



UNDERCURRENTS:

Implementation of the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Policy in Yukon Education



MARCH 2026



Land Acknowledgement

The Yukon Child & Youth Advocate Office (YCAO) respectfully acknowledges that we work and live on the traditional territories of the 14 Yukon First Nations. Colonial government policies have caused long-lasting impacts to Indigenous children and youth, and we commit ourselves to working alongside Yukon First Nations by integrating traditional knowledge and culture for the safety and wellbeing of children throughout the territory.

Mission, Vision, Values

Mission: We commit to upholding the rights and amplifying the voices of children and youth throughout the Yukon.

Vision: The vision of YCAO is for a safe and healthy society that hears, includes, values, and protects the rights and voices of children and youth.

Values: YCAO's core values are respect, integrity, empowerment and hope.

- Respect is the most important value in how we approach our interactions with children, families, caregivers, First Nations, and professionals. It reminds us that relationships lead to results, not the other way around.
- Integrity is essential to ensuring our reputation is as solid as our work. We seek to operate with honesty, dedication, and professionalism in every interaction.
- Empowerment is where our heart lies. We believe unreservedly in the potential of young people to share their opinions and play an active role in decisions being made about them.
- Hope is what drives us to continue this work – the desire to see a better world for kids and the optimism to believe it is possible. Hope requires tenacity and resilience, two things we are continually learning from the young people we serve.

How to cite

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About YCAO

The Yukon Child and Youth Advocate Office (YCAO) is an independent office of the Yukon Legislative Assembly mandated by the *Child and Youth Advocate Act* to represent the rights, views, and preferences of children and youth who are eligible for, or currently receiving, government services and programs. The YCAO provides services to young people: under 18 years of age under the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*; under 19 years of age under the *Child and Family Services Act*; under 21 years of age under the Education Act; and between the ages of 19 and 26 that are eligible or receiving services under section 17 and 18 of the *Child and Family Services Act*. YCAO is a part of the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates (CCCYA) and operates from a children’s rights framework as informed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).



Did you know?

The Yukon Territory is the most northwestern jurisdiction in Canada with a population of 48,000 (Statistics Canada, 2025). The Yukon comprises 14 First Nations, 11 of which are Self-Governing First Nations that work through a government-to-government relationship with Yukon government (YG) and the Government of Canada. Whitehorse is the territorial capital, and also its largest city with roughly 80% of the Yukon’s population. The remaining 20% are distributed among various rural communities. The YCAO represents all children and youth in the territory who are accessing YG services.



Content Warning

This review discusses sensitive topics including homophobia, transphobia, racism, sexism, self-harm, suicide, HIV/AIDS, domestic violence and abuse. It also references experiences related to residential schools, intergenerational trauma, missing and murdered individuals, religion, and the ongoing impact of colonialism in Yukon schools and educational programs. It quotes both harmful experiences reported by participants and harmful statements from participants.

If you experience a trauma-related response to the content requiring support, please reach out to the Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services at (867) 456-3838, Canadian Mental Health Association Yukon division at (867) 668-6429 or if you are a child, Kids Help Phone at 1 (800) 668-6868.

If you think any of this content could be distressing or triggering for you, please make sure you have supported and trusted people around before reading.



Advocate's Message

The previous Minister of Education requested this review at a time when the inclusion of and the rights for 2SLGBTQIA+ students were being threatened nationally and internationally. Policies emerging in places like New Brunswick, Alberta, and Saskatchewan signalled a troubling shift towards restricting students' rights, and the Yukon's Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) policy appeared to stand in contrast. On the surface, the policy promotes inclusion and belonging, but words alone do not create change or encourage kindness. Real results require time, effort, commitment, and a genuine desire to do better.

We understand that SOGI topics, and the SOGI policy itself, have been the source of contention for many in our community. The various opposing voices and opinions we heard during the course of this review bear that out. This review's flowing river design is meant to reflect what is possible when currents meet and move together. Imagine school communities where different beliefs can still share a common purpose of children's wellbeing, and work together from that starting point. All students should be able to go to school and feel celebrated for who they are!

This review amplifies the voices of young people, families, and school staff who have bravely demonstrated that inclusion is possible. So many educators have acted as fierce allies, opening their classrooms, advocating for supports and services, and stepping up as safe adults for students. So many families have made the call, loudly, for change, and demanded that the Department of Education honours its commitment to inclusive learning for all Yukon children. So many young people have led the way, demonstrating to decision-makers, politicians, and adults that acceptance, belonging, and respect are values worth fighting for. We are humbled to have heard these stories, and more, and are grateful to represent them here.

It's important to name that the Yukon Government has done many things to promote inclusion, not the least of which was introducing the original SOGI policy back in 2012. It's not nothing. However, the mere existence of a policy does not guarantee protections and safety if the policy is not implemented with intention and care. That is what this review is about - examining the gaps in the policy's impacts, and proposing tangible, thoughtful actions to improve implementation.

Let us state unequivocally - the Yukon Child and Youth Advocate Office leads with a child rights framework that emphasizes non-discrimination. As such, we are a sexual orientation and gender-affirming organization. Our dedicated review team embraced wholeheartedly our belief that all children and youth have the right to be and live as their full authentic selves without fear of judgement, discrimination, and violence. It is the duty and responsibility of the Yukon Government, as a default signatory under the Canadian Government to the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, to do everything within its power to foster educational environments where young people can feel safe, seen, and empowered to learn.

Respectfully,



Annette King,
Yukon Child and Youth Advocate

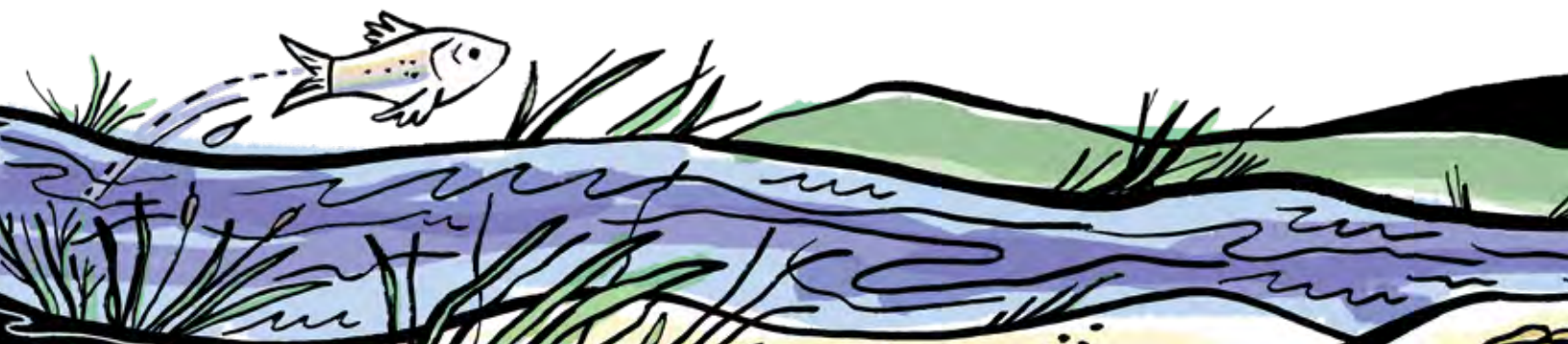


Acknowledgement

We would like to acknowledge the dedication and hard work of our review team in undertaking this massive effort. To Paige Galette, Jack Istchenko, Adanchilla Lepine-Pauls, and Jessie Dawson, this could not have been accomplished without your thoughtful advice and caring ability to listen to participants with empathy and without judgment, even when emotions ran high. You are the bedrock of our unwavering and hope-driven river, and we are grateful to have been able to swim alongside you on this project.

To the children, students, youth, the families, the professionals, and the educator community who participated, as well as our YCAO colleagues we hope this review does justice to your hopes and daily efforts to uphold basic human rights.

The review team,
Anya Braeuner and Christopher Tse



Letter from EDU



Minister's Office (CM-2)
PO Box 2703, Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 2C6

March 11, 2024

Annette King
Office of the Yukon Child and Youth Advocate
2070 2nd Ave, Unit 19
Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 1B1

Dear Annette King,

Re: Referral for review and report relating to the provision of the designated service of education, specifically, sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) inclusion in Yukon schools

The LGBTQ2S+ Inclusion Action Plan committed the Department of Education to updating the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) policy. To that end, the 2012 Department of Education's SOGI Policy was updated in August 2023, to reflect the 2022 amendments to the Education Act and some of the commitments in the LGBTQ2S+ Inclusion Action Plan. The announcement of that policy update included a commitment to further review and modernize the policy, along with a commitment to provide key stakeholders the opportunity to inform how the policy can be improved to better foster inclusion of children of all sexual orientations and gender identities in Yukon schools.

The Department of Education must ensure that any engagement on SOGI policy is informed by evidence and best practice. Any changes or updates to the Department of Education's SOGI policy should centre on child rights. Future SOGI policy changes should be informed by research and professional opinions of mental health and medical experts.

Accordingly, as Minister of Education, I am referring this matter to you for your review pursuant to s. 15 of the Act, which states:

15(1) The Legislative Assembly or a Minister may refer to the Advocate for review and report any matter relating to the provision of designated services that involves the interests and well-being of children and youth, which may include a review of critical injuries, a death or other specific incident concerning a child or youth in the care or custody of the government or a First Nation service authority.

15(2) The Advocate must conduct a review and make a report under subsection (1) in accordance with the terms of reference established for the review by the Legislative Assembly or the Minister. S.Y.2009, c.1, 2.15.

Therefore, I formally request that you conduct a review of and make recommendations on the issue of department-wide policy provisions for inclusion of children of all sexual orientations and gender identities in Yukon schools.

As part of the terms of reference for this review, I request that you:

- Engage with the Department of Education and any other relevant departments, as well as with students, families, Yukon First Nation governments, public partners in education and youth-serving organizations;
- Engage with experts and advisors as required to develop informed recommendations;
- Review relevant reports and research, including child rights reports from other jurisdictions;
- Examine the complexities of child rights pertaining to sexual orientation and gender identity inclusion and points of perceived conflict with other rights such as
 - "Parents' rights" conflicting with their child's right to privacy;
 - Freedom of religion in relation to SOGI inclusion, especially in Yukon Catholic schools;
 - Balancing trans inclusion, particularly in sport and common bathrooms, with fair competition and safety; and
 - Representation of all sexual orientations and gender identities in Kindergarten to Grade 12 classroom materials.
- Prepare a report with recommendations to the Department of Education to amend the SOGI policy under which the Department will meet its obligation to protect the rights of children of all sexual orientations and gender identities.

The Department of Education will fully cooperate with your office as you conduct this independent review. Cassandra Kelly, ADM of Schools and Student Services, will be the lead contact at the department to ensure you receive all the information you need from the department for this review. Ms. Kelly can be contacted at Cassandra.Kelly@yukon.ca.

We value your expertise in this important issue. I look forward to learning from your review and receiving your recommendations to help us balance the complexities of child rights in an updated SOGI policy for Yukon schools.

Sincerely,



Jeanie McLean
Minister of Education

Executive Summary

Summary

Children of all sexual orientations and gender identities have a right to an education that helps them achieve their goals and reach their potential. They have a right to access this education in an environment that respects and affirms their identity. Currently, the Department of Education (EDU) has a SOGI policy in place to support these goals and to strengthen SOGI inclusion, as laid out in the 2021 *LGBTQ2S+ Inclusion Action Plan*. While the intentions of this policy are positive, this review finds that the implementation of the policy has been largely inadequate across all Yukon schools and educational programs, and that 2SLGBTQIA+ students continue to be at risk of bullying, harassment, violence, negative mental health impacts, and other factors that contribute to poor educational outcomes.

Findings

1. Policy Implementation & Communication

- a. **Communication:** EDU's inconsistent communication to staff and to students and their families has affected successful SOGI policy implementation. There has been misinterpretation of the policy, lack of clarity around implementation responsibilities, and space for rumours and misinformation to spread. Staff have also not received adequate training to implement the policy effectively.
- b. **Governance:** Ambiguity concerning the governance frameworks and relationships that inform EDU's operations has contributed to tension surrounding both the SOGI policy's implementation, and the policy itself. EDU and the Catholic Episcopal Corporation (CEC) have a convoluted working relationship, with the latter routinely overstepping its authority to weigh in on SOGI implementation in schools. EDU has also failed to honour its accountability in managing school councils.
- c. **In-School Implementation:** The SOGI policy is not effectively implemented in schools due to confusion around staff roles, administrative issues, and a poor data management system to track and respond to SOGI-related incidents. Despite these challenges, students continue to lead the way in SOGI-inclusion advocacy.

2. Culture of Inclusion

- a. **Comprehensive Sexual Health Education (CSHE):** CSHE continues to be wrongly conflated with the SOGI policy when the two are different things. CSHE is not provided regularly due to staff capacity and/or discomfort and is largely contracted out to external providers. CSHE continues to be a vital component of public education and requires safe learning environments for students to access it.



- b. Cultural Considerations:** The current SOGI policy universalizes the 2SLGBTQIA+ experience and does not consider the unique and diverse needs of Indigiqueer and Two-Spirit, racialized, and disabled people. It also fails to locate anti-queer violence as being directly connected to misogynist and heteropatriarchal systems.
- c. Representation and Inclusion:** The current SOGI policy hasn't led to meaningful inclusion or an accurate and diverse portrayal of 2SLGBTQIA+ experiences in school environments or curriculum. It also doesn't have concrete guidance around inclusion in sport for trans student-athletes. Respect is the baseline when it comes to inclusion, even when concepts or identities seem hard to navigate for individuals.

Recommendations to EDU:

- 1. YG Response:** Respond to this review by June 30, 2026. Provide a follow-up response outlining progress made toward addressing the Advocate's recommendations by Dec. 1, 2026 and annually henceforth until YCAO's systemic progress tracker shows satisfactory outcomes.
- 2. Incident Response:** Address homophobic/transphobic bullying and discrimination by developing and implementing standardized procedures for schools to integrate into their school-based SOGI procedures, including documentation, reporting, tracking, communication and evaluation of the effectiveness of the action taken.
- 3. Communication, Dialogue, and Training:** Develop and implement proactive strategies for building inclusive learning environments including fostering respectful dialogue through a sub-committee of education partners and with the CEC, establishing clear standards with school boards, school councils, and community committees, and improving access to and quality of staff training and inclusive administrative processes.
- 4. Enhance EDU SOGI Policy and Procedures:** Implement meaningful student input in amendments to the SOGI policy and ensure effective, rights-based and vetted inclusion measures across all EDU programs and environments, including but not limited to comprehensive sexual health education, building infrastructure, sports and extracurricular activities, and in-school staff support.
- 5. Student Wellbeing and Belonging:** Continue to invest in supports and resources that will improve students' wellbeing and sense of belonging through access to trained in-school safe contacts, safe spaces, comprehensive sexual health educators, and inclusive resources and curriculum.



