

SOGI EDUCATION

ANSWERS TO FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC

How did SOGI originate and what is it?

In July 2016, Bill 27-Human Rights Code Amendment Act was passed to include “gender identity or expression” among the protected grounds covered by the BC Human Rights Code. The BC Ministry of Education followed in September of 2016 with its own directive asking that explicit references to sexual orientation and gender identity be added to the policies and codes of conduct in each school district. The [BC Ministry of Education has also produced a curriculum](#) for BC schools that addresses the general topics of diversity and tolerance.

SOGI stands for Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. The SOGI 1 2 3 learning resource was created by the ARC Foundation in collaboration with education partners, school districts and community organizations to assist with the delivery of the new curriculum.

The focus of the SOGI learning resource can be summed up as follows:

Every student understands and expresses their gender differently, with interests and choices that are common or less common for their biological sex. Some students may be unsure of their sexual orientation. Others may identify specifically as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, two-spirit, heterosexual, cisgender and more. A SOGI-inclusive school means all these experiences and identities are welcomed and never a cause for discrimination.

How does SOGI 1 2 3 work within the BC curriculum?

Educators have expressed the need for a variety of additional resources, including materials that address SOGI, to assist them with teaching the new curriculum. SOGI 1 2 3 is one of many optional learning resources created to help support the Ministry of Education prescribed curriculum on diversity (including discussion of race, ethnicity, religion and ability).

While SOGI 1 2 3 provides optional grade-level lesson plans that align with the curriculum, there is no "SOGI" curriculum. Discussion of SOGI is a sub-topic that can be addressed in the context of grade-appropriate student discussions of diversity, tolerance and inclusion.

What will my child learn?

The inclusive education curriculum is about students discussing diversity in society and the importance of treating everyone with dignity and respect, including individuals from the LGBTQ community. Individual teachers, however, review and determine the learning resources that are appropriate for teaching their students in regard to the general Ministry of Education curriculum. This may or may not include using the SOGI 1 2 3 learning resources.

A variety of age and grade appropriate topics may be addressed in a teacher’s actual lessons. For example, a Kindergarten / Grade 1 lesson on families may teach students that families exist in many forms. A lesson for older students may discourage students from saying “That’s so gay,” as the statement may negatively impact the welcoming atmosphere of schools.

The SOGI 1 2 3 materials are an optional resource that educators may utilize in addressing such topics. They are intended to align with the existing provincial curriculum but can also be customized by educators to meet the needs of their students.

What about school policies?

Each school district, through its board of education, has the autonomy to adopt its own policies and procedures regarding learning resources and budgets. They do not, however, have the right to override the provincially mandated curriculum; nor to ignore defined teacher autonomy in the classroom. In BC school districts, it is the local board of education that holds the responsibility to define this balance for their students and communities.

SOGI-inclusive school district policies on inclusion and tolerance may address such topics as student safety and harassment, inclusive activities, dress guidelines, self-identification and confidentiality. Parents and other community stakeholders are often invited to participate or comment on proposed new policies within school districts.

Why can't you just teach about bullying instead of talking about sexual orientation and gender identity? Aren't elementary-aged children too young to be talking about sexual orientation and gender identity?

We believe it is imperative that all students feel welcome in their classroom. Schools are responsible for creating safe, inclusive learning environments for EVERYONE. It is, therefore, important that every student has the opportunity to learn about their peers with a goal of building common understanding, tolerance and inclusivity.

Unfortunately, children may already be learning homophobic and transphobic slurs, or other barriers to inclusivity in the classroom, starting as early their primary years. The job of educators is to help make schools safe for all students by addressing such issues at all levels and in all grades.

Are students being told not to use "boy" or "girl" to describe themselves?

No, students have never been told this; nor is it part of the SOGI learning resource. Teachers have, however, been asked to think about using inclusive strategies for grouping students or speaking collectively about a class that include and respect all students. For example, instead of saying, "Good morning guys" a teacher may use a phrase such as, "Good morning, students." This allows for all students to feel equally included regardless of their gender or identity.

Are students being told not to call their parents 'mom' or 'dad'?"

No, students have never been told this. They may, however, be asked to acknowledge and respect the fact that the makeup of some families may not be "mom and dad."

Can parents opt-out of education related to sexuality, sexual orientation and gender orientation?

The provincial government has allowed for some flexibility in the delivery of topics related to reproduction and sexuality that students and their parents/guardians may feel more comfortable addressing outside of a classroom setting. These topics do not include lessons and topics related to sexual orientation and gender identity (unless they relate to reproduction and sexuality) in the context of bullying, tolerance and inclusivity.

I have concerns about what is being taught in my child's classroom. Who should I talk to?

The best place to start is always with your child's teacher. Classroom teachers are knowledgeable about the subjects being taught in their classroom and the needs of their students. The school-based administrators or school district representatives can also be an excellent source of information for questions that a child's teacher cannot answer.

What is the BC SOGI Educator Network?

The BC SOGI Educator Network was formally launched as a pilot project at the beginning of the 2016/2017 year by the ARC Foundation and nine BC school districts: Vancouver, North Vancouver, West Vancouver, Burnaby, Langley, Delta, Sea to Sky, Nanaimo-Ladysmith and Kamloops/Thompson. The network was open to all districts, independent schools and First Nations schools in 2017/2018.

The BC SOGI Educator Network now brings together BC Educators interested in SOGI-inclusive education. There are currently 56 school districts out of 60 participating within the network and more than 1300 volunteers leading this work across BC. Each of these school districts has at least one SOGI district lead educator who in turn works with teachers throughout the district

The network has helped to build professional capacity around the province and enabled educators to meet, share resources, co-design programs and collectively address curricular issues within and between school districts, independent schools and First Nations schools. All of this work was overseen by BC's SOGI Education Lead, a position funded by the Ministry of Education.

SOURCES AND OTHER RESOURCES

- [Ministry of Education Fact Sheet on SOGI education](#)
- [BCCPAC SOGI FAQ for Parents](#)
- [Physical & Health Education Curriculum FAQs \(Langley School District\)](#)
- [SOGIEducation.org](#): (lesson plans, templates, professional development and parent page)