

November 9, 2023

**IMPORTANT INFORMATION - PLEASE TRANSLATE**

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| Informations importantes - Veuillez traduire         | • | 这是一份重要信息 — 请找人为您翻译                         |
| Mahalagang Impormasyon - Paki salin sa sariling wika | • | Thông tin quan trọng - Xin tìm phiên dịch  |
| ਮਹੱਤਵਪੂਰਨ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ-ਮਿਹਰਬਾਨੀ ਕਰਕੇ ਅਨੁਵਾਦ ਕਰੋ/ਕਰਵਾਓ     | • | महत्वपूर्ण जानकारी - कृपया अनुवाद करें     |
| Información importante - Por favor traducir          | • | 重要な情報-翻訳してください                             |
| 중요한 정보 - 번역 부탁드립니다                                   | • | معلومات مهمة - الرجاء الترجمة              |
| اطلاعات مهم - لطفا ترجمه کنید                        | • | Важная информация - переведите, пожалуйста |

*Please see the following message from VSB superintendent, Helen McGregor.*

Dear Families,

In recent months, there have been discussions and concerns regarding Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) inclusive education. I wanted to take this opportunity to address concerns and provide clarity on this topic.

It is important to note that SOGI-inclusive education is part of a larger educational approach that includes various aspects of identity and inclusion. Its main objective is to promote respect and understanding while reducing incidents of violence and discrimination against students and community members who identify as 2SLGBTQIA+.

SOGI-inclusive education is built into the BC Curriculum. It lines up with our ongoing efforts to build and grow an inclusive environment, complementing our work in equity, including racial equity, Indigenous equity and the inclusion of diverse abilities and needs in schools. This approach ensures that students learn and develop a deep appreciation for the diverse individuals who shape and enrich our society.

It is also important to understand that SOGI-inclusive education is not centered on sexuality, nor does it seek to influence or change students' sexual orientation or gender identity. Teachers, administrators, support staff and District staff deeply respect and value the unique individual identities of students and work hard to create inclusive classroom and school environments.

I want to stress that SOGI is a distinct and separate topic from sexual health education. SOGI-inclusive education builds understanding, inclusivity and support, addressing identity, respect and belonging. Students cannot be removed from these classes. Sexual health, within BC's Physical and Health Education curriculum, focuses on biology, physiology and reproduction, following specific provincial guidelines. Families, in consultation with staff at their child's school, have the option to arrange for alternative delivery for certain topics contained in the Physical and Health Education curriculum for students enrolled in kindergarten to Grade 10.

Staff developed a resource guide about SOGI to help inform members of communities and to address the most frequently asked questions about it. This resource package includes:

- Understanding SOGI-Inclusive Education: A Guide for Families (pages 3-4)
- Understanding SOGI-Inclusive Resources: A Guide for Families (pages 5-6)
- SOGI-Inclusive Education Frequently Asked Questions: A Guide for Families (pages 7-8)
- Tips for Holding Space for Difficult Conversations at Home: A Guide for Families (page 9)

I encourage you to review these resources and speak with your child's school if you have any questions or concerns.

We sincerely thank you for your continued support and partnership in creating a safe, welcoming, and respectful learning environment for students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H. McGregor', is placed above the printed name.

Helen McGregor  
Superintendent | CEO  
Vancouver School District

## UNDERSTANDING SOGI-INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: A GUIDE FOR FAMILIES

### What is SOGI-Inclusive Education?

SOGI stands for sexual orientation and gender identity. Everyone in our community has their own sexual orientation and gender identity. SOGI-inclusive education encompasses a broad range of topics including identity and inclusion. It aligns seamlessly with our ongoing efforts to foster an equitable learning environment, complementing District initiatives in equity, including racial equity, Indigenous equity, and the inclusion of diverse abilities and needs throughout our district. Its purpose is to reduce bullying and discrimination, and it is not centred in sexuality.

SOGI-inclusive education in the classroom is an approach that fosters a safe, respectful and inclusive learning environment for all students, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. It promotes diversity, empathy and respect, fostering a welcoming learning environment for every student. Teachers take care to ensure that all subjects are taught in an age-appropriate manner.

### Creating an Inclusive Environment:

- **Respect for Diversity:** Teachers promote understanding and respect for diverse family structures and gender identities, ensuring opportunities for all students feel valued and included.
- **Inclusive Language:** Classroom discussions and materials use inclusive language that respect students' identities.
- **Visible Support:** The classroom environment may feature 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusive materials, posters, and imagery to affirm the school's commitment to diversity and inclusion.