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Glossary

1962 Agreement: agreement between the Commissioner of the Yukon Territory and the Catholic Episcopal Corporation (CEC) of Whitehorse signed in 1962. The CEC sold two of its private schools – Christ the King Elementary School and Christ the King High School – to the Yukon government, making them public schools. It contains commitments by both parties to abide by all territorial and federal laws. (Winter, 2013)

2SLGBTQIA+: acronym for Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and/or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual people. The “+” allows for any additional gender and sexual diversity not captured within the preceding labels (Yukon SOGI policy). This acronym was chosen for this review to encompass all iterations of the various existing acronyms related to individuals who share an identified sexual orientation, expression or, and, gender identity or expression that is outside the binary female-male heterosexual orientation or gender assigned at birth. The terminology is continuously evolving. In this review we also kept the iterations used by participants or in the original source of a document. These include: LGBTQ2S, LGBTQ+, LGBTQ2S+, LGBTQIA+, LGBTQ, 2SLGBTQIA+, 2SLGBTQINA+.

Administrators: They are the people in charge of making decisions and implementing them in the school environment, in respect of the *Education Act* and policies. This term includes the schools or educational programs’ Principal, Vice-Principals, administrative staff, Team leaders, Superintendents, Executive Directors, School Councils, School Boards, First Nation School Board (FNSB) Community Committees, and the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in Government (for Robert Service School).

ARC Foundation SOGI 123: ARC Foundation is a non-profit organization that creates and delivers SOGI 123, a program that supports teachers in addressing human rights and diversity topics in the BC provincial curriculum. The Department of Education contracted it to support the implementation of the updated SOGI policy.

ASPEN: EDU data management system. It contains student demographics, enrolment and attendance, programs and courses, student achievement, individual education and learning plans, and reports. A single record is maintained for each student, which is available only to authorized users associated with the school providing educational services to each student. (Yukon.ca)

Catholic schools: Christ the King Elementary School, Saint Francis of Assisi Secondary School (formerly named Vanier), Holy Family Elementary School.

CEAY: Catholic Education Association of the Yukon is a non-profit organization supporting the school council of the three Catholic schools.

CEC: Catholic Episcopal Corporation. Charity organization of the Catholic Diocese of Whitehorse.

Cisheterosexual: related to standards of sexual or romantic attraction primarily toward people of a different gender, between individuals whose gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth.



Community: In the Yukon, community has several meanings. It is related to the living places of Yukon First Nation citizens on their Traditional Territory. It is also related to rural municipalities. In the context of this review, it also means the people who identify as a member of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and their allies. We specify a school community for the school environment, meaning any individual or organization who studies, works or provides services to someone on school grounds or connected to schools and education. “Community member” is used for participants of this review who identified as a community member at large, meaning they were not speaking as a student, professional or family member’s capacity.

Community Committees: Subcommittees of the First Nation School Board (FNSB) from a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the FNSB and local First Nation governments. Members are appointed by local First Nations governments. They co-create and co-develop crucial elements of their school’s operations such as school plans, procedures or guidelines, local and First Nation language programming.

CSFY: Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon.

CSHE: Comprehensive Sexual Health Education is a broad approach to sexual health education “aimed at equipping people throughout the lifespan to enhance sexual health and well-being...and to prevent outcomes that can have a negative impact on sexual health and well-being” (SIECCAN, 2019). It is part of the official Physical and Health Education curriculum for British Columbia schools (K-10) and is also applied in the Yukon. Because of its wide scope, CSHE is often wrongly conflated with a SOGI-inclusive policy. CSHE in the Yukon includes topics on SOGI beginning in Grade 4. An SOGI-inclusive policy, such as the one examined in this review, aims to create a learning and working environment free from discrimination, harassment, and bullying on the basis of characteristics protected by human rights legislation, including sexual orientation and gender identity. Implementing an SOGI policy therefore normalizes the teaching of CSHE in the curriculum. (see Section 2).

EDU: Yukon Department of Education central administration.

EDU SOGI policy / EDU policy: a policy established by the EDU Minister or Deputy Minister that must be followed in all public schools, regardless of whether the school is part of a school board.

FNSB: First Nation School Board.

GSA: Gender-Sexuality Alliance. Clubs or social groups often referred to as the Rainbow Room or Rainbow Club in Yukon schools. Initiated and led by students and/or school staff.

Heteronormative: relating to, or based on the attitude that heterosexuality is the only normal and natural expression of sexuality (Merriam-Webster.com, 2025).

Heteropatriarchy: or cis-heteropatriarchy is a system of power and control that positions cis and straight white males as superior and normative in their conceptions and expressions of gender and sexuality (Harris, 2011; Smith, 2016, as cited in OISE, 2025).



HPU: Health Promotion Unit - Health and Social Services Department of the Yukon government. HPU delivers and supports schools in the delivery of the local resource *Better to Know Comprehensive Sexual Health Education*. This resource has been developed conjointly with the Department of Education.

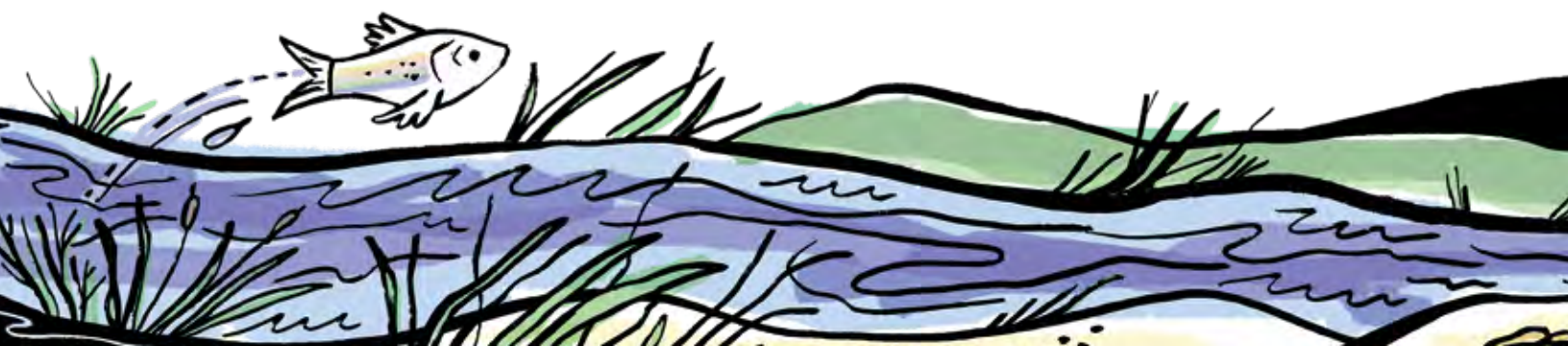
MOU: Memorandum of Understanding, formal agreement between the Yukon Territory and another party.

Queer: The word queer is sometimes used by 2SLGBTQIA+ people as a positive way to refer to themselves. It is becoming more widely used among 2SLGBTQIA+ communities because of its inclusiveness. Queer can be used to refer to the spectrum of non-heterosexual and/or non-cisgender people and provides convenient shorthand for 2SLGBTQIA+. Queer is also used by some people as a specific identity term when referring to themselves. It is important to note that this is a reclaimed term that was, and sometimes still is, used as a hate term and thus some people feel uncomfortable with it. Similarly, not all trans people see trans identities as being part of the term queer, and it is important to acknowledge the different histories of queer and trans Communities. (Yukon SOGI policy)

QTIBIPOC: An acronym for Queer, Trans, Intersex, Black, Indigenous, People of Colour. Queer people of colour often experience intersecting oppressions on the basis of race, gender, sexual orientation, and other factors. QTIBIPOC identities often face discrimination in both queer and non-queer communities. QTIBIPOC is often used instead of QTIPOC (queer, trans, intersex, people of colour) to call attention to the specific mechanisms and impacts of oppression experienced by Black and Indigenous communities. (Yukon SOGI policy)

Schools and educational programs:

- 17 schools with a school council
- 13 schools governed by a school board (FNSB, CSFY)
- 3 schools without a school council and report to a Superintendent (ILC, AVS) or School Board Executive Director (École Nomade)
- 3 educational programs that operate under a school or school board and therefore are not classified as a singular school (Teen Parent Centre and Wood Street Centre under F.H. Collins Secondary School; Programme Confluence under CSFY)
- 4 educational programs that are not considered schools but provide services to Yukon students. Two are independent of any school, and have no school council but are under direct authority of EDU: Gadzoosdaa Student Residence reports to EDU First Nations Initiatives and Student Learning Branch, and Yukon Schools Sports (formerly Yukon Schools' Athletic Association) reports now to EDU Superintendents. The Youth Achievement Centre and the Young Offenders Facility are under the direction of the Department of Health and Social Services and receive educational services through an agreement with EDU.



School-based policy / procedures / guidelines: policy, procedures or guidelines established by the school councils, school boards, or by the school administrators with the school council, school board and EDU superintendent approval.

School board: defined under section 116 of the *Education Act*. Two school boards (CSFY and FNSB) with five elected trustees each who oversee how designated schools are run. They work with EDU to make sure educational programs meet students' needs. They are responsible for the development of school boards' policies, school-based procedures or guidelines, school programs, and resources allocations for their designated schools in respect of the *Education Act*.

School communities: School communities include administrators, staff, students, families, school councils and boards, FNSB community committees, other school community members (First Nations, faith-based organizations, non-governmental organizations, etc.), EDU school community consultant, EDU curriculum and assessment consultants, EDU Student Support Services.

School council: defined under section 113 of the *Education Act*. Between three and seven elected members, set by regulation. Provide advice to the Minister of Education on resource allocation, school programs, policies and school-based procedures or guidelines.

Separate schools: defined in the 1962 Agreement and concerns the “education of children of Roman Catholic parents separate and apart from other children” and benefitting from public funding for Catholic religious instruction under the authority of the Yukon Roman Catholic Bishop, currently in the three Catholic schools.

SHE: Sexual health education is a component of the learning standards of the official Physical and Health Education British Columbia school's K-10 curriculum applied in the Yukon.

Sexism / sexist: prejudice or discrimination based on sex; behavior, conditions, or attitudes that foster stereotypes of social roles based on sex (Merriam-Webster.com, 2025).

SOGI: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity.

Superintendent: EDU senior administration. They supervise school administrators, are responsible for school budgets and liaising with education partners.

UNCRC: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is an international human rights treaty signed by Canada in 1991. It states 54 rights for all children. The Convention says that governments are in charge of making sure that children's rights are respected and that children know about their rights. Signing the Convention means Canada promises to protect and promote these rights. (Canada.ca)

YFNED: Yukon First Nation Education Directorate. A non-profit organization supporting Indigenous students and families' education in all Yukon schools.

YG: Yukon government.



I like that you said in your policy that I am included, but how come nothing is changing when me and my friends are telling adults about what we're going through everyday?



Introduction

When EDU requested that YCAO conduct a review on the implementation of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) policy in Yukon schools, it re-centred a policy that has already existed in the territory in some form for nearly 15 years. The need for that policy, unfortunately, remains as urgent as ever. Across Canada and the United States, SOGI continues to be politicized as a tool in an increasingly divisive sociocultural landscape. The language frequently employed by people against inclusive SOGI policies is demonizing and deeply harmful, and weaponizes fear, misinformation, and discrimination against the 2SLGBTQIA+ community for political purposes.


As with most social issues that become politicized, children and youth are impacted in disproportionate ways, and often in situations where their perspectives and voices aren't taken into account. Across Canada, 2SLGBTQIA+ youth continue to experience increased rates of violence, bullying, mental health issues, and lack of access to crucial services and resources while their humanity is debated on talkshows, podcasts, and in classrooms, religious settings, and legislatures. It is clear that a review of the SOGI policy in Yukon schools would elicit emotional responses from all sides, and it already has. However, in the current political climate, it is more necessary than ever.

SOGI inclusion in the Yukon cuts across political lines, as the timeline of the SOGI policy demonstrates. The initial policy originated under the Yukon Party in 2012, and was updated under the Liberal Party in 2023, with this review being requested in 2024. The most recent election sees a return to office of the Yukon Party that will oversee the continued implementation of a policy it created 14 years ago to ensure safer and more inclusive public education for 2SLGBTQIA+ students and staff.

A frequent point of concern raised in opposition to SOGI policies is that parents are being left out of decisions made about their children. It is important to address this directly - schools do not, and are not meant to, replace parents. Schools in the Yukon are places where the average student will spend about 11% of their time per year, learning under the guidance of trained professionals who are entrusted to deliver education safely and intentionally. Parents, guardians, caretakers, and other family and community members are also responsible for guiding young people on their learning journey, as per a child's right to be parented and taken care of (UNCRC 5 and 18). Children also have a right to learn all the information (UNCRC 17, 28 and 29) so that they might think, share, and develop their ideas and identities for themselves (UNCRC 12 and 13), and it is the duty of all adults in their lives to safeguard children from discrimination (UNCRC 2) while respecting the children's rights to privacy, cultural, and religious identities (UNCRC 14, 16 and 30).

This review is not about shaming, blaming, or individualizing any of the areas where SOGI policy implementation can be improved. There are incredible educators, schools and EDU staff, administrators, and school council and boards members who are doing the best they can with what they have, and it shows! Schools with strong SOGI advocates and active Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) communities are proving that inclusive education benefits all members of the school community - 2SLGBTQIA+ and allies alike. To the professionals doing whatever they can to





promote safety and inclusivity for 2SLGBTQIA+ students - never letting a slur go unaddressed, helping 2SLGBTQIA+ students access safe housing because home isn't safe anymore, sharing information, resources, and mentorship, doing their own constant unlearning and reflection, educating their colleagues and staff on how to do better, feeling comfortable around a rainbow sticker or a Pride flag - we acknowledge and honour your courage and commitment. Let this review be a call to action for the system to better support you, so that you can continue to support your students.

Both those who are supportive of the SOGI policy, and those who have expressed concerns with it, share a similar sentiment - wanting the best for the children in their lives. This is a common starting point from which to have important conversations about the policy, its implementation, where it has succeeded and stumbled, and where it can be improved. The argument that education should be value-neutral or apolitical is impossible - education has always reflected societal values, ethics, and worldviews, and children are better for it. When they are informed and empowered, young people grow up to become critical thinkers, caring community members, and engaged citizens.

