

Myths & Facts

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) is not a separate curriculum. SOGI-inclusive education encompasses a broad range of topics including identity and inclusion. Its purpose is to reduce bullying and discrimination. SOGI-inclusive education is **not** centred in sexuality.

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

Sexual orientation and gender identity are protected under the BC Human Rights Code, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and provincial legislation. The Surrey School District 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 is aimed at fostering tolerance, dignity, and respect while working towards a reduction in incidents of violence and discrimination against students and community members who identify as 2SLGBTQ+.

There are often misconceptions about what SOGI-inclusive education is and what it looks like in our schools. Here are some common myths and the corresponding facts about SOGI-inclusive education:

MYTH: SOGI-inclusive education promotes a specific sexual orientation or gender identity.

FACT: SOGI-inclusive education does **not** promote any specific identity or orientation and 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 2SLGBTQ+ individuals.

MYTH: SOGI-inclusive resources are inappropriate and contain explicit content.

FACT: 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.

MYTH: SOGI-inclusive education violates parents' rights.

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

MYTH: SOGI-inclusive education is the same thing as sexual health education.

FACT: 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, and 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 and focuses on the biological, physiological, and reproductive aspects of human sexuality. Sexual health education is taught separately and follows specific guidelines. Parents or guardians, in consultation with their school, may arrange for alternative delivery for certain topics contained in the Physical and Health Education curriculum for K-10 students.

MYTH: SOGI-inclusive education is about "recruiting" students to be 2SLGBTQ+.

FACT: This is a baseless myth. SOGI-inclusive education aims to create understanding, acceptance, and inclusion for 2SLGBTQ+ 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.

MYTH: SOGI-inclusive education is inappropriate for students.

FACT: All students learn about topics such as respect, compassion, and diversity, while more complex topics such as discrimination and injustice may be explored in a developmentally and age-appropriate manner. SOGI-inclusive resources play a pivotal role in addressing fundamental human ideals such as diversity, acceptance, and a sense of belonging. SOGI-inclusive education is essential for **every** child.

MYTH: SOGI-inclusive education is a recent and controversial addition to education.

FACT: 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 and is supported by many educational organizations, school districts, and 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.

MYTH: SOGI-inclusive education is not needed because these issues are not relevant to all students.

FACT: These issues are relevant to every student. SOGI-inclusive education is intended to foster inclusivity and respect, address issues of discrimination and bullying, and build understanding and empathy among all students. Furthermore, 2SLGBTQ+ 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 improve the school climate, reducing discrimination, depression, anxiety, substance use, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts for **all** students. SOGI resources help ensure schools are welcoming for every person and allow teachers to address important topics in a safe and age-appropriate manner.

MYTH: School libraries have books that are not safe for children.

FACT: School libraries and learning commons are safe spaces for children and youth. Our school district has a comprehensive policy that guides teacher librarians when selecting books for school libraries. This policy includes specific criteria that both elementary and secondary librarians must consider. This ensures that the books selected are age-appropriate and reflect our diverse community, including 2SLGBTQ+ students and families.

Within our secondary schools, a wide range of books are available that address diverse and, at times, mature subject matter. School libraries offer a controlled environment where students can explore these topics safely and in a structured manner. Having access to resources that delve into diverse and mature subjects is vital for older students, eliminating reliance on potentially unreliable or harmful internet sources. Moreover, it guarantees that a trusted adult is on hand to provide support if required.

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

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