### Student Learning:

- **Inclusive Practices:** Lessons may include stories, history, contributions and challenges faced by 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals and families to promote awareness and challenge stereotypes.
- **Diverse Literature:** Teachers may incorporate books and reading materials featuring 2SLGBTQIA+ characters and themes to reflect the diversity of experiences. It's important for every student to see themselves reflected in school resources, and it is equally important that the diversity of our community is reflected.
- **Open Discussions:** The teacher may have open, age-appropriate and respectful discussions about different sexual orientations and gender identities, creating a safe space for students to understand these topics and have engaging conversations.

### Respectful Policies and Practices:

- Anti-Bullying Measures: Schools and the District actively address bullying and discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity through clear [policies](#) and [administrative procedures](#).
- Inclusive Assignments: Assignments and activities avoid gender stereotypes and provide students with opportunities to express themselves authentically.

### Teacher Training and Support:

- Professional Development: Teachers receive training on 2SLGBTQIA+ issues and inclusive teaching strategies to better support all students.
- Creating Safe Spaces: Teachers approach topics related to SOGI with empathy and compassion, ensuring a safe and respectful space for students to ask questions and share their experiences.

### Support Services:

- Counselling and Resources: Schools may offer counselling services and access to resources for students and families who may need assistance with SOGI-related issues or questions.

### Student-Led Initiatives:

- Diversity Clubs: Many schools have student-led clubs that provide a supportive and inclusive space for 2SLGBTQIA+ and allied students.

### Parent/Caregiver and Guardian Involvement:

- Open Communication: Teachers and schools maintain open communication with families, respecting privacy while addressing concerns and providing information on inclusive practices. If there are safety concerns, schools will contact families.

## UNDERSTANDING SOGI-INCLUSIVE RESOURCES: A GUIDE FOR FAMILIES

### What are SOGI-Inclusive Resources?

SOGI-inclusive resources are one of many tools used by teachers in our school district to foster understanding and acceptance of every member of our community, regardless of race, culture, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity.

These resources are created and supported by the [BC Ministry of Education and Child Care](#). These resources are used by all school districts across BC and aim to reduce bullying and discrimination.

### Key points about SOGI-inclusive resources:

- **They are an essential component of inclusive education**  
SOGI-inclusive resources equip teachers with the tools needed to provide factual information, foster empathy and help students understand and respect the diversity of our community and the importance of using inclusive language.
- **They foster respect and empathy**  
SOGI-inclusive resources address topics like diverse identities, family/caregiver diversity, stereotypes, bullying and name-calling.
- **They are age-appropriate**  
All students learn about topics such as respect, compassion and diversity, while more complex topics such as discrimination and injustice are explored in a developmentally and age-appropriate manner.
- **They provide support for 2SLGBTQIA+ students**  
SOGI-inclusive resources provide support, a sense of belonging and affirmation for 2SLGBTQIA+ students who may otherwise feel isolated or marginalized. They help create an environment where all students can thrive.
- **They benefit all students**  
Studies show that having inclusive classrooms and SOGI-specific anti-bullying policies improve the school climate, reducing discrimination, depression, anxiety, substance use, suicidal ideation and suicide attempts for all students.

## Our Commitment

We are committed to providing a safe and supportive learning environment for every student, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. SOGI-inclusive resources are one of many tools we use to achieve this goal.

Sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) are protected under the [BC Human Rights Code](#), the [Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#) and provincial legislation. VSB is committed to ensuring that every classroom in our District is welcoming, and all students feel safe and supported. Our commitment extends to fully supporting teachers and schools as they integrate age-appropriate references to diversity in sexual orientation and gender identity. This approach fosters dignity and respect while working toward a reduction in incidents of violence and discrimination against students and community members who identify as 2SLGBTQIA+.

Together, we can create a more understanding, inclusive and accepting community.

## SOGI-INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ): A GUIDE FOR FAMILIES

Across the District, educators have been answering questions about SOGI education. The following section is a compilation of the most asked questions. We hope these will be helpful; however, every situation is different. Please contact your school's principal if you have specific questions relating to your child's education.