Concerned with the SOGI policy:

“So you’re putting it on the child to initiate a conversation about something that they’re may be uncomfortable or scared about ... I think it’s unfair because it puts too much weight on the child to take action, to help themselves, to think things out. When we should be as adults, guiding them and supporting them ... ” – Family member

Supportive of the SOGI policy:

“This is not like regular, easy conversation that just gets absorbed in the usual. These are, I think, an incredible and unfortunate burden on some of those kids. So we’re putting the burden on teenagers to learn enough about themselves on their own.” – Professional



Concerned with the SOGI policy:

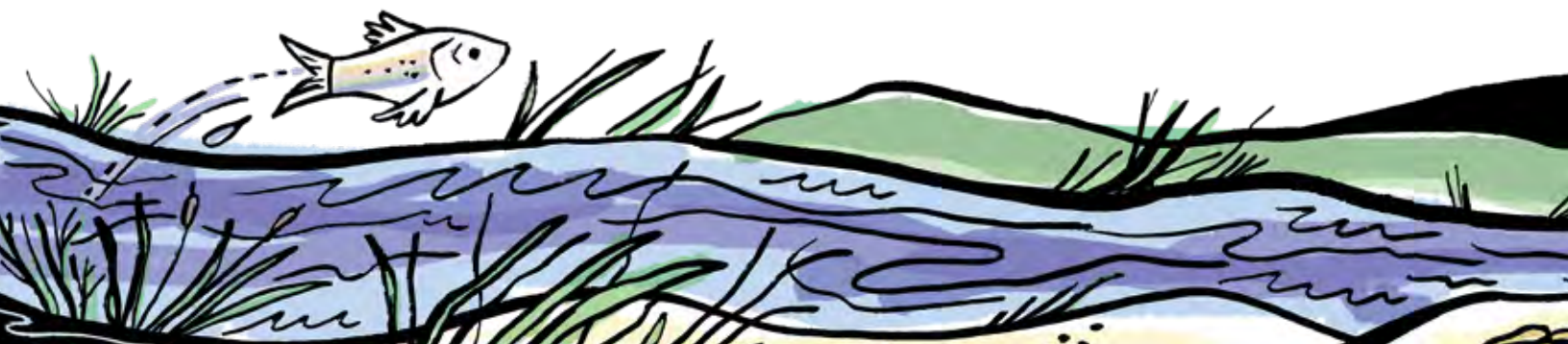
“Right now, there’s a real division about people’s opinions about what they understand their faith to be and opinions about what they think is required of them legally. ... I also don’t really know if there’s a willingness for our school leaders to come together, to try to understand together, how can we move forward as a community that’s not dividing us all the time? And it’s not a new issue..., in Yukon, this has been for over a decade. When it’s talked about, it creates division. And then people ignore the elephant in the room for a long time.” – Professional

Supportive of the SOGI policy:

“In time we all thought ..., ‘Oh, I’m sure a lot of our staff are more liberal Catholics’, or we share this kind of view, ‘Okay, let’s focus on the good things we’re trying to do with ...students and not think about those hard issues or tension issues’. And then something happened. Was that a PD up at Mount Mac or something? And then...you start to realize, ‘Well, wait a minute’. That’s when SOGI first came out... And then I think it created a divide within our staff, when you started to realize who was the more liberal Catholic or accepting or forward thinking ... and who wanted to ... almost go back into more conservatism in their Catholicism. And that’s when I think that tension became.” – Professionals



This journey includes all of us, which is why we're excited to introduce Rain, Frye, and Gramma. Rain is a curious, creative, and super smart rainbow trout who acts as a guide throughout this review (they're also somehow incredibly well-versed on the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, EDU's SOGI policy, and other pieces of legislation). Sometimes, Frye (little fish) or Gramma (Elder fish) will chip in with their own wisdom or perspectives. Look for Rain, Frye, and Gramma in the margins and footers of this review to provide extra context or details.



EDU SOGI Policy



What is in the EDU SOGI policy and how does it apply to us?

The EDU SOGI policy recognizes that 2SLGBTQIA+ people are facing unique challenges that requires protection.

The EDU SOGI policy identifies who is responsible for creating the procedures to follow when something bad happens, and to support positive, affirming messages and actions in our learning and working environments in education.

The EDU SOGI policy says that people making decisions and working in our learning environment must make the procedures visible and accessible for all of us to know them.

The EDU SOGI policy requires training for the people who are to support and protect 2SLGBTQIA+ people.



This EDU SOGI policy was introduced on August 15, 2023. It is an updated version of one created in 2012.

The people responsible to apply the policy are all EDU staff, school staff, students, administrators, and school community members.



Did you know?

The Education Act says:

(w) at the beginning of each school year, the principal must ensure that there are initiatives in the school that promote equality and non-discrimination, (i) which must include student activities relating to gender, gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation, and (ii) which may include, without limitation, student organizations promoting equality and non-discrimination, such as a gender and sexuality alliance. (section 169, 2022 amendment)

Background

The EDU's policy on SOGI originated in Fall 2012. At that time, the Education Minister identified national trends linking youth suicide to homophobic and/or sexualized bullying, and connected those back to students struggling with SOGI-based issues in the Yukon (EDU internal communication, 2012). In September 2012, EDU enacted a SOGI Policy to support students in the territory. Other jurisdictions nationally have also implemented similar policies, recognizing that youth struggling with SOGI-based issues require additional support and resources.

The policy was a positive and proactive step towards making Yukon schools more inclusive, but unfortunately it did not prevent a terrible bullying incident that took place a month later at St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Secondary School (then known as Vanier Catholic Secondary School). An openly out 16-year-old student, arrived at school to find a homophobic slur carved into her locker. According to reports, the school administration minimized her concerns, left the graffiti up for a week, and did little to investigate the incident. This resulted in the student transferring to Porter Creek Secondary to finish her studies (Winter, 2013).

In the initial years following the incident, some work was done to implement the SOGI policy in schools, including limited training for educators and administrators. These early efforts were not without pushback from official representatives of the Catholic community and eventually, despite the attention of some committed workers within EDU, the policy was shelved and largely forgotten. Compliance with the policy largely remained at a surface level of Pride flags and rainbow stickers in classrooms.

In 2019, a group of Whitehorse students actively involved in their school's Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA), with the support of their teacher and administration, escalated their concerns with the 2012 SOGI policy to EDU. The high profile nature of this activism sparked action that was long overdue, and resulted in an amendment to the Education Act (Bill 304, 2022) and an updated SOGI policy in 2023, stemming from the Yukon government's (YG) LGBTQ2S+ Inclusion Action Plan. In response to the activism of these students, EDU made substantial updates to the existing policy and announced the changes on August 15, 2023. The new version of the SOGI policy was heavily informed by the YG LGBTQ2S+ Inclusion Action Plan (released in 2021), and made commitments with the ultimate goal of strengthening SOGI inclusion in schools.

In 2024, former Education Minister Jeanie McLean requested that YCAO undertake a review of EDU's SOGI policy. EDU's request for this review is to better understand, through a child rights lens, the nuances of the issues related to SOGI policies currently being debated across several provinces. The goal is ensuring that EDU's policy, and any further amendments, will protect the right to education for all children.



Review Process

This review was completed using mixed methods to gather both qualitative and quantitative data representing a broad cross-section of Yukoners. Data collection methods included focus groups, individual interviews, literature reviews, online surveys, and thorough analysis of data from both EDU and YCAO. The data collection process took place from June 2024 through December 2025. During this time, our review team heard from:

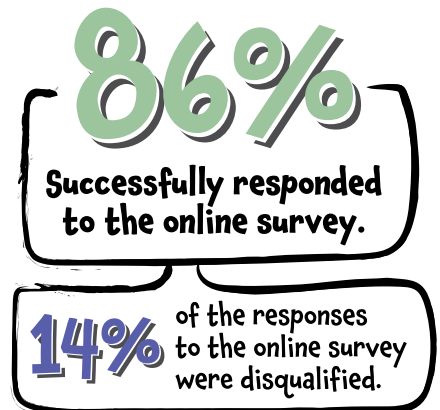
- current and former students
- family members
- educators
- administrators
- education professionals (including EDU and First Nation education workers and school councils)
- other professionals (including healthcare workers and non-governmental organization workers)
- and school community members (including faith-based organizations and representatives, and concerned community members).

An online survey available in both French and English through SurveyMonkey was open for eight months and received a large number of responses. In total, 558 individuals began the survey, but only 480 provided complete answers. The disqualified responses came from participants who either answered only the initial consent question or clearly had no connection to the Yukon. All the submissions in the survey were reviewed carefully. Answers that clearly came from adults pretending to be students (e.g. identifying as a student initially, but then referencing their teaching job or the children they supervise) were marked and treated separately.

The survey attracted interest from people worldwide and from varying backgrounds. We did not automatically exclude out-of-Yukon responses because we are aware of the prevalence of Virtual Private Networks (VPNs). Instead, we looked at each answer to see whether the respondent demonstrated a basic understanding of the Yukon education system before deciding whether to keep it in the analysis. Responses were included unless it was obvious that the individual had no knowledge of the local situation.

Because a sizable portion of the data comes from people who may not be directly connected to Yukon schools, the numbers are presented only as background information. Any quantitative data drawn from the survey should be understood as having significant limitations.

The anonymous survey was designed to reach a wide range of people—students, family members, school staff, administrators, professionals, and other community members—to gather their views on the SOGI policy. It mixed short, numbered questions that could be scored (such as confidence levels or star-ratings for how easy something was) with open-ended prompts where respondents wrote out their



A total of
72
 unique focus group and
 individual conversations took
 place, representing over
220
 participants.

These conversations were facilitated by YCAO interviewers and external contractors with lived experience, including a young person and an Elder.

own experiences and thoughts. To protect anyone who might have found the topic upsetting, the questionnaire included a trigger warning, a consent statement and a list of phone numbers for crisis-help services.

Depending on each respondent's role and how comfortable they felt with the SOGI policy, the survey showed different sets of questions. While students, families and community members did not answer the detailed confidence-and-implementation items, they still provided useful feedback about how they perceived the policy and what they had observed in practice.

Further, direct outreach regarding this review was made to all administrative levels at EDU including all school principals, school boards, school councils, and school councils' associations. YCAO also reached out to all First Nations governments, Yukon First Nation Chiefs and Councils, numerous non-governmental organizations, various professionals, and the Catholic Episcopal Corporation. It is notable that even though EDU requested that YCAO conduct this review, they offered no tangible support or instruction to school staff on participation - could they do so during work hours, confidentiality, etc. We were also surprised during the course of the review process that several senior EDU employees, in meetings with YCAO, were unaware of this review, its intentions, or that the request had originated from their own Minister.

A literature review examining SOGI policies and SOGI-based discrimination in educational settings was conducted, offering a broader theoretical grounding from other analyses of similar topics from across Canada and the United States.

Data was gathered from both EDU and YCAO, the latter comprising the experiences of YCAO clients who have experienced discrimination or infringement of their rights as students based on their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. EDU data included records of work done towards the development of the 2012 SOGI policy and the 2023 policy updates, and details of policy implementation efforts between 2019 and 2025. Throughout the course of this review there were ongoing conversations and check-ins with EDU workers to ensure alignment and clarity of facts, as per the Terms of Reference. YCAO was to inform EDU of ongoing issues related to SOGI to be addressed throughout this review. YCAO is concerned by the fears expressed by some EDU employees and participants surrounding potential consequences in relation to the information shared in the context of this systemic review. YCAO is aware that some information shared with EDU was used in human resource matters, leading to distrust in YCAO processes. YCAO is addressing this clearly avoidable risk to our integrity further with EDU.

For the survey and communication with participants YCAO used physical voice recorders and Sonix for transcription, Acrobat Reader Pro, Canva, and SurveyMonkey. The natural language processor Lumo (AI) was used to search for and summarize documents that were publicly available. All results generated by Lumo have been verified for accuracy by this review team. Data analysis was done using Microsoft Excel and Acrobat Reader Pro.



YCAO recognizes that this review addresses highly charged subject matter and has provoked strong reactions across the full range of viewpoints. We were saddened during the course of this review to read and hear false, and at times harmful, statements expressed about the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, and about our office. Our review team was exposed to unacceptable racism and homophobia. In several cases, participants did not appear to consider the impact of their comments on the people working on this review.

Review Timeline

March 2024: Referral from the Minister of Education for review and report relating to the provision of the designated service of education, specifically, SOGI inclusion in Yukon schools.

June - August 2024: Terms of Reference confirmed, public launch of the review, Review Coordinator, Youth and Elder Co-facilitators recruited. Public engagement started.

September 2024 - April 2025: Online survey active.

April 2025: Records requested from EDU.

May 2025 - December 2025: Data analysis and ongoing conversations with EDU.

November 2024 to July 2025: Focus groups.

July 2025: Briefing to Minister of Education and EDU senior leadership.

November 2024 to December 2025: Individual conversations.

December 2025: Public engagement ended.

December 2025 to February 2026: Legal and privacy review, report writing.

January 2026: Briefing with EDU.

February 2026: Review provided to EDU and the Minister of Education.

Spring 2026: Report tabled in the Legislative Assembly.

Disclaimer

This review deals with topics that are contentious in public discourse. As such, some individuals may have limited their responses due to concerns about potential repercussions, while others used the survey to express views opposing children's rights as set out in the UNCRC, rather than responding constructively to the questions being posed. The dataset includes responses that were vehemently opposed to the EDU SOGI Policy and contained misinformation that was concerning. These issues are important contextual limitations to data interpretation.

Some participants in this review requested to withdraw their contributions after participating in the review. We honoured these requests in accordance with the *Child and Youth Advocate Act* and related policies.



Artist Contribution

As part of this review, YCAO invited Ivan Coyote, to meet with a Student, a Youth and an Elder for an intergenerational conversation around what decision makers need to hear and know about the SOGI policy implementation. In December 2025, Ivan selected quotes from these conversations, and they wrote vignettes included in this report. The vignettes are regrouped under the title Ghosts in the Road. We are honoured to showcase Ivan Coyote's art.

While this review took precautions to anonymize Ivan's stories (with their consent), any remaining identifying information appears with the consent of the of the subjects of the stories.

Ivan Coyote's statement

I believe it is my duty and obligation as a third-generation Yukoner and non-binary trans person to use my gifts to do what I am able to do to ensure that our youth are safe, welcome and celebrated in our schools. I made a promise to myself decades ago to use the power of storytelling and personal narrative to build us all a better world to live alongside of one another in, and I believe starting with addressing the culture in our schools is a necessary first step.

Artist Bio

Ivan Coyote is a writer and storyteller. Born and raised in Whitehorse, Yukon, they are the author of thirteen books, the creator of four films, six stage shows, and three albums that combine storytelling with music. Coyote's books have won the ReLit Award, been named a Stonewall Honour Book, been longlisted for Canada Reads, and been shortlisted for the Hilary Weston Prize for non-fiction, and the Governor General's Award for non-fiction twice. In 2017 Ivan was given an honorary Doctor of Laws from Simon Fraser University, and in 2023 they received the first Honorary Doctor of Arts ever bestowed on anyone by Yukon University. Coyote's stories grapple with the complex and intensely personal topics of gender identity, family, class, and queer liberation, but always with a generous heart, and a quick wit. Ivan's 13th book, *Care Of*, was released in June 2021 by McClelland and Stewart and their new one-person show *Playlist* premiered in February of 2024.



Quick Facts

EDU SOGI policy created in 2012, updated in 2023.

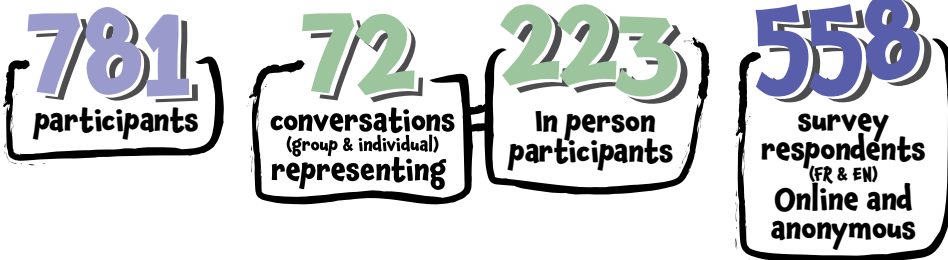
YCAO’s review of the SOGI policy implementation in Yukon schools is a response to a request made by the Minister of Education under section 15 of the *Child and Youth Advocate Act*.

