



LGBTQIA EDUCATION

FAQS FOR EDUCATORS AND ADMINISTRATORS



LGBTQIA+
EDUCATION & ADVOCACY
INTEGRATED YOUTH SERVICES



FAQS FOR EDUCATORS & ADMINISTRATORS

■ WHY IS LGBTQIA -INCLUSIVE CURRICULUM NECESSARY?

Homophobia, heterosexism, and transphobia are still very much present in many of our schools and communities. These biases manifest themselves many ways, from invisibility in the curriculum and school policies to active teasing, bullying, harassment, and physical violence against gender variant children, youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, or asexual and families that include LGBTQIA+ parents or relatives. This bias hurts all children, both those directly affected and those who learn in an atmosphere of fear and tension, afraid to explore their own lives because of worry about disapproval and rejection. Students of all ages must be given an opportunity to learn that the words “gay,” “lesbian,” and “transgender” are adjectives that should be used with respect to describe people in their community, not words used in a negative way to hurt, insult, and degrade. Students need to be encouraged to reflect on their own actions and prejudice, learn from their peers who are different from them, and support allies who stand up to prejudice and hate. Creating inclusive curriculum and establishing accepting classroom and school climates improves the educational experience for all students, families and teachers.

■ ARE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN TOO YOUNG TO BE INTRODUCED TO THIS TOPIC?

Name-calling and using anti-gay and anti-trans slurs starts as early as kindergarten, first, and second grades. At a very young age, children have already been introduced to information about LGBTQIA+ people, which is often based on misinformation and negative stereotypes. When teachers are silent about LGBTQIA+ people, students learn from this omission that it is acceptable to use homophobic and transphobic put-downs. These slurs are hurtful and unacceptable and they affect the lives of people in every school and community. Teachers are not introducing a new topic, they are helping young students understand bias and prejudice and learn to use respectful language. Educators are creating inclusive school communities that prevent name-calling, teasing, and bullying and provide safe learning environments for all children.



FAQS FOR EDUCATORS & ADMINISTRATORS

■ DO PARENTS AND GUARDIANS NEED TO BE NOTIFIED IF LGBTQIA PEOPLE OR FAMILIES ARE DISCUSSED IN THE CLASSROOM?

SDUSD does not have a requirement for notifying parents and guardians for lessons about respect and diversity. In fact, SDUSD requires schools to be proactive in addressing bias and prejudice and ensuring students' safety. Although sexual health is a critical concern of all youth populations, sexual health curriculum falls under the purview of the Sexual Health Education Program (SHEP), a program that collaborates with the LGBTQIA+ Education and Advocacy Program. Sexual health topics are not covered in the curriculum produced by the LGBTQIA+ Education & Advocacy Program. Rather, the focus of LGBTQIA+-inclusive education is to create respectful and welcoming learning environments for all children by communicating that LGBTQIA+ people are part of our communities and that LGBTQIA+ discrimination is harmful to everyone. We strongly recommend involving parents and guardians as part of school-wide efforts to be more inclusive. As important members of the school community, families can help reinforce the concepts of respect at home, help answer questions, assist in classroom discussions, and be actively engaged in making the school and community safe for all children and their families.

■ CAN PARENTS GUARDIANS "OPT OUT" OF THEIR CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL INSTRUCTION THAT INCLUDES LGBTQIA -INCLUSIVE LESSONS?

Programs that are designed to encourage respect and address bias are not included in SDUSD "opt out" policies. By not including all students in LGBTQIA+-inclusive lessons, schools run the risk of conveying a message that it is somehow acceptable to engage in hurtful and disrespectful behavior when it comes to LGBTQIA+ people. Students who miss or "opt-out" of lessons where families or identities are discussed must be prepared to do an alternative "make-up" assignment that covers the same content that they missed. Often times those students are among those who might benefit the most from being with their peers when community values around respect and understanding are addressed.

■ IS TALKING ABOUT LGBTQIA ISSUES THE SAME AS SEX EDUCATION?

Talking about LGBTQIA+ issues is a discussion about people and families present in our communities, a struggle for civil rights, and addressing bias-based bullying. None of these include talking about sex or human reproduction. With the rapid growth of LGBTQIA+-headed families and the increasing visibility of LGBTQIA+ issues in the media, children are learning about LGBTQIA+ people at an increasingly younger age. The stereotypes and misunderstandings that often develop can be prevented by incorporating LGBTQIA+ issues in the context of lessons about families, current events, literature, and civil rights.



FAQS FOR EDUCATORS & ADMINISTRATORS

■ HOW DOES LGBTQIA+ INCLUSIVE CURRICULUM COMPLY WITH ANTI-DISCRIMINATION LAWS AND STILL RESPECT THE RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY OF OUR STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES?

LGBTQIA+-inclusive curricula encourages respect, cooperation, and understanding, values that all religions and cultures hold in common. In fact, by giving students a language to discuss these sensitive issues, families may find it easier to share their own beliefs about human commonalities and differences. LGBTQIA+-inclusive curricula attempts to ensure that the diversity of opinions in school communities do not create a negative climate of insults, violence, and exclusion. Part of that work is ensuring that children can be proud of who they are because they are embraced for their commonalities and differences alike rather than rejected or marginalized because of them.

■ HOW CAN EDUCATORS FIT THIS TOPIC INTO AN ALREADY FULL SCHEDULE?

Building a safe and welcoming environment that is conducive to learning should never be viewed as a burden or as superfluous to an academic focus, but rather as an added benefit. Lessons about LGBTQIA+ people and issues can be easily tied to academic standards in English language arts, mathematics, social studies, and life skills. There also are many ways to integrate LGBTQIA+ content into existing curricula. Furthermore, by PROACTIVELY helping students develop mutual respect and understanding for ALL, educators will find themselves spending less class time addressing behavior issues and more time teaching the required curriculum. The Department of Youth Advocacy and LGBTQIA+ Education & Advocacy Program together offer several professional development opportunities on how to enfold LGBTQIA+-inclusive curricula designed to create a space in which all students can learn, achieve their goals, and realize success. For more information, please contact Program Manager, Sophia Arredondo at sarredondo@sandi.net

■ WHAT IF LGBTQIA+ -INCLUSIVE CURRICULUM CAUSES DISAGREEMENT IN THE COMMUNITY?

It is important to be transparent and open about the intentions and content of the program to avoid accusations that it is part of a larger, hidden “agenda.” Involve the entire staff, everyone should be familiar with and/or trained on the content of LGBTQIA+-inclusive curricula, and understand the reasons for its importance. If a controversy does arise, it is important to communicate to families that this work is supported by the Board and the SDUSD Superintendent, and by state law and educational policies, including the SDUSD Nondiscrimination Policy. Schools have an obligation to ensure all their students are able to learn in a safe environment. Lastly, it is important to stand firm on your commitment to addressing the identities of all of your students and their families.