

SOGI Explained

The following information is provided to explain aspects of the curriculum related to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) and how it is being discussed in the classroom. **It is important to note that there is no separate and distinct SOGI program or curriculum.**

The work being done is not unique to SD8 - it is part of the Ministry of Education's mandated provincial curriculum in both public and private school systems. There is nothing overly new about this work and **a new subject area is not being introduced.** Teachers have been teaching this curriculum for years, but there is a legitimate need for increasing awareness of sexual orientation and gender identity to be as inclusive as possible. We hope this will clarify confusing and inconsistent messages being communicated by individuals and organizations not affiliated with our school district.

In July 2016, the provincial government amended the BC Human Rights Code to include gender expression as prohibited grounds of discrimination (sexual orientation was already included in the Code). Later that year, the Ministry of Education announced that explicit references to sexual orientations and gender identity must be included in all public and independent school districts' codes of conduct throughout the province. The Ministry of Education also recently implemented a redesigned curriculum, which provides educators the opportunity to teach in a more inclusive and personalized way. **It is important to note that curriculum is provincially mandated and adherence to the BC Human Rights Code is not optional for all schools and school districts.**

School District No.8 (Kootenay Lake) ensures that the diversity that already exists within our school communities is reflected in classroom lessons. Sexual orientation and gender identity are topics that are present throughout several curriculum content areas, but mostly arise in the physical and health education (PHE), language arts, and social studies curricula among many other topics. The PHE curriculum also has topics related to nutrition, physical activity, maintaining positive mental health, sexual health, child abuse prevention and drug education. Sexual orientation and gender identity are also sometimes discussed as they arise in the daily lives of students, and in the "teachable moments" that occur daily in classrooms. **All this information is age and developmentally appropriate and coverage of curricular content is done very respectfully.**

To build a strong community, it is important for all students, families, and staff to be reflected in the curriculum and in school life, meaning that we are inclusive of all types of families (single parent, mixed culture, intergenerational, foster families, blended families, adopted, same sex families, etc.) and individuals (regardless of how they identify or what their sexual preferences might be). **It is about respecting all people and the diversity of our society.**

In addressing SOGI in the curriculum, teachers do not suggest that students develop a particular set of beliefs around sexual orientation or gender identity. **The approach is to build understanding of the diverse society that we live in and learn to treat each other with dignity and respect, regardless of our differences.**

It is important to note that the Provincial Government has allowed for some flexibility in the delivery of certain 'sensitive areas' of the curriculum, specifically topics related to reproduction and sexuality that some students and their parents/guardians may feel more comfortable addressing by means other than instruction by a teacher in a regular classroom setting. In such instances, students, with their parents' or guardians' consent, may arrange to address topics related to reproduction and sexuality by an alternative means. This must be arranged in consultation with their school. The alternate means must be agreed upon by the students, their parents or guardians, and the school. The alternate delivery policy does not allow students to "opt-out" of learning about these topics. It is expected that students will, in consultation with their school, demonstrate their knowledge of the learning standard(s) or learning outcomes they have arranged to address by alternative means. These topics usually do not include lessons and topics related to sexual orientation and gender identity, unless they relate specifically to reproduction and sexuality.

We encourage you to read the information on this webpage, including our Frequently Asked Questions and the Physical & Health Education Curriculum Connections outlined below, and visit the webpages below:

- Physical & Health Education <https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/curriculum/physical-health-education>
- BC Government Media Release <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2017EDUC0104-001810>
- BC Government SOGI Factsheet <https://news.gov.bc.ca/factsheets/sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity-sogi-in-schools>
- BC Government Media Release <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2016EDUC0089-001625>
- BC's New Curriculum <https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/>
- Videos:
 - <https://youtu.be/ZDSARFjk7X0>
 - <https://youtu.be/W5-BhcorOtI>

SOGI in the Curriculum FAQs

What exactly is SOGI education?

There is no separate and distinct SOGI program or curriculum. Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) are important topics that are interwoven through several curriculum areas, most notably, Physical and Health Education, language arts, and social studies. How the topics are introduced to students is dependent on the age and stage of their development. These topics may also be discussed as they arise in the daily lives of students.

Are discussions about sex or sexual practices taking place in elementary classrooms?

No, sexuality as a concept is discussed starting in grade 4 (with the onset of puberty) but does not include discussions about sexual acts or practices. Secondary students need accurate information about relationships and safe sex. Lack of information can have significant consequences for youth health and emotional wellbeing.

Are school aged children too young to be learning about gender?

When discussing gender, the conversations are largely about what people like to wear, the activities they engage in and how they feel about themselves. Gender is about self-identity. When students learn about the diversity found in gender, they have an opportunity to explore a greater range of interests, ideas and activities.

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

It's important that all students feel safe and welcomed in school. In order to do that, it's important that everyone has the opportunity to learn about each other and celebrate each other's differences. Unfortunately, children are already learning homophobic and transphobic slurs starting in the primary years. The job of educators is to make schools safe by opposing all bullying and name calling.

Won't talking about sexual orientation and gender identity confuse children/youth?

Information and discussion will not make anyone gay or straight. No one decides to be gay or straight, it is not a "lifestyle choice". As students grow older, some will identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. All of our students need to feel safe, welcome and positively reflected in the curriculum.

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

No, students have never been told this. Teachers have been asked to think about using more inclusive strategies for grouping students or speaking collectively about a class. For example, instead of saying "good morning boys and girls" a teacher may use a phrase such as "good morning students". This allows for all students to feel included regardless of their gender identity.

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

No, students have never been told this.

Why is SD8 working on ensuring sexual orientation and gender identity are being taught in schools?

The work that is being done in the district is the Ministry of Education's curriculum, it is not unique to SD8, it is province wide. This work has been mandated in both public and private school systems. SD8 is merely ensuring that the diversity that exists in school is reflected in the conversations in the classroom - there has been no addition to the curriculum. There is nothing overly new about this, a new subject area is not being introduced. Teachers have been teaching this curriculum for years, but there is an increasing awareness to be inclusive. It is important that these conversations are respectful and inclusive.

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 certain 'sensitive areas' of the curriculum, specifically topics related to reproduction and sexuality that some students and their parents/guardians may feel more comfortable addressing by means other than instruction by a teacher in a regular classroom setting. These topics do not include lessons and topics related to sexual orientation and gender identity, unless they relate to reproduction and sexuality.

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. As with all areas of the curriculum, the classroom teacher is the most knowledgeable about the subjects being taught in individual classes. The school-based administrator can also be an excellent source of information.