Goals of this review:

1. Analyze and assess the implementation of the SOGI policy in schools and provide recommendation to ensure appropriate guidelines, policies and procedures uphold children’s views, rights, interests and wellbeing.
2. Provide recommendations informing the balance of children’s rights and other applicable provisions of any policy or legislation relevant to EDU, with regard to students of all sexual orientations and gender identities.
3. Provide advice on best practices/approaches when responding to conflict situations and complexities that impact students and staff.
4. Provide advice to EDU to update the SOGI policy.

Data collection June 2024 to December 2025.

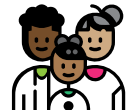
Public engagement



Participants profiles



Current & former students



Family members



Educators



Administrators



Educational professionals

(including EDU and First Nation education workers, school councils)



Other professionals

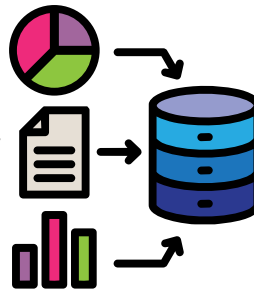
(including non-educator school staff, healthcare workers and non-governmental organization workers)

Record analysis - 2000 files

- YCAO data
- EDU data
- Background work for 2012 policy development and 2023 updates
- Details of policy implementation efforts between 2019-2025
- Processes in schools to address issues related to SOGI

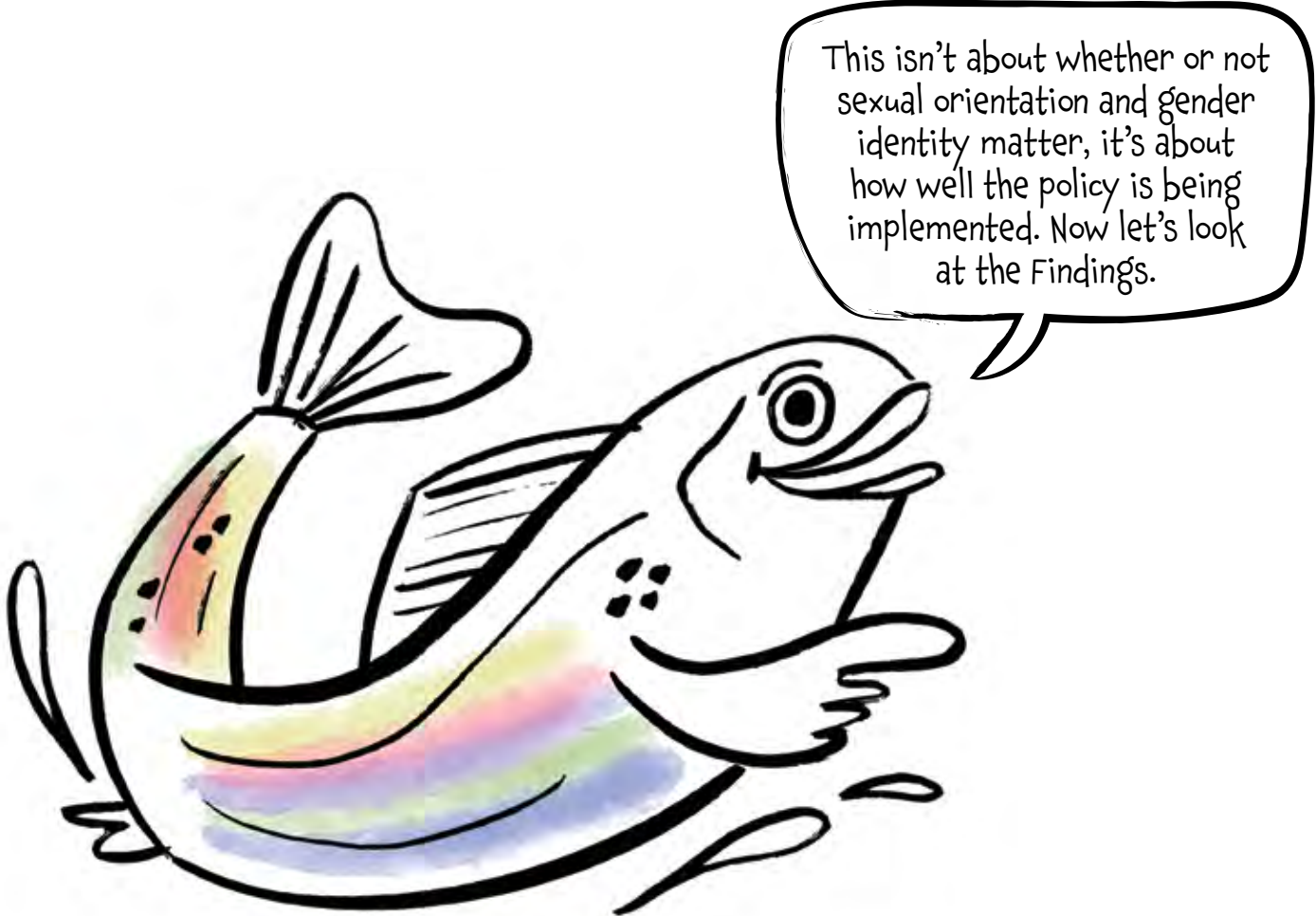
Implementation assessment through:

- Communication around SOGI
- Concrete ways of how the policy is enacted
- Accountability measures
- Incidents
- Content and framework of the policy (what is written, what are the potential gaps)



School community members

(including faith-based organisations and representatives, and concerned community members).



This isn't about whether or not sexual orientation and gender identity matter, it's about how well the policy is being implemented. Now let's look at the Findings.

Findings

This review divides its findings into two sections. The first, Policy Implementation, examines the actions and decisions that factored into the creation and introduction of the original 2012 SOGI policy and the subsequent 2023 updates, with particular attention paid to the need for improved communication from EDU to students, families, and communities regarding new and updated policies, as well as the need for more transparent, decisive, and tangible support for educators in understanding and applying these policies. The section reviews the ways the policy has been enacted in Yukon schools, often with mixed results, and how inefficiencies related to school councils (both membership and mandate) slow and/or complicate the implementation of the SOGI policy. This section also addresses the fraught and unclear division of authority between EDU and the Catholic Episcopal Corporation (CEC), which has directly led to unsafe situations for 2SLGBTQIA+ students and educators, and calls attention to the continued need for respectful dialogue between all parties, and educational governance frameworks that prioritize students and children's rights. Finally, this section details ongoing SOGI-related issues in schools, especially bullying and discrimination, and investigates what many research participants call weak and ineffectual responses by educators and administrators.

The second section, Culture of Inclusion, examines the educational environment where the SOGI policy is meant to be implemented. While Comprehensive Sexual Health Education (CSHE) and SOGI inclusion are not the same, the former is necessary in order to address the latter. As such, this section looks at the current state of CSHE in Yukon schools and lays out the challenges faced by school staff in delivering CSHE in safe learning environments. This section also challenges the universal approach of the current SOGI policy and emphasizes the need for a policy that addresses the diverse experiences of Indigenous, racialized, and disabled members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. Any adaptation must be informed by a critical interrogation of misogyny and heteropatriarchy. Finally, this section considers how schools must improve their representation of 2SLGBTQIA+ history, perspectives, and experiences in both environment and curriculum. It calls for increased protections for and policies around inclusion of trans student-athletes in sports, and a baseline of respect as a guideline for educators when navigating topics and identities they may not be familiar with.



Ghosts in the Road

by Ivan Coyote

Vignette 1

I am blessed to get to meet and work with and know a lot of queer and trans youth, through my books and gigs and my work up at the university, too. They continue to amaze and impress me. They are proud and brave and resilient. They are coming out earlier and bigger and stronger than I was able to do back in 1985.

I wish that someone else had done the work to make my hometown safer for me in 1985. I wish to this day that this place was more welcoming of all of the people I see living and working here now. I wish we all felt equally valued and listened to and cared for. I wish I didn't still feel I have to speak up and remind the powers that shape this place what it would take for me to truly feel included.

I know that growing up queer in this place made me tough. I know that leaving here and moving to the big city and coming out as trans and facing down all of the challenges that came with embracing my authentic self have made me resilient.

Just the other day my friend told me that being the primary caregiver for an ornery and stubborn parent who slips further into oblivion with every rise and set of the sun was going to help to build my character.

All of this made me wonder: how much resilience do I need to get through this one wild and precious life? Just how much character am I going to require?

Resiliency. I've spent quite a bit of time pondering my relationship with this word and all that it means over these last few difficult years.

I started as I often do, with the dictionary definition of the word resilience:

1. the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness.
2. the ability of a substance or object to spring back into shape; elasticity.

Yukoners love to think of ourselves as so much more resilient than our friends in Vancouver or Toronto or Victoria. And to be honest, I think we are. I still to this day have a splitting maul and a hatchet in the trunk of my car, and road flares and a tow chain and a tool kit, even when I travel deep into the streets of a big city. I carry all my Yukon habits with me wherever I go. I don't think I am stronger or smarter than 40 below and 100 kilometres from a cell signal, but I live determined to not go down without a fight, a good parka, a change of socks, a change of tire, and a campfire.

I am a trans person who was born and raised in the Yukon in a Catholic family in the seventies and the eighties.

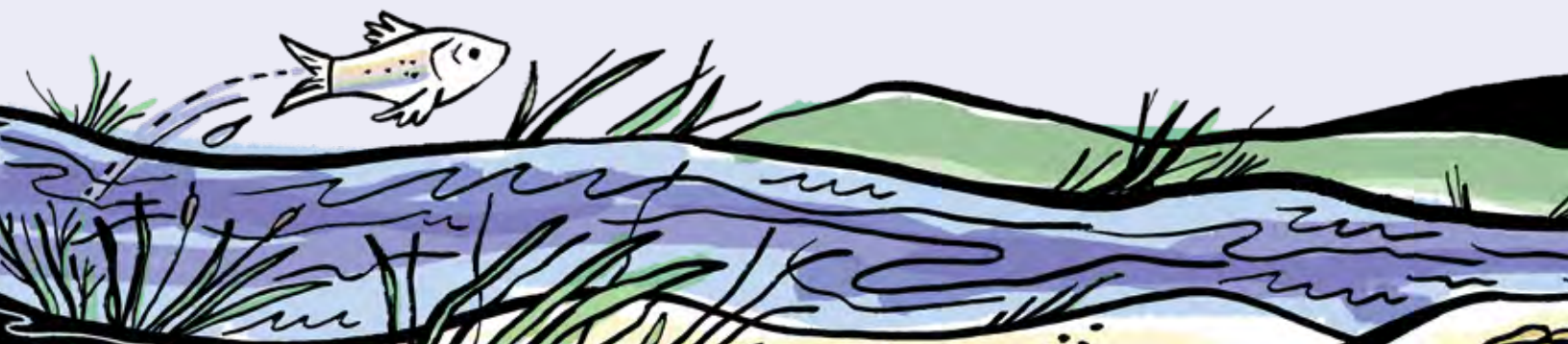
I navigated this and still managed to love the place I come from, but today I find myself wondering what we can all do to make it so that instead of glorifying and celebrating resiliency, we can build communities and organizations and workplaces and schools and unions where marginalized peoples don't have to learn to recover from difficulties, places where tenderness could be regarded with the same respect and reverence we so readily give to toughness.

What if all of us were not expected to constantly spring back into shape after experiencing trauma or hardship?

What could we all accomplish together then?

*

CCO



1. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Preamble

This first section examines the implementation of the EDUSOGI policy through three distinct, yet interrelated themes that shape how the policy has been, and is, currently understood, supported, and applied in practice across Yukon schools.

The first theme, Communication, demonstrates clearly that poor communication of the policy from the get-go, both to EDU staff and to students and their families, has been an obstacle to effective implementation. Inconsistent and unclear communication, particularly around topics perceived as sensitive such as CSHE, sexuality, and gender identity, leaves a lot of room for misinterpretation and conjecture. From the beginning, this has hampered EDU's efforts to roll out the policy with educators, administrators, students, and families on board. These dynamics directly affect educator confidence and willingness to implement the policy and influence trust in EDU more broadly. Further, the poor communication has extended to expectations around training for educators, who are tasked with implementing a policy that they often feel unqualified and unsupported to carry out.

The second identified theme relates to governance, specifically around the frameworks that have an important influence in matters of education and educational policy. It is imperative, given the several incidents that have taken place in the Yukon over the last several years, that EDU and the Catholic Episcopal Corporation (CEC) move towards greater clarity on their working relationship, especially regarding the limits of each institution's authority pertaining to education in Catholic schools. This also applies to how EDU manages and works with school councils; as the bodies responsible for the development of school-based plans to implement SOGI policy, there needs to be better accountability between EDU and school councils to ensure the latter have the support and resources necessary to do their job.

Finally, in-school implementation reflects the cumulative impact of communication and governance challenges and looks at how the policy is working in schools. This theme considers the shortcomings in EDU's own evaluation mechanisms for its policy. It also considers how inadequacies in reporting and tracking of SOGI-related incidents subsequently results in poor responses to these incidents, and perpetuates feelings of unsafety and exclusion in schools for 2SLGBTQIA+ students and staff. There is also an exploration of the current framework that EDU utilizes to identify designated SOGI-inclusive school staff, and how this model is insufficient, convoluted, and confusing for students and staff. It's important to mention that successes are celebrated as well, primarily hard-fought wins by students who have consistently exercised their right to be heard in advocating for more inclusive learning environments for themselves and their peers.



“It’s not clear what is required, and what is optional.” – Professional

“When the EDU says each school gets to create their own policies and procedure, that is fobbing the work off onto each school. We don’t all need a different, I appreciate individualized, like if you’re in Ross River, maybe you need to have something a little different than, say, Whitehorse. But I do think the department is responsible for creating a template. ... Not, ‘Here schools, can you create this, this?’ Then everybody’s doing something different.” – Professional

“The partners who work in schools need a clear directive that they must operate within the ethos of SOGI, otherwise it undermines the whole thing.” – Professional

“[EDU] should have a policy that all schools follow with clear guidelines for consequences.” – Professional

“Know what it stands for and that all people must be included but have not received support at the school level (from the dept) nor has the expectations for the different age levels been clear or clearly differentiated, where appropriate.” – Professional

“Staff stop any negative language or discrimination immediately. My principal is supportive and enforces the policy within our school community. However, my principal is still not clear on what other schools are doing and how it is being enforced.” – Professional

Communication

Communication to Schools

A persistent theme that emerges from this review is the lack of a robust, ongoing and comprehensive communication strategy from EDU regarding both the creation and introduction of the SOGI policy to educators, administrators, parents, families, and other members of the school community. Respondents to our review report that since the policy’s inception in 2012, effective execution has been heavily impacted by EDU’s failure to provide clear guidelines to school staff on how to implement the policy, as well as who jurisdictional authority is to be adhered to. The resulting confusion has led to uneven policy implementation and monitoring across the Yukon.

Educators and administrators look to EDU as the central administrative hub of Yukon education, responsible for establishing a clear mandate and vision, and providing frontline staff the tools and training necessary to carry this mandate out. It is evident that this has not been the case for the SOGI policy, which continues to be a source of confusion and job-related stress for educators throughout the territory.

While most educators and administrators are aware the policy exists and have varying levels of familiarity with its content, this review also heard from some educators and administrators who shared that they had never seen, read, or even heard of the policy.

