



June 22, 2018

Board of Education School District No. 22 (Vernon) 1401 – 15th Street, Vernon, BC V1T 8S8

Dear Parents and Guardians;

This past year, our school district has been participating in the SOGI (Sexual Orientation Gender Identity) Network of schools in British Columbia. This involves 58 districts in British Columbia and has included the networking and training for district and school lead representatives. In our work, parents have put forward some questions regarding SOGI123 and how sexual orientation and gender identity are possibly being discussed in the classroom. We are writing to provide you, our SD22 parents and guardians, with more information about this topic.

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 same year, the Ministry of Education announced that specific references to sexual orientations and gender identities must be included in all public and independent school districts' codes of conduct throughout the province. Teachers, support staff, students and parents in School District 22 worked together to develop our district policy No 4.8.0 Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. This was approved by our school trustees in March of 2017.

Our curriculum provides opportunities for diversity and inclusion, including SOGI topics, to be woven into lessons in a variety of subject areas and teach in a more inclusive and personalized way. The content in the redesigned curriculum includes a focus on valuing diversity and respecting differences, and the topics of 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 expectation is that all students in all schools will experience the integration of inclusive education beginning in elementary school.

SOGI stands for sexual orientation and gender identity. It is an inclusive term that encompasses all individuals regardless of where they identify on the sexual orientation or gender identity spectrums, as everyone has a sexual orientation and everyone has a gender identity. It includes heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, two-spirit, cis-gender and more.

SOGI 123 is a resource developed by the ARC foundation in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, BC Teachers' Federation, UBC Faculty of Education, school districts, educational partners, and local, national and international LGBTQ community organizations. The BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils is also a supporter and has collaborated on the development of SOGI 123 parent resources available on the SOGI 123 website at www.sogieducation.org



SOGI 1,2,3 represents three areas of focus:

1. Policy –ensuring districts and schools have developed inclusive policies and procedures.
2. Environments – working towards physical spaces, language and activities that respect the diversity in our community. All schools in our district have at least one washroom that is a single stall area that any student or guest may access. Inclusive environments may also include things like having visual reminders of the inclusive message (posters, everyone is welcome stickers, rainbow flags/crosswalks).

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It also is about teachers being aware of language that is inclusive of others and respecting student pronoun and name choices.

3. Resources – www.sogieducation.org provides teachers with sample lessons, professional development in SOGI terms. Another focus in the area of resources is having literature and classroom lessons that reflect the diversity of our community. This may range from picture books that share that 'all families are different' to novels for older students that have transgender characters. These resources provide students with a mirror to see themselves in their learning and a window to view the diversity of the world around them.

Is my child too young to learn about these topics? Teachers choose language and instruction that is developmental and age appropriate for their students. The intent is to have students, families, and staff reflected in the curriculum and school life, meaning we are inclusive of all types of families (single parent, mixed culture, intergenerational, foster, blended, adopted, same sex families etc.) and individuals (regardless of how they identify or what their sexual preferences might be). It is about providing safe, inclusive schools that accept and value the diversity of our community.

How does teaching of SOGI content respect the values and beliefs of families? The ways that teachers may address SOGI in the curriculum is not about promoting or 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.

Most of the ideals and topics within the SOGI area are not new for schools and classrooms. Our teachers and schools have long been promoting the learning and culture of safety, belonging and value of the diversity in our community. Research in the area of mental health, safety and school success highlights that our LGBTQ youth are at a much higher risk for being victims of bullying and attempting suicide. Research also shows that schools that actively support SOGI initiatives become safer spaces for all students.

Parents are encouraged to learn more about SOGI topics and have discussions with their children. If you have questions or concerns, we encourage you to talk with your child's teacher or the school principal.

Joe Rogers
Superintendent

Candy Siegmüller
SD22 SOGI District Lead
Principal, Hillview Elementary

Sources of information for parents:

www.sogieducation.org/parents/

BCCPAC Resources and FAQ information: <https://bccpac.bc.ca/index.php/resources/46-sogi/135-sogi-faq-for-parents>

