- ★ Arrange to set up a display or an information table on sweatshops and the No Sweat campaign.
- ★ Make a flyer about sweatshops and distribute it to students. Students at one school distributed a leaflet at a football game with a guide to referee signals on one side and information about Nike sweatshops on the other.
- ★ Arrange to speak to students in other clubs and classes about the issues. Teachers can arrange talks about sweatshops during their classes.
- ★ Write articles for your school newspaper.
- ★ Invite students to wear an armband, a No Sweat button or other material to show their support.
- ★ Show a video in your class about sweatshops or organize a school assembly with a video and speaker.
- ★ Hold a school-wide vote on the policy and report the results to the school board, or do a survey of students' opinions on the issue.
- ★ Contact outside supporters – students at other schools, unions, religious groups, women's groups – and ask them to write letters supporting your campaign.
- ★ Join with others in making a presentation to your school administration or school board on sweatshop practices and how a No Sweat policy will improve conditions.