This lack of awareness is disappointing given the policy’s own directions that Yukon schools must not only have their own developed SOGI implementation plan detailing procedures and guidelines, but that these plans “must be posted in a visible place and made readily available to parents and the school community.” Unfortunately, this is not the case.

EDU’s SOGI policy, and school-based SOGI procedures, are largely absent from school walls and websites, and SOGI-related procedures are barely mentioned in student handbooks, if mentioned at all. As of 2023, only one of the 40 schools and educational programs in the Yukon had a comprehensive school-based SOGI policy in place. This particular plan establishes a clear process for handling discrimination, harassment and bullying relating to SOGI, and requires teachers to read and sign it at the beginning of their employment in that school. It is available on the school’s website for public information. Between 2023 and 2025, two additional schools with a school council, either created an inclusion policy or an anti-bullying policy that

“I was not fully aware of the policy until today (2025-04-16). I had never looked at the policy before today.” – Professional

“I was only made aware today (April 30 2025) because a teacher came up to me and asked if i was aware of it, I had seen nothing before that moment regarding SOGI.” – Student

“There should be a clear complaint process in place. It makes no sense that the [EDU], wants specific SOGI complaint process in place when they don’t even have non-SOGI process in place.” – Professional



explicitly or implicitly referenced EDU's SOGI policy. They present a strong vision for inclusion but lack explanation of a clear process establishing the channels of responsibility and authority regarding monitoring, execution, and accountability.

When review participants were aware of EDU's SOGI policy, or that their affiliated school was supposed to have a school-based SOGI procedures or guidelines, they learned about it from word of mouth, a school communication, the EDU news release, personal research, or, rarely, through the school's website.

"If we have situations, there should be somebody that's there to guide us into how to deal with this [SOGI] for so many reasons. If you don't deal with it, there's fallout...it's a hot, emotional topic and we should have someone to walk us through it... Catholic schools want to do the work... There was positive feedback from that PD day. Teachers want actionable items, want to fly the flag, have displays, create safe spaces for kids... But the bishop... who isn't our employer, and we can't just go meet with him... because they aren't like our employer. And our employer isn't like putting them in check in terms of what they are allowed to tell us to do or not do. It makes it really difficult." - Professional

"It is not clear to what extent folks are aware of and supportive of the [EDU] SOGI policy. I think there is a general want to support all students, but educators get frozen in "not sure" what to do, or "how" or "what to say". The [EDU SOGI] policy outlines school-based procedures and things the school and admin should have in place at the start of the year, and we do not have these places in place at our school. I hope we can really shift into proactive action and support for our students and not just respond to discriminatory behaviours that arise. We are in a growing stage, big time." - Professional

"The issue of flying the pride flag in June has caused discord at my child's school. The issue of pride flags in the windows have caused discord at my child's school. The principal at my child's school has stepped away due to challenges surrounding the SOGI policy and lack of clarity around the implementation and the authority of the bishop on this matter." - Family member

"We don't have a school policy on inclusion anywhere on our webpage (which is it's own issue) and we are missing anything about the Yukon SOGI policy for schools, as well as how our school is implementing this. This feels like a very beginning step, that is needed! And then so much after that." - Professional

"I'm sure the staff and admin are working on policy implementation but as a parent of a child in gr 1 I am unclear as to the specific procedures they have adopted." - Family member

"I've seen lots of arguments among school community adults on whether SOGI is appropriate for elementary schools and whether it is needed at all. Also, Bishop ... is opposed to SOGI policy and has interfered with Catholic School implementation of SOGI - YG has done nothing to support school administrators trying to implement SOGI and do their job. YG needs to recognize that SOGI policy-and I'm referring to the gender identity part-is controversial and take the steps to acknowledge and address that, beyond giving families an option to opt out of body science curriculum." -Family member

"No. Nothing... Don't know that it [EDU SOGI policy] exists. I am LGBT+." - Professionals

"I would say that the SOGI policy is not well promoted, Department of education leadership is very bad at communicating information from a ministerial level to staffing at all other levels." - Professional

"Don't know about it [EDU SOGI policy]." - Professional



Board-Specific Updates

At the start of the 2025 school year, the First Nation School Board (FNSB) provided information and guidelines via their website to FNSB school administrators on how to implement the EDU SOGI policy in their schools. FNSB also established a SOGI committee to work with and support school staff, FNSB staff, and school Community Committees in navigating EDU SOGI policy implementation. Currently FNSB schools apply the EDU SOGI policy broadly, though no information is publicly available about each school's internal procedures. Their website also provides links to EDU's SOGI policy, SOGI resources, and the Yukon government (YG) guide to writing inclusively. FNSB publicly released their *SOGI Safety Report 2024-2025* on their website highlighting essential information and the work undertaken in their schools.

On the website for Yukon's French-language school board, Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon (CSFY), all board procedures and guidelines are listed, though there are none specifically related to SOGI or inclusion. The EDU SOGI policy is not referenced or linked on the website, though directives for respect and inclusion reference sexual orientation and prohibit homophobic language. Information about incident reporting and recording were not specified beyond communication with the families on CSSC Mercier's website. The CSFY and the FNSB are actively developing their own SOGI procedures.

SOGI Training for School Staff

It is important to note that school staff have not been adequately equipped by EDU to implement the EDU SOGI policy. Heightened public discourse, abundant misinformation, and the potential for harm to be done to both 2SLGBTQIA+ students and school staff necessitate a base foundation of training on how to implement SOGI-related procedures. While some efforts have been made to provide educators with basic skills and knowledge, what has reportedly been offered is far from sufficient.

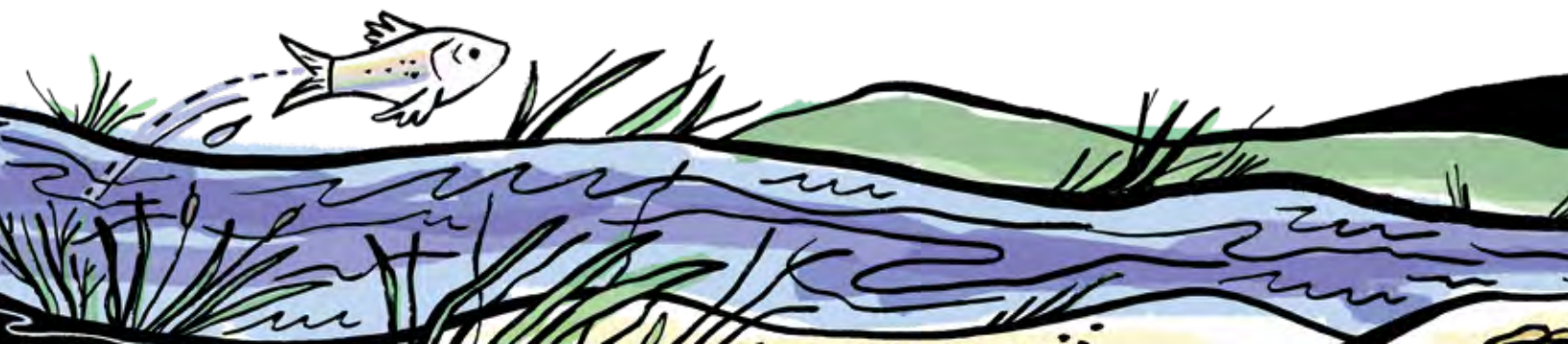
Review participants questioned the extent to which decision-makers (EDU, school councils and boards, and administrators) are aware of the capability and readiness of their staff to be SOGI-inclusive. This corresponds with survey results, where decision-makers that responded to the review survey self-rated their confidence level in applying the policy "Somewhat confident" at 50%, "Not at all confident" at 36%, and "Very confident" at 14%.

"I was wondering...is that something that they're exploring in the hiring process of finding out whether or not the teacher is neutral, and willing and able to provide inclusive instruction for all people? If that's a question that's in the interview or not?" – Professional

The updated 2023 EDU SOGI policy stipulates that "training and resources shall be offered to all staff and further training to those identified staff members and counsellors to be sensitive and respond knowledgeably to 2SLGBTQIA+ students as well as students with 2SLGBTQIA+ family members. Identified staff and counsellors must receive training."

"It's one thing to see a rainbow on a wall, but it's another thing to be able to go into a classroom and have that conversation with a staff member and sort through the s**t that you might be facing." – Professional

"Standards for teachers need to be more clear (this is for the staff who are not seeking this info out in their own)."- Professional



This review was unable to determine a clear number of SOGI-trained staff or verify whether all identified staff (SOGI champions aka identified safe contacts or SOGI 123 leads) have received SOGI training based on EDU records. Related, it is not clear whether EDU tracks training completion or its outcomes such as application or evaluation. There is no data to indicate whether training year-to-year is provided to the same staff (those who have retained their SOGI staff lead/champion role) or new staff leads, or whether staff joining a school mid-year receive training. Limited data provided by EDU shows that at least 100 staff, including those in teaching, administrative and departmental roles, received training in 2023, and similarly, about 100 staff received training in 2025. Of note: there are approximately 1600 EDU employees in total (Yukon Bureau of Statistics, 2023-2024), meaning up to 6% of all EDU employees are SOGI-trained. Thus far, the number of school council members (EDU), commissaires (CSFY), and community committees members and trustees (FNSB) who have received SOGI training or introductory sessions is unknown, but extremely marginal (YCAO was able to confirm four members of one school council have received training). At the departmental level, only one position (besides outside contract) is dedicated to supporting SOGI implementation and one for comprehensive sexual health curriculum delivery for approximately 800 educators.

Of further concern from EDU's SOGI policy's training mandate is the "offering" of training to all staff as opposed to the mandatory training for identified staff and counsellors. While having staff leads for SOGI-related issues in each school provides an important resource for students and other staff, mandating training for these individuals alone is highly problematic and risks overextending the capacity of these staff leads right away. It places the burden of responsibility for supporting 2SLGBTQIA+ students, maintaining safe spaces in schools, and educating colleagues and other school community members onto one person. Insofar as 2SLGBTQIA+ students are in every classroom and discrimination or bullying can take place anywhere, it is the responsibility of all school staff to be able to address SOGI-related issues. It is the responsibility of EDU to equip them to do so. Currently there is a requirement during a new educator's onboarding that some policies are read, including the SOGI policy. Unfortunately the most recent (June 2025) onboarding package referenced the 2012 SOGI policy and not EDU's 2023 updated version. Further, because there is no comprehensive tracking system for whether staff have actually completed these onboarding requirements, it comes at no surprise that many staff working within the school environments have not read, or are not even aware of, EDU's SOGI policy.

There was one mandatory training - "Introduction to SOGI inclusive educational practices in K-12 schools" - for all educators during EDU's Welcome Week in 2023 that overviewed the policy and staff's responsibilities within it. This has since been described as a general information session provided to all staff in attendance about the updates to SOGI policy. Since, SOGI-related training sessions have only taken place at school Professional Development (PD) days in an optional capacity, or at the request of individual school and educational program administration or school councils. Of note, school councils and school boards manage the funds designated



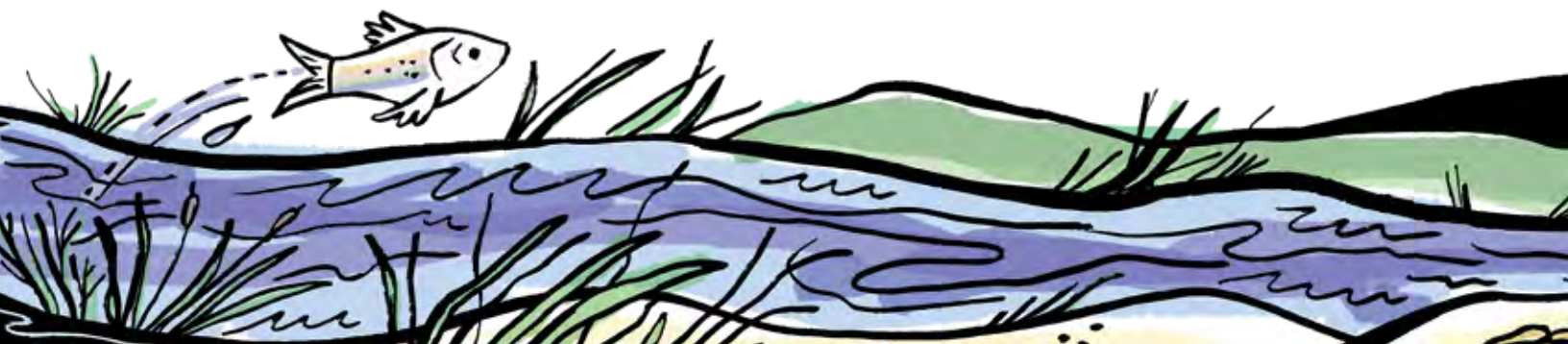
“They get like 15 minutes of SOGI education, like once a year. It’s not enough.”- Professional

“Well, I had a student come forward and identified she was identifying as a male. I was, ‘Oh my God, we have nothing. No education on this. What do I do?’ So I kept him back and spoke with him privately about what he would like me to do going forward with this whole situation, knowing that it caused a big uproar in the class. And everybody was kind of in shock. And I just went back to the human rights poster because I have had nothing on it, and there is no gender neutral bathroom for that student. And I think that student had an awful experience about it all... There’s nothing for you to fall back on. No guidelines, no support system. So you’re left to your own, your own values, how you go forward and how you respect and care for this individual and advocate for this individual. So, I think it really needs to be clear and people need to be, the teachers need to be educated, the parents and the kids on how to behave and how to go forward.” - Professional

for PD days, and thus have a responsibility to ensure SOGI-related training receives adequate funding allocation. This review has heard from school-based professionals this has not been consistently the case.

Since 2023, EDU has contracted ARC Foundation to lead the implementation of the SOGI policy between 2023 and 2026. ARC Foundation is a nationally-recognized organization delivering SOGI educational content and advocacy across Canada, and provides training and support through their optional SOGI 123 program, which also supported the creation of SOGI staff leads in Yukon schools. SOGI 123 is a resource made available by EDU to schools, though school councils, school boards, administrators and teachers have been free to seek out resources elsewhere as well at their discretion. It is unclear if external resources or training must be vetted by EDU. Between 2023-2025, ARC Foundation delivered five mandatory trainings to participating educators, along with multiple optional trainings across various platforms for broader staff participation. Though EDU has not developed adequate tracking measures for determining when and whether staff have attended SOGI training, feedback from professionals indicates that attendance at optional training sessions continues to be a major barrier to more widespread capacity-building. For example, review participants shared that they struggled to attend SOGI training provided during PD days as they are asked by their administrators to participate in other training considered higher priority. The limited numbers provided showed that other trainings related to SOGI aren’t massively accessed. SIDEBAR “They get like 15 minutes of SOGI education, like once a year. It’s not enough.” - Professional as they are mainly optional as per the Yukon Association of Education Professionals’ (YAEP) request.

It is important to recognize that staff may not opt into SOGI training for a variety of reasons, one of which is their own discomfort. Inclusive pedagogies require school staff to acknowledge the personal commitment it takes to shift the lens that they’re used to seeing the world through. A dismantling of long-socialized and internalized narratives is incredibly demanding work. This review heard that a lot of adults in the Yukon educational environment are going through their own journeys and questioning what they have always known, similar to young people who are wrestling with their own identities and asking questions too. Educator training must necessarily take into account that SOGI training, along with other inclusion-based forms of training, are not merely skills that can be taught and learned in value-neutral environments. Rather, they require self-reflection, humility, and a genuine desire to want to do better for students, even if it means change. This is hard work, and it is incumbent on EDU to properly support and guide all its staff on this journey.



