



Frequently Asked Questions about SOGI 123

What is SOGI or SOGI 123?

SOGI and SOGI 123 are two different things. SOGI stands for sexual orientation and gender identity. Every person has a sexual orientation, and every person has a gender identity. It includes heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, two-spirit, cisgender, and more. SOGI 123 is a resource to help schools and teachers build inclusive environments for students of all sexual orientations and gender identities.

SOGI 123 was developed by the ARC Foundation in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, BC Teachers' Federation, UBC Faculty of Education, nine BC school districts, educational partners, and local, national, and international LGBTQ community organizations.

www.sogieducation.org

Is there a sexual orientation and gender identity curriculum or subject area?

No. There is no SOGI curriculum or subject area. Sexual orientation and gender identity, as they relate to the BC Human Rights Code, may be interwoven through several subjects such as physical and health education, language arts, and social studies. How the topics may be introduced to students depends on their age and stage of development. These topics may also be discussed as they arise in students' daily lives. SOGI 123 are resources that teachers can use to address these topics.

What prompted SOGI 123? Why is sexual orientation and gender identity being discussed in schools?

In 2016, the provincial government included gender expression as prohibited grounds for discrimination in the BC Human Rights Code (sexual orientation had already been added to the Code). After that change, the Ministry of Education said that sexual orientation and gender identity must also be protected through all public and independent school district's codes of conduct. Curriculum is provincially set, and public schools must adhere to the BC Human Rights Code.

The curriculum includes a focus on valuing diversity and respecting differences, human rights, and responses to discrimination (especially in subject areas of Physical and Health Education, Social Studies, and English Language Arts). Components of the BC Human Rights Code, including sexual orientation and gender identity, may be explored within those curricular themes. The Ministry of Education's expectation is that all students in all schools will experience inclusive education beginning in kindergarten.

The use of SOGI 123 resources is at the discretion of individual school districts, however it was developed and approved by the Ministry of Education and BC Teachers' Federation, so it is the most readily available resource that is compliant with the BC Human Rights Code. All 60 school districts in the province use SOGI 123 and SOGI 123 is also supported by other professional organizations and associations, including the BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils.

Do teachers have to use SOGI 123? Is it mandated?

Teachers have to cover the curriculum and teach to the learning outcomes of each subject area. However, teachers have a degree of discretion over which approved resources they use. The SD72 Board of Education and the BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils supports the use of SOGI 123.

Why not just teach about bullying instead of talking about sexual orientation and gender identity?

All students should feel safe and welcomed in public schools. Therefore, it is important that everyone can learn about each other and respect each other's differences. Sadly, children can learn homophobic and transphobic slurs as young as elementary school ages.

The reality is that this diversity already exists within schools and our communities – there is just an increasing awareness to be inclusive and to have students, families and staff reflected in the curriculum and school life.

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

Information and discussion will not make anyone a certain sexual orientation or gender identity. These are not "lifestyle choices". As students grow older, some will identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. All students need to feel safe, welcome, and positively reflected in their schools.

Are schools teaching or encouraging kids to identify as transgender or become homosexual?

No. We are not "teaching" LGBTQ2S+ topics, nor are we "encouraging" (or discouraging), or "glorifying" sexual orientations or gender identities. The intent is to have students, families, and staff reflected in the curriculum and school life, meaning that we are inclusive of all types of families and individuals, regardless of how they identify or what their sexual preference might be. We are respecting diversity.

Teachers addressing SOGI is NOT about students developing a particular set of beliefs around sexual orientation or gender identity. It is about building understanding of the diverse society that we live in and learning to treat each other with dignity and respect, regardless of our differences.

Aren't you disrespecting parent rights and religious freedoms by introducing these topics?

Parents are always the most important teacher in a child's life, and we respect parental rights to establish their own family values and religious beliefs. However, it is the responsibility and role of public education to be inclusive and reflective of all members of the society we serve.

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

No. Students are being introduced to the idea that not everyone may identify with these pronouns and 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"? Is this why the district addresses letters to parents and guardians?

No. Students are made aware of the fact that families can be diverse. Some students have single parent families, foster families, blended families, adopted families, same sex families, etc. The school district has for years addressed letters to parents and guardians to be respectful of the diversity of families that exist within our schools.

Why weren't parents consulted before SOGI 123 was introduced?

Provincially, parents were consulted as part of the development process. Also, the BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils is a supporter and collaborated on the development of SOGI 123 parent resources available on the SOGI 123 website.

Can parents "opt-out" their children out of sexuality, sexual orientation, and gender orientation topics?

The provincial government has allowed for some flexibility in the delivery of topics related to sexual and reproductive health within the Physical and Health Education curriculum. Participation in this section is optional to parents and guardians as a subject in the classroom and other means can be chosen to address the learning standards in this curricular area. However, this does not include topics related to sexual orientation and gender identity, unless they relate to reproduction and sexuality. See <https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/curriculum/physical-health-education> for more information.

I have concerns about what is being discussed 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 principal can also be an excellent source of information.