**Here are some common questions and answers about SOGI-inclusive education:**

**QUESTION:** Does SOGI-inclusive education promote a specific sexual orientation or gender identity?

**ANSWER:** SOGI-inclusive education does not promote any specific identity or orientation. It is designed to create a safe and inclusive environment for all students, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. It aims to combat discrimination by fostering representation of all types of people within classroom resources and enhancing awareness of the experiences and challenges faced by 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals.

**QUESTION:** Are SOGI-inclusive resources inappropriate and contain explicit content?

**ANSWER:** There is no pornographic or explicit content in any curriculum taught in our schools. SOGI-inclusive education and resources address topics like diverse identities, family diversity, stereotypes, bullying and name-calling. These resources help teachers ensure everyone feels included when teaching any subject area, including Social Studies, English and Arts education.

**QUESTION:** Does SOGI-inclusive education violate parent/caregivers' rights?

**ANSWER:** SOGI-inclusive education is meant to complement parent/caregivers' efforts in teaching essential values of respect and acceptance of all people. It does not undermine parental/caregiver rights, but rather contributes to a greater understanding of diversity and inclusion for all students and families.

**QUESTION:** Is SOGI-inclusive education the same thing as sexual health education?

**ANSWER:** No, SOGI is a distinct and separate topic from sexual health education. SOGI-inclusive education is designed to promote understanding, inclusivity and support for all students. It encompasses a broader range of topics, including identity, respect and belonging. Sexual health education, on the other hand, is part of BC's Physical and Health Education curriculum. It focuses on the biological, physiological and reproductive aspects of human sexuality. Families, in consultation with their school, may arrange for alternative delivery for certain topics contained in the Physical and Health Education curriculum for students enrolled from kindergarten to Grade 10. This is not the case for SOGI-inclusive education.



**QUESTION:** Is SOGI-inclusive education being about recruiting students to be 2SLGBTQIA+?

**ANSWER:** This is a baseless myth. SOGI-inclusive education aims to create understanding, acceptance and inclusion for 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals. It does not seek to recruit or influence students' sexual orientation or gender identity. Teachers deeply respect and value the unique individual identities of students and work hard to create classroom environments that are inclusive.

**QUESTION:** Why is SOGI-inclusive education a recent and controversial addition to education?

**ANSWER:** SOGI-inclusive education, like the inclusion of diverse cultures and races, has been part of the broader goal for diversity and inclusion in our schools for decades. Although SOGI has gained increased attention recently, it is not a new concept. It is supported by many educational organizations, school districts, as well as child development and health experts. Sexual orientation and gender identity are also protected under the BC Human Rights Code, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and provincial legislation. The Vancouver School Board has had a SOGI policy since 2004.

**QUESTION:** SOGI-inclusive education is not needed because these issues are not relevant to all students, why can't teachers just stick to reading, writing and arithmetic?

**ANSWER:** 2SLGBTQIA+ students are members of our school communities and often face unique challenges related to their identity. Studies show that having inclusive classrooms and SOGI-specific anti-bullying policies and education improve the school climate by reducing discrimination, depression, anxiety, substance use, suicidal ideation and suicide attempts for all students. SOGI education and resources help ensure schools are welcoming for every person and allow students to learn at their fullest potential in a safe and supportive environment.

**If you have any questions about your child's education, please contact your school. We value and encourage open communication with families and work hard to ensure families are well-informed and actively engaged in their child's educational journey.**



## TIPS FOR HOLDING SPACE FOR DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS AT HOME: A GUIDE FOR FAMILIES

Schools are microcosms of the greater world. With access to social media and news, coupled with rapidly changing current events, children may feel overwhelmed by global and local events. This one-pager can be used to support discussions with children about difficult topics.

1. Be mindful of your reactions: Your child will take cues from you on how to respond.
2. Keep communication open: Encourage your children to express their feelings. Be prepared to listen actively and answer their questions in an age-appropriate manner.
3. Maintain routine: Try to stick to your regular daily routines as much as possible. Consistency provides a sense of stability and security for children.
4. Communicate age-appropriate information: Tailor explanations to your child's age and level of understanding. Younger children may need simpler, less detailed explanations, while older children might require more context.
5. Limit exposure to news: Continuous exposure to news coverage can be overwhelming. If your child is quoting from text they see online, help them to ask questions about the source.
6. Seek community support: School staff, community organizations or counsellors can provide guidance and resources to help children cope with emotions.

### Resources:

[How to Talk to Your Children About Conflict and War](#)

[Explaining the News to Our Kids](#)

[Kids Help Phone – How to Cope with Tragedy](#)