Excerpt chosen by Ivan Coyote from the SOGI Intergenerational conversation

“But how are we supporting our teachers? How are we supporting them in furthering their education? How are we supporting them in their mental health and their struggles? ...And that’s something I think about a lot is there’s 24 hours in a day. And lots of times when you’re in school, whether it’s elementary school or high school, school feels like your only day, like that’s where you are. You see, it almost feels like you’re at school more than your own family. That’s how it feels.

So our teachers are impacting us. ... Who I am today has been impacted by every teacher I’ve ever had. It might be the littlest thing, it might not be a huge piece of meat. And other teachers might have given me things that I live by. But this is what we need to remember... I know so many teachers who have quit or aren’t working anymore. Like my [family member] she was a teacher. She doesn’t work anymore. It’s not because she doesn’t love students... but you know, they don’t get paid that well for their job.” - Youth

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Ghosts in the Road by Ivan Coyote

Vignette 2

Late in the summer of 2023 I was stuck in the Vancouver airport, waiting for a delayed flight home to Whitehorse. I was travelling home heavy-hearted from doing a keynote and a couple of workshops for teachers in Grand Forks. A school counsellor had burst into tears in the breakout discussion, and told us all a story about how for Pride Day the Rainbow Club had asked all the students to wear bright colours, to show support for their LGBTQ2S classmates, but a bunch of students had shown their true colours by wearing all black to school to protest Rainbow Day.

Some days I find it hard to scrape together enough hope to have enough to give to anyone else. That day was one of those days. Anyways. I got to talking with a tall thin man in the departure lounge. I had seen him around town, here and there, but I didn’t know his name. He was coming home from being in a treatment centre, a place that helped people recover from PTSD, he tells me.

“PTSD,” I repeat. “Are you a first responder?” I ask him. He is soft-spoken, and a bit shaky. I couldn’t see him being a cop, or a soldier.

“No.” He let out a sort of laugh, and shook his head. “I’m a queer teacher.”

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"I know it's a policy but our school hasn't seemed to advertise that it is required."
- Family member

"I don't really know what they have done." - Student

"I am just learning about it now [while responding to the YCAO SOGI Policy implementation survey online]." - Family member

"I have heard about it from friends." - Family member

"I think the lack of clarity and communication between different groups within the school community is a significant issue. While the policy may be clear to higher administration, its understanding and respect seem to diminish as it moves down to students, families, and staff. There needs to be more open dialogue, transparency, and sensitivity to diverse perspectives in order to create an inclusive, respectful environment for all members of the school community."
- Family member

"I thought it was discretionary, but I know the school my children attended was very SOGI-positive (at least the administration)."
- Family member

"A clear protocol and respectful presentation in both religious programming and SOGI policy acknowledging differences and clear procedures addressing conflicts [is needed]." - Family member

"There was always the belief that student-parent-teacher worked together, now there is a cloud where the school hides information from parents." - Family member

"I know about SOGI, but didn't think it was followed in the Yukon unless school administration would choose this. I am not happy to find out it is being followed in the Yukon, as I think it is formalized child sexual abuse." - Family member

"It sounds like communism and encouraging paedophilia."
- Family member

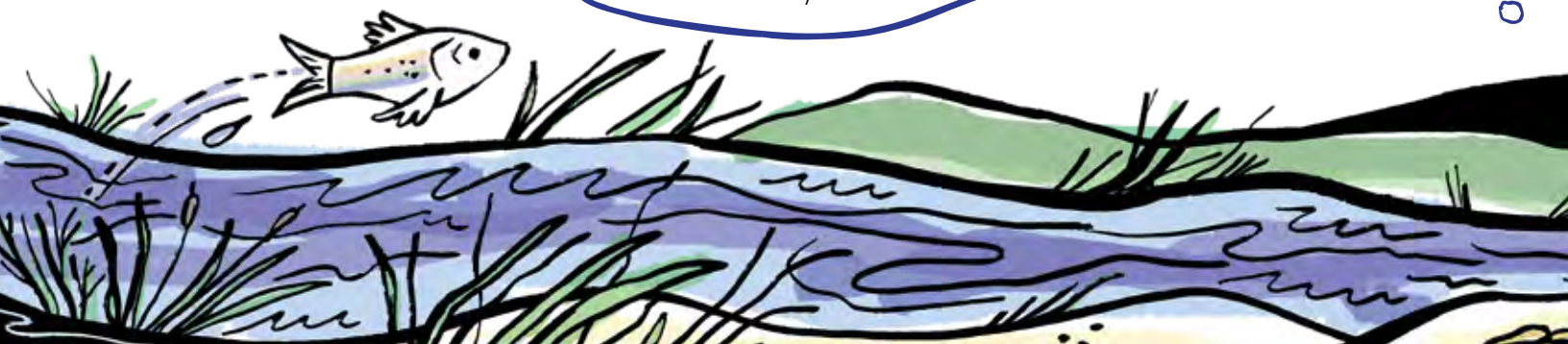
Communication to Parents and Families

This review heard from many people whose primary concern was not necessarily the SOGI policy itself, but rather insufficient communication about the policy from EDU.

This lack of clarity has compounded widespread confusion about the difference between the SOGI policy and the comprehensive sexual health education curriculum (See Finding 2). In an attempt to clarify, EDU drafted a letter that principals were asked to send to parents two months after the SOGI policy update in August 2023, which explained the comprehensive sexual health education curriculum, and what differentiates it from SOGI 123. Some respondents said this lack of clarity and transparent messaging was their main point of contention with EDU, including a large number of survey respondents, including children, youth, and family members, who reported being unaware of the policy's existence or that each school was supposed to have school-based implementation guidelines in place.

Convolved and inconsistent communication from EDU about the SOGI policy was a precipitating factor for the resulting tension among school communities. Without clarity, the policy's intentions have been conflated with extreme or inaccurate claims, leading to heightened mistrust in educators, schools, and EDU. This in turn has undermined productive dialogue and continues to impact the effective implementation of the policy.

Along with the absence of clear and defined procedures or guidelines in schools, unclear messaging creates a void which is easily filled by intentionally misleading narratives, especially in polarized contexts where gaps in information may be interpreted as evidence of hidden agendas or ideological overreach, alongside misinformation, rumours, and assumptions about SOGI (Roberts et al., 2023).



“The previous SOGI policy of 2012 was well written and made sure that all people groups were included. This revised version of the policy is politically driven and is discriminatory in nature. It promotes woke ideas on children, takes away the rights of parents, and reduces the rights of woman and girls in sport.” - Professional

“I would like to see SOGI continue to be supported, not only by faculty/ staff, but with the unwavering action of Department of Education. In my opinion, this requires a clear delineation of what educational material the Catholic diocese has the right to weigh in on, and what cannot be challenged. Obviously I believe that faith exploration and Christianity can exist in a school, as we have chosen to enroll our children in a Catholic school, however I do not believe that many of the derogatory, outdated and prejudiced principles of that form of faith should be allowed to overrule or outshadow legislated educational policies in our publicly funded school system.” - Family member

“Make it clear and firm that SOGI is the democratically lawful policy of the Yukon government. It’s founded on Canada’s Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I know this survey is just about SOGI but the problem with interference by Catholic church officials is related to the lack of clarity in the Yukon Education Act and Regulations about Yukon Catholic schools. The act and regs need to be clarified and brought up to date. The “agreements” between the Catholic Episcopal Corporation of Whitehorse and the Yukon Government come across, to me as a faith community member, to be secret understandings between whoever is bishop at the time and whoever is minister of education at the time. I’ve seen this change as the people and personalities of the major players changed since the 1990’s to present, with a major shift happening from about 2006 onward.” - Community member

“Staff, administrators and students know the policies and procedures clearly, unfortunately the process of introducing the SOGI policy was not explained and done very poorly to families - it was not a roll out that allowed parents/guardians to understand and ask questions and has resulted in a lot of “push back” from them, students were removed from the school system because of this policy.” - Professional

“The SOGI program from BC is what the policy supports. That program supports making books that are highly sexually and inappropriate for children available. If parents were given the opportunity to see what books are recommended I doubt they would be too thrilled with their contents. There are many studies that effeminate boys who may grow up to be gay often fantasize about being a girl/ woman. It is not until they are allowed to complete puberty and truly understand their sexuality do they understand that they are gay. If that process is interferred with by promising that he could be a women, the long term impact on that young boy is huge. In the absolutely worse case, he could be sterilized and never have an orgasim. I know that this policy is just trying to be inclusive and accepting, but you are hurting kids and familys. Kids that struggle with ADHD, Body dyspforia, Autism, depression, anxiety, engage in self-harm etc, and they declare for whatever reason they are the opposite sex or nothing and we dont ask why? Shame on us, shame on abandoning children to unscientific ideologues; the promise that if they just change gender everything will be okay. Shame.”- Family member

“If there is a need to address a need for a club at school, the administrative team is capable of deciding what clubs are needed. Using legislation to dictate community standards is wrong on all accounts. Promoting one people group over the over is wrong. We have safe and caring schools and have students/families that have a variety of beliefs, we respect their right to do so.”- Professional

“The other concerning area is Yukon school staff taking these policies and using them to promote their personal agenda on the backs of children ... at PCSS parading around LGBTQ2S students in the legislature and around the school and the politicians eating it up and supporting it, ... making Holy family look like it was designed just for queer students to go to school.”- Professional



Ghosts in the Road

by Ivan Coyote

Vignette 3

Back in 2018 I went to Vernon to do a bunch of school shows, which would then culminate in evening of storytelling for parents in the school district as well. The principal who had organized the whole trip called me a couple of hours before the evening gig, just a head's up she said, we've just been warned by the police that there might be a protest tonight at your show. A conservative parent's group might picket outside, and maybe try to disrupt your performance. Try not to worry about it, she told me. We've asked for a visible security presence in the school, and police are alerted and will be in the area. Let's go with the business as usual strategy she said, using her best principal voice.

So I tried not to worry about it, and I told stories to about 400 parents in a school gymnasium that night. Turned out there were no protestors outside, and nobody disrupted my performance. In fact we had a pretty fun time, until the question and answer session at the end.

A thin woman stood up and told me that she had come that night expecting to have a problem with my stories. That she had kept her kids home from school the previous day so they wouldn't be exposed to my ideas. That she was expecting to be offended by me and had planned to stand up and march out tonight in protest, but she hadn't. She said I actually seemed like a nice person, and that she was sorry that I was going to burn in hell for eternity. She said that she believed that trans people were a scientific accident, that our mothers had been exposed to toxic chemicals while we were in the womb, chemicals found in lead paint, or that had leached into food from the lining of tin cans, and jiffy-pop, she explained.

Jiffy pop popcorn was full of stuff that could cause a birth defects such as transsexuality, she informed the gobsmacked room, and that chemically altered trans people shouldn't be allowed around children, because we could give them ideas about themselves, ideas that could spread, and did I think I was a toxic chemical trans or did I catch it from hearing trans ideas somewhere? I tried to keep my poker face, mostly because I had no idea how many more of her were in that audience.

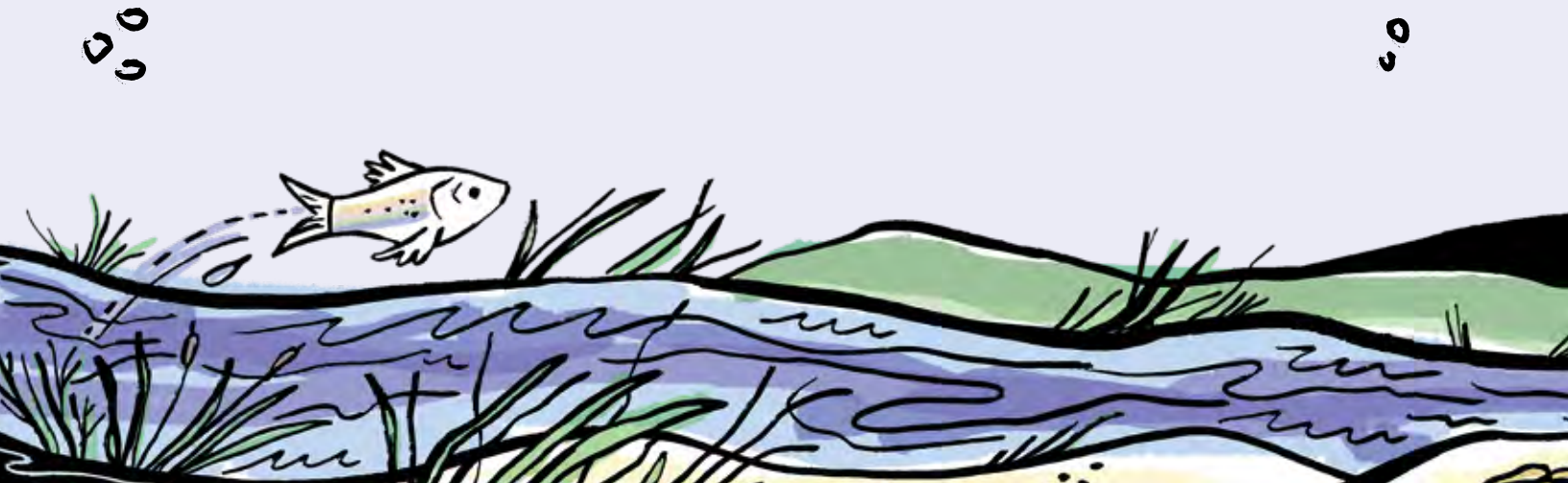
A man in the front row stood up, raised his hand, and asked if he could address her question. Normally I would never do what I did next, which was remove the microphone from the stand and walk over and hand it to the big bearded guy standing up in the front row, but I knew this particular man. He was with his very pregnant wife, and their five year old daughter, who just happened to be wearing a frilly pink dress and a tiara. I knew him, and I trusted him.

He took the mic from me and turned to look at everyone. Stood up straight and said his name was Leon, and that he had just moved to Vernon, with his wife and young family. He was a nurse, he said, and a trans man. He said his mother never ate any jiffy pop when she was pregnant with him, but she had made her home very unsafe for him when he came out as trans as a youth, and that he had left that home, and that his teenage years had been hell for him, and that if he could have made himself be straight and not trans he would have, as a survival tactic. If there had been an easier road he would have taken it, he said.

He said he hoped with all of his heart that none of her kids were queer or trans, because she would obviously never be able to conquer her hate enough to properly parent her queer or trans child, but that was okay, he said, because when she either kicked them out of her house or made it so unbearable they would have to leave her home, then people like him, and me, would be there to love her kids when she could not. To provide them shelter and health care and addictions and trauma counselling and help them get their high school diploma. That we would step up and take care of her children when she couldn't, or wouldn't. Then Leon sat back down. Talk about a mic drop.

In 2018 I could laugh at that woman and her jiffy pop theories. In 2018 I thought we were moving forward. Making progress. Back then I thought that woman and her hateful pseudoscience was an anomaly, not an omen.

