

Chilliwack School District Q&A In Relation To SOGI

What is SOGI education?

There is no separate and distinct SOGI program or curriculum. Sexual orientation and gender identity 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. Parents are invited to address any questions with their child's classroom teacher and/or principal.

What is SOGI -123?

SOGI-123 is an optional free resource, available online with ready to use, grade-level appropriate lesson plans, online learning modules, and customizable templates and tools that align with B.C.'s new curriculum. The ARC foundation developed SOGI-123 in collaboration with the B.C. Ministry of Education, B.C. Teachers' Federation, The University of British Columbia's Faculty of Education, nine school districts throughout B.C., and local, national and international LGBTQ community organizations.

Are discussions about 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.

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 role 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. 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, and nor will they ever.

Why is the Chilliwack School District 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 Chilliwack, it is provincial. This work has been mandated in both public and private school systems. The Chilliwack School District 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 on being 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.

Is it true that when a student approaches a school counsellor and talks about their sexual orientation or gender identity, parents will not be informed?

This is incorrect. The educational role of a school counsellor is to provide direct instruction in areas such as peer helping, conflict resolution, social skills and life

skills. School counselling functions include individual, group and class work to provide both an intervention and prevention services. When students disclose personal information to a school counselor, the role of the school counsellor is to work with the student and their family and to provide information on community resources and supports that the family can access to support the student.

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 principal or vice principal can also be excellent sources of information.

Is there any information from the Ministry of Education parents can refer to in relation to Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity in Schools (SOGI)?

Yes there is. The Ministry put out a communique on Friday, November 3rd, 2017. The link has been included below for parent consideration:

<https://news.gov.bc.ca/factsheets/sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity-sogi-in-schools>