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SOGI in schools and “childhood innocence”

In our anonymous survey many participants opposed to the SOGI policy claimed their opposition was to “protect childhood innocence.” This is concerning on a number of levels and presents high risks for children and their right to participation, access to information, protection from discrimination, protection of privacy, protection from violence, and access to healthcare and special care. Firstly, operating according to the concept of “childhood innocence” as a way to shield children from supposedly harmful topics infringes on their right to developmentally appropriate information and operates on the belief that children should be shielded from topics they can’t understand (or to that point, that there are things outside of children’s understanding). The goal instead should be engaging young people in intentional and critical dialogue that allows them to learn, form opinions, and exercise agency in their own lives (Mustafa, 2025).

While there is merit to considering the age-appropriateness of certain comprehensive sexual health education content, considering SOGI topics off-limits to children entirely can put their safety at risk. This also upholds a colonial approach to human development, ascribing a universalizing linearity that simply does not exist (Fleer, 2006; Wilson & Schellhammer, 2021). Children and youth today are exposed frequently and earlier to sensationalized, unrealistic, and often harmful depictions of sexual behaviours (Madigan et al., 2018). The report on *Health and health-related behaviours among young people in the Yukon Territory* (2025) reported that 16-25% of grades 9 and 10 students in the Yukon have had sexual intercourse. Cybertip.ca reports in 2023 that online sexual luring of Canadian children increased by 815% in five years. “Online luring is when someone (typically an adult, but not always) communicates with a child or youth through technology, like texting or chatting through an app, game or site, to make it easier to commit a sexual offence against them. Luring can involve a person asking, hinting at, or trying to convince the child or youth to send naked or semi-naked sexual pictures or videos. Luring can also lead to offenders manipulating children into meeting in person, where the child is sexually abused.” (Cybertip.ca, 2023).

Hickling (2005, in Michael, 2013) contends that offenders are skillful at choosing vulnerable children. Offenders know that children do not learn scientific vocabulary from the internet or watching television shows. If a child knows the appropriate sexual vocabulary, the offender knows someone has taught the child about their body. These children know it is ok to discuss sex with safe adults and are more likely to tell a safe adult if someone tries to take advantage of them. These children will also be able to use proper scientific terms to explain abuse to adults.

In light of this data, the concern in question should not be whether young people are exposed to sexualized content and sexual behaviours; they are. A child-centred response should be on ensuring young people are given all the information they need to make healthier decisions and become media literate to decipher harmful online luring or exposure. “Childhood innocence” dismisses the fact that children are disproportionately negatively impacted when they are not given access to

Did you know?

Article 2

Establishes the principle of non-discrimination, ensuring all rights in the Convention apply to every child under 18 without exception. It mandates that children must be protected from discrimination based on race, gender, religion, language, ability, background, or opinions, regardless of their parents’ status.



information about their own experiences (Robinson et al., 2017). Abundant research shows that young people have far more positive sexual, physical, social, and mental health outcomes when they are provided with age-appropriate and culturally relevant comprehensive sexual health education (Braeken & Cardinal, 2008; Kim et al., 2023; UNESCO, 2025). (See Comprehensive Sexual Health Education in Section 2.)

There are additional risk factors to be considered. Many young people already face challenging realities due to various life circumstances, among them health, family, education, and far more. YCAO works with children daily, across the spectrum of privilege, who are experiencing extreme difficulties in their lives. Their stories are living proof that “childhood innocence” is a fallacy that causes more harm than good. Further, difficult circumstances elsewhere in life can have implications for youth sexual behaviour:

“Previous HBSC [Health Behaviour in School-aged Children] cycles have indicated that certain contextual factors, such as disrupted family structure and low family support, are indicative of early sexual activity. While engaging in sexual activities is not inherently unhealthy, those who engage at younger ages have greater rates of sexually transmitted infections, a greater number of lifetime sexual partners, and increased odds of experiencing an unplanned pregnancy.” (Yukon.ca, 2025)

Though there are a plethora of factors that could contribute to harmful environments for young people, the research indicates trends towards younger sexual behaviour. As such, not equipping young people with the knowledge they need to understand their situations and advocate for themselves, on the basis of maintaining a fictitious “innocence,” is a direct determinant for increased vulnerability (Garten in Mustafa, 2025).

Finally, the term “childhood innocence” itself is a heavily contested and historically complex concept which has often been used to serve specific groups’ interests, with little potential benefit to children themselves. Though the original intentions of the term were wide-ranging, since the early twenty-first century it has largely been “narrowed down to debates on children’s sexuality and sexual endangerment” as a way to construct moral panic (Bühler-Niederberger, 2015).

Governance

Government vs. Catholic authority

One of the central points of tension surrounding The Department of Education’s (EDU) Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) policy continues to be the question of jurisdictional authority between Yukon government (YG) and the Whitehorse Catholic Episcopal Corporation (CEC), as the two have repeatedly clashed over the SOGI policy’s implementation, with significant spillover impacting students, families, and school staff. Specifically, in what areas does the Yukon Catholic Church and the Bishop have say and influence over education in Catholic schools, does their authority outweigh YG’s in matters of education in Catholic schools, and if so, to what extent?



The landscape of publicly funded Catholic education in the Yukon is a unique and historically significant one, dating back to 1899 when the territory's first public Catholic school was opened. Today, funding is rooted in a 1962 agreement between YG and the CEC. Currently, the Yukon operates three public Catholic schools - Christ the King Elementary, Holy Family Elementary, and St. Francis of Assisi Secondary School. A new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), signed in 2025 by YG and the CEC, continues to maintain the CEC's responsibilities in "religious instruction" while asserting the YG's authority in "school governance," including holding Catholic schools to "commitments to reconciliation and inclusion" (Yukon.ca, August 21, 2025). Importantly for this conversation, the MOU explicitly lays out that Catholic schools are "expected to adhere to educational standards and policies" while maintaining Catholic identity (Yukon.ca, August 21, 2025).

As recent events, public discourse, and ongoing tensions reflect, however, this has not been the case. The CEC has directly or indirectly repeatedly challenged EDU on SOGI policy in highly public, often confrontational ways. This has led to multiple impacts, including but not limited to school staff stepping down or requesting reassignment, school council members resigning and/or feeling silenced in meetings, and school staff walking out in protest of homophobic rhetoric at EDU-sanctioned professional development events. Several members of at least two Catholic school councils have no connection to the school at all, but had been put forward by the Catholic Church as candidates:

"The church has chosen a few people that they've put forward as candidates [for school council]. So on our council, I was the only parent. No one else even had an affiliation with the school. They were just members of the parish." - Professional

"But the parish members... they all can vote. And so we have a whole bunch of people who vote for school council who have nothing to do with the school. They have no kids going...have never stepped foot in the school, don't even know their way around it, and yet they are the ones that dictate who our school council members get to be. And their agendas are not always in the best interest of our LGBTQ+ kids." - Professional

While this is technically permitted under EDU regulations (O.I.C.1991/231), this revelation raises serious concerns about the presence and intentions of those school council members in question. This has contributed to an ongoing culture of instability, political conflict, and unsafety in Catholic schools for everybody, particularly 2SLGBTQIA+ students, families, and staff as SOGI-inclusion is represented as a threat to "childhood innocence," often in attempts to engender "moral panic" among the public (Bialystok & Wright, 2017).



Letter from the Bishop

In January 2025, Catholic school-enrolled families received a letter from the Bishop, dated September 17, 2024 and sent through the official communication channels: EDU to school administrations to families via School Messenger. The letter stated:

“[...] As you may be aware, the Catholic Church teaches that parents are the primary educators of their children and have the right to educate them in line with their family’s beliefs. [...]

Since our schools are both Catholic and public some programs currently offered in our schools are required by the government but do not represent the Catholic view. I would like to draw your attention to the “Better to Know” classroom resources and lesson plans on matters of sexual health and relationships which have been developed by the Department of Health and Social Services of Yukon and which are facilitated by the Health Promotions Unit. It is important to highlight that these resources are used to teach the public Physical and Health Education curriculum but are not approved by the Catholic Church and do not teach nor promote Catholic teachings, values, and morals on matters of human sexuality and relationships.

We are currently working in collaboration with the Department of Education to supply a Catholic sexual health program and curricula to support Administrators, Religious Education Coordinators, and teachers in supplementing the public resources with the Catholic perspective. However, even upon implementation, this adaptation will remain an imperfect solution for families wishing to raise their children in the Catholic faith. While we continue to work to resolve this issue, please be advised that you have the right to have your children opt out of sexual health classroom instruction by filling out the appropriate form supplied by your school administration.

The Diocese of Whitehorse has many resources to assist you, as first educators, in teaching and speaking to your children about human sexuality, sexual health, relationships, and other topics from the Catholic perspective.”

Principals, who shared liability concerns with EDU, were directed to send the letter to families regardless, with the rationale being that it was in compliance with Section 7(1) of the 1962 Agreement. By seemingly taking the path of least resistance, EDU endorsed the interpretation that comprehensive sexual health education (CSHE) in Catholic schools falls under the CEC to provide instruction for “religion and morality,” and abided by the Bishop’s interpretation that “some programs currently offered in our [Catholic public] schools are required by the government but do not represent the Catholic view.” From a child rights’ perspective, this letter from the Bishop, and transmitted at the direction of EDU, is concerning. Several of the points raised create tension with specific United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) provisions when implemented in ways that limit children’s access to unbiased, comprehensive information about sexual health and relationships.



“Regarding the “Better to Know” Program - [a school council member] has been in talks with...the public health nurse who teaches body science. [They] sat in on the Grade 5 classroom presentation and talked to ...the counsellor. It was 100% body science. [They] found that what was being supported was the science and not the ideology behind it. [The nurse] should be applauded for her neutrality in the political sphere and straight forward space, and [their] respect for [a] Christian worldview such as marriage, abstinence, and identity. Students were encouraged to talk to their parents or the school counsellor if they had questions. [Another school council member] asked if this is the program that Bishop Hector said was not Catholic and the response was yes.” (CKES School Council Meeting Minutes, Mar. 3, 2025)

Labeling the public “Better to Know” resource (which were confused with another resource by the letter’s author) as “not approved by the Catholic Church” may lead to deprioritising or outright omission of the *Better to Know Comprehensive Sexual Health Education* resource in classrooms, thereby restricting students’ access to the full, evidence-based curriculum created by Department of Health and Social Services (HSS) professionals and mandated by EDU. This clashes with UNCRC article 17 (Access to Information), article 24 (Right to Health), and article 28 (Right to Education). Referencing the development of an alternative “Catholic sexual health program” in the letter, this review has found no evidence that any work, either independently or “in collaboration with [EDU]” has actually taken place: “For clarity, currently, the Department of Education staff and the Catholic Diocese have not entered into conversations about alternate sexual health curricula for Catholic schools” (Letter from EDU to MLA White, March 6, 2025, and Hansard of the Legislative Assembly, March 13, 2025). This review has observed, however, exchanges between EDU and the CEC around proposals to support SOGI policy implementation in Catholic schools, though to our knowledge, this work has not yet yielded any concrete outcomes. An additional concern is the letter’s problematic assertion of parental primacy; while UNCRC articles 5 and 18 recognize the role of parents in raising and educating their children, the UNCRC also stresses the child’s best interests are paramount (article 3) and must be a primary consideration by decision makers; children’s rights cannot be ignored or violated so as to comply with a family’s value system. Rather, children have a right to have their parents protect their best interests and to ensure their rights are held in balance.

This letter further highlights the inconsistency and lack of process regarding CSHE, as it proposes to families the right to “opt out of sexual health classroom instruction by filling out the appropriate form supplied by your school administration.” Currently, the only official information about opt-out options is that it is the responsibility of every school to communicate this option to parents: “We are striving to ensure all schools and administrators are responsive to parents and caregivers when they request their right to opt their children out of classroom instruction on sexual health. It is the responsibility of every school to communicate this option to parents.” (Letter from EDU to MLA White, March 6, 2025). Beyond the existence of a formal Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) to set up accommodations for special needs, there is no EDU



policy, guidelines, or standardized forms to formalize an opt-out process for any class, regardless if it is mandatory curriculum or not. Instead, families can make a direct request to the school principal or superintendent for a child to opt out. In order to assess EDU's accountability to students who opt out of instruction, we asked EDU the following questions:

1. If a student is pulled out of a class or lesson by their family, who is responsible for ensuring that the student receives the mandatory teaching of the targeted class or lesson?
2. How does the principal ensure that an alternative delivery of the lesson has been provided?
3. Who assesses/evaluates the knowledge acquired in the alternative way, and on what criteria?
4. Who assesses and approves the resources used for the alternative delivery of the lesson?
5. How long do the family have to ensure that the student is provided with the mandatory lesson in an alternative way?

To these five questions, the same response was provided: "We do not currently have a formal policy in place" (Internal communication YCAO-EDU, October 2, 2025).

This review is aware of a small number of children whose parents have opted out of CSHE class, though it is unclear whether this decision was made in consultation with their child (UNCRC 12 and 3). EDU could not provide information on whether these children received alternative CSHE, though a staff member was made available to supervise them. In other instances, parents have also decided to homeschool their children due to SOGI policy, requested their child's exemption from SOGI or Pride-related events, and refused to fill out school forms with gender categories beyond the binary.

A similar letter, with corrected information regarding the curriculum, was circulated through the School Messenger tool in October 2025 for St. Francis of Assisi. This letter is also available on the Sacred Heart Cathedral's website, calling out the CSHE program delivered in Yukon schools and inviting parents to opt their children out of these classes. The letter also offers alternative teachings from the Diocese. While it appears the letter wasn't sent to Catholic elementary schools' families, it is concerning that this second letter was still sent through official channels of communications from EDU. The CEC therefore, even after the new MOU was signed, is maintaining their position against an official, researched, mandatory and vetted curriculum, with EDU's endorsement of the CEC's position.

"[This letter] was like the domino which led to [the] principal leaving because she sent a counter letter talking about what the sexual health curriculum looks like, what the public health programming looks like. And it's hard for me to understand how my boss, the Department of Education, can say, 'You are going to teach this public school curriculum' and then send a letter so confusing from the bishop on his behalf. Historically, there's never been a letter sent from the bishop." - Professional



Diverse Catholic Views of SOGI Content

It is important to note that this CEC’s position is not representative of all Catholics, or even most of them. Affiliation with a religion or spiritual belief system does not in itself mean a person is anti-SOGI. Any perceived tension would have to come from particular doctrines or interpretations, not from the mere fact of religious affiliation (UN Independent Rapporteur on SOGI about religion and SOGI rights compatibility, 2023). Based on interviews and survey respondent demographics, it appears that strong reactions in opposition to SOGI policy and CSHE in schools represent a small minority of the Catholic community, and this review otherwise heard that the other members of the Catholic community felt misrepresented in the message relayed by the Bishop and EDU:

“And if you talk to Catholic people, the range of the faith is very broad and it’s being presented as if this very hard line old school thinking is the norm and in my view, it’s not. ... And it’s a very hard one because we absolutely love this school. We love the teachers. Our kids have been cared for there. The people that work with the students are wonderful people ... But I don’t think just because you love your school and the teachers are nice, that you can just keep going with this type of culture of leadership that is not willing to question, and it can be damaging. I really am having a hard time with understanding why the Department of Ed is not taking a more vocal stand. They often will say, ‘Well, we have this policy.’ And [the school is] like, ‘Listen, we’re struggling with this. We don’t know what to do with this, and we need some help navigating it.’ And the default just seems to be, ‘Well, we’ve got this agreement and the bishop’s allowed to be involved.’ - Professional

“But without the Department of Education pushing to ensure that all schools are behaving this way, and essentially allowing the Bishop to push an agenda that really only 2% of parents are looking for, it’s frustrating. I could see if there was a big split. I could understand if the Department of Education said, ‘Listen, 50% of our parents really don’t know how to deal with SOGI.’ I could understand, ‘Oh wow, this is really hard for us!’ [But] that’s not the case. 98% of the parents are like, ‘Love the flags, love the safe stuff, love flying the flag in June. This is great. This is why we want our kids here.’ There is a way to have religion in your life, but also be respectful of the SOGI policy. We can walk alongside each other. There is a way to love everybody.” - Professional

In fact, a Fall 2024 parent survey from Christ the King’s (CKES) school council minutes reported that *“only 8% of our parents feel that the environment, curriculum and activities at CKES are NOT distinctly Catholic”*. (CKES school council, 2024)

Further important to note is that a primary goal of Catholic education is “to help students fully inform their consciences which means they have a solid understanding on all perspectives on an issue”. While perspectives that are “not always popular or in sync with our civil society” may be introduced to the conversation, the objective remains to give students the opportunity to have discussions and come to their own conclusions on issues. (EDU internal communication, May 15, 2015)



“There was a lot of pushback from the Bishop. [Such as] why do we need rainbows? Why is that important?” – Professional

“There was no action being taken, like that textbook literally compares homosexuality in the same sentence as bestiality, like having sex with animals. And this is what our children are reading. And in my mind, if the principal did not know that was in the textbook, number one, they should have known. Number two, they should have been appalled. It was responded to as if it was nothing. [...] Department of Education eventually, several months later [said] we’re going to review the textbook, not even remove it.” – Family member

“It is conflicting to go to one PD that’s Catholic focused and essentially it’s an undercurrent of homophobia and like all this horribleness [...] but we’re also legally, and happily for myself, required to follow SOGI policy. But we’re being told also something else, right?” – Professional

“A large number of staff left the church at Catholic PD, [...] a very divisive action which we haven’t recovered from [...] there’s been no debrief or follow-up [with EDU].” – Professionals

“I was a bit disappointed that others were not interested in the Catholic perspective [on SOGI] and I feel like it may represent a lack of desire to understand the Catholic perspective which is very different than what I think most people ‘assume’ to be the case” (EDU internal communication, May 15, 2015).

Despite the clear diversity of beliefs on SOGI within the Catholic community, the Bishop and CEAY have continued to advocate for distinctly anti-SOGI resources in Catholic schools’ professional development, specifically content rooted in the work of the Theology of the Body Institute, which teaches that God created two sexes - male and female - with distinct, complementary purposes, and rejects “gender ideology” that separates gender from biological sex. While some review participants grounded their opposition to SOGI policy in these theories, it is of interest that two youth who expressed reluctance to participate in SOGI-related events at school based their decision on tenets of personal choice rather than distinctly anti-SOGI beliefs:

“People can like whoever, just doesn’t mean I have to be forced to participate in a bunch of this stuff.” - Student

“I think people’s personal choices and beliefs should be respected and this SOGI agenda should not be forced on anyone.” - Student

Lack of EDU Accountability

As stated above, the CEC’s opposition to the SOGI policy over the last several years has resulted not just in homophobic and transphobic rhetoric, but harmful actions and decisions that have endangered the safety of 2SLGBTQIA+ students, families, staff, and allies. Among those were vehement opposition to Pride flags being flown or hung at schools the use of a deeply homophobic textbook and lesson in classrooms, reports of bullying related to SOGI matters from the Bishop and CEAY, and repeated homophobic comments from school council members, the Bishop, and CEAY representatives, including public opposition to the inclusion of all genders. Some Catholic school councils’ minutes, local news coverage, and Legislative Assembly Hansards have all documented these challenges and conflicts. Still, EDU’s response to these incidents is generally slow, and often ineffectual.

An example of a relatively prompt response took place in 2024, when family members of students enrolled in the Moral and Ethics 12 class at St. Francis of Assisi expressed concerns to media about the teacher’s use of a textbook titled *Called to Happiness: Guiding Ethical Principles* (Auer, 2016) with explicit homophobic content. They also expressed concerns about a school council member in active opposition to the SOGI policy. This letter stated that the textbook had been reported before with no action. EDU responded to the media request, that “There is no place for homophobic or transphobic teachings in our public school system”. (EDU record, March 1, 2024). After the story gained traction, EDU developed a guiding document for selecting curricular resources generally, and more specifically with a Catholic lens, inspired by the work of Focused Education Resources, a non-profit supporting school administrations with resources to optimize the delivery of education (EDU internal



communication, June 2024). Using this framework, the textbook in question was eventually formally removed from the school and replaced with *In Search of the Good*, published by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. EDU sent out a letter to St. Francis of Assisi families, signed by the superintendent and the Bishop, addressing the textbook issue and their decisions. This is an encouraging sequence of events from EDU (though still in reaction to a media scandal) and hopefully sets a precedent for curriculum review moving forward.

With that said, the fact that such a textbook was in use in the first place, along with continued acts of homophobic violence and bullying by individuals with public responsibilities within the education system is egregious and a blatant violation of the policy. Just as unacceptable has been EDU's lack of a firm response to these actions. Multiple school staff have reported not being listened to or acknowledged by EDU when requesting support for external challenges to SOGI policy implementation efforts, or being advised to bring their issues with the school council to the court. Others, after a perceived lack of EDU's actions for resolution, went to advocate for themselves to the Human Rights Commission. Even when staff concerns were heard and escalated, resolutions could take weeks, months, and even years (EDU records 2019-2025 for YCAO request). Meanwhile, education professionals have expressed perplexity at the inaction of EDU representatives during school council meetings and professional development events when homophobic dialogue and bullying has taken place. EDU's failure to hold these actions accountable is a clear violation of multiple children's rights: UNCRC articles 2 (non-discrimination), 14 (freedom of thought and religion), 19 (protection from violence), 28 & 29 (access to and goals of education), and 30 (rights of Indigenous groups, minority culture, language and religion).

The Education Act requires the respect and continuity of any agreement between the Education Minister and the CEC (section 57) which sets a separation for the education of children from Roman Catholic parents from other children. At the same time, the Act requires each school to have initiatives promoting equality and non-discrimination (section 169). This contradiction factors into the lack of accountability.

School Council and SOGI procedures

Conflicts around SOGI implementation have shone a light on the gaps in capacity for school councils, including convoluted bureaucratic processes between school councils and school boards, school administrations, and non-profit organizations supporting school councils that lead to inconsistencies, miscommunication, and misappropriation of authority. This prevents school councils, which are meant to comprise dedicated members of each school's broader community, from accessing the clarity, support, and training necessary to fulfill their duties in an effective way.

Duties and responsibilities of school councils, along with accountability processes for how they should work with other educational counterparts such as administrations and superintendents, are laid out in the *Education Act*. School administrators, as EDU employees, must follow EDU policies but do so in accordance with their respective school councils, who are charged to "(a) review, modify if necessary, and approve the school objectives, educational priorities and courses



Did you know?

The Education Minister:

- enacts the Law and develops policies;
- is responsible for the operation and management of any school in an attendance area in which there is a school committee or Council;
- shall evaluate, at least once every five years, each of the schools operated by the Minister in accordance with guidelines, standards, and procedures established by the Minister.

The school board, school council or Superintendent:

- review, modify and approve rules, policies and procedures respecting the Minister requirement developed by school administrators with staff, families and students inputs;
- review, modify, and approve school objectives, educational priorities and course of study by grades, and other matters required for the effective functioning of the school;
- establish procedures for resolving disputes between schools, parents and teachers;
- establish an attendance policy;
- MAY establish rules and policies on any matter within its jurisdiction.



of study by grades, as prepared by the school administration, and other matters required for the effective functioning of the school; (b) make recommendations to the superintendent for the allocation of resources within the budget approved for the school” (section 113 (1)). A school council **may** also “establish rules and policies on any matter within its jurisdiction” (section 113 (2) (e)). School boards have the same obligation under section 116 (1) (b) and (d).

Additionally, school councils, school boards and the superintendents “shall review, modify if necessary, and approve rules for the school procedures for the enforcement of the rules as developed by the school administration in consultation with school employees and after having requested input from students. (section 39 (1)). “The rules that affect students shall be posted in conspicuous places in the school and shall be reviewed with the students of the schools at the start of each school year” (section 39 (2)). There is no evidence that these requirements are effectively happening.

It’s imperative to note that school councils and boards have a binding obligation to listen to staff and families and weigh their input when making decisions (section 120 (1),(2)). The Education Minister may under section 113 and 114 request a status report, an audit or an explanation of why a decision has not been carried out. Failure to comply if the council or board does not act, can lead the Minister to issue a formal directive requiring compliance (section 6) or to investigate (section 199) and act accordingly.

For accountability, school councils must “keep a complete and accurate report of its meetings and provide a copy to the Minister within 30 days of each meeting” (section 113 (1) (e)) and the Minister shall evaluate, “at least once every five years, each of the schools operated by the Minister in accordance with guidelines, standards, and procedures established by the Minister.” (section 114 (2)).

Where the *Education Act* fails to articulate guidelines for school council is in the area of conflict resolution processes. This lack of process has led to accountability gaps for school councils when considering their authority and roles in the development and implementation of procedures. In 2024, a staff member from a Catholic school spoke publicly about being harmed by homophobic statements during a school council meeting (Hong, 2024). EDU responded to these concerns by stating that school staff aren’t required to attend school council meetings and that school councils are elected, thereby implying that EDU has no oversight. This response was dismissive, inaccurate, and sets a dangerous precedent of EDU and school councils acting entirely independently.

“The Education Act sets out the powers and responsibilities of the Minister and school councils. School councils are a separate, autonomous elected body, and the Department of Education is not a body that has authority to compel the council or the non-profit organization to comply.” (EDU internal communication, August 2024)

By claiming they have no authority or oversight, EDU effectively absolves itself of accountability to the fact that school council members can make non-SOGL inclusive statements and arguments in meetings while being on EDU property and discussing the operation of schools, with school administrators and sometimes senior EDU officials present. This is, again, inaccurate. School councils exist by virtue of the



Education Act, not independently of it. The Minister's statutory duty to administer and oversee the Education Act necessarily extends to all bodies created under that Act, including school councils. The fact that a school council is elected does not remove it from the Minister's purview. Election is simply the method of selecting members; it does not convert the council into an autonomous or extra-statutory body. This also fails to consider that as meetings are public, children and youth could very well be present and thus subjected to harm. In this case, EDU contradicts its ability to uphold its own SOGI policy, with children's rights to non-discrimination, best interest and protection from violence potentially being violated (UNCRC, 2, 3, 19).

This lack of process extends to conflicts between school council members, which have arisen within the tense context of discussing SOGI issues and policy implementation. Some school council members, school staff, and administrators have chosen to leave their positions for their own feelings of wellbeing and safety, as was the case with two school council members who reported threatening and passive-aggressive language and tone from other professionals in meetings and through email conversations, a school administrator who felt they could no longer continue in their role due to tensions with school council, and educators who have felt disrespected by their school councils and unsafe to continue teaching. These situations, among others, would have strongly benefited from a more robust and process-oriented EDU response. Instead, the ensuing fallout led to school staff leaving their roles due to tensions with their respective school councils, and students ultimately feeling the impacts of this instability.

"I will be speaking on the topic of funding of the Catholic Education Association of the Yukon.

This group is not meeting its purpose. The purpose is for the CEAY to advocate on behalf of Yukon Catholic schools and provide a forum for partners to come together to discuss issues that affect all Catholic schools. This is not happening. The CEAY has been using its position to oppose SOGI whenever and wherever possible and in a disrespectful, and hurtful way. This behavior has factored into the resignation by 4 school council members, including myself. It's the reason staff walked out on the Catholic PD day two years ago. It's the reason our principal has resigned. It's the reason for a legal challenge, led by one of the teachers at the Catholic schools this past year. It's the reason the CEAY meetings are so poorly attended. When is enough enough? I ask the DOE [Department of Education]. How many more staff are we going to lose because of this organization that is not meeting its purpose?" - Community member

While EDU provides a School Council Dispute Resolution Procedure, this procedure serves to support conflict resolution from parents and students towards the school council, but not conflict between council members. EDU has thus far worked with one school council and administration to develop a code of conduct for school council operations, in response to an incident of harm. Otherwise, EDU offers support to school council members through the availability of a School Council Liaison, and school board superintendents and/or Assistant Deputy Ministers can or already are attending school council meetings to ensure discussions and decisions remain within the confines of the *Education Act* and EDU policies.

"[The school principal is] already stuck in the middle... [The school principals] have to follow the school Council says. ... Unless there is a law. ... School council's role is to help with governance. But [school principal is] in charge of operations, so [school council] might wish for certain thing or certain idea that [school principal] can decide how to operationalize that idea. So there is some gray area there." - Professional

"And I felt like [during difficult/toxic school council meeting] why isn't the leadership, where is the principal's voice? Where is the vice principal's voice? Maybe they didn't feel like they knew what to say or could say anything." - Family member



“School councils do have conferences and professional development. Even money that they can spend. I have not seen anything directed towards SOGI yet.” - Professional

“I wish they would have locks like the ones that are at Queer Yukon, where you turn the lock and on the outside it goes from red in use to green available. Because sometimes the doors are just locked for the sake of being locked. And I have a key ..., so I can open the door and go in. But other times I’m trying to open the door and then somebody inside starts panicking. There’s no way to know because it’s inconsistent whether it’s unlocked or not. The ones at [high school], it’s a storage room as well. Why are [they] storing stock in both the accessible washroom and the gender inclusive washroom? ... If I hear a key, [when I’m in it, I’ll wonder] is that just a custodian trying to get paper towel? Is somebody needing the washroom?... It causes my anxiety to go up.”
- Professional

An additional concern is that of funding, which school councils can use for some operations related to the school, including staff professional development and school council member training. Additionally, EDU makes Transfer Payment Agreements (TPAs) to associations supporting school councils in the Yukon, such as the CEAY and Association of Yukon School Councils, Boards, & Committees (AYSCBC). These TPAs are dependent on compliance with EDU laws and policies, including the SOGI policy. It is unclear if anti-SOGI statements in school council minutes have resulted in withheld or reimbursed funds, though the money itself is less the issue than the accountability of school councils to abide by EDU policies. Further, interview participants report that none of this funding has been directed towards SOGI support or SOGI-specific training (which would ideally bolster the percentage of EDU staff (~6%) who have received formal training). Some schools and educational programs have requested funding to adapt school infrastructure to be more inclusive and SOGI compliant, but funding and priority considerations continue to be an issue. Infrastructural shifts can be timely and costly, but it’s often not even on the radar, especially in the communities:

“We’re like 3 million years behind on that... the only building I can think of that has neutral stalls is the hospital.” - Professional

SOGI-inclusion can be implemented even when the infrastructure of a building makes it challenging. It requires will, openness, and adaptability. Numerous resources and best practices across Canada and the world attest to this (Harwood-Jones, et al., 2021; Francis et al., 2022; McCunn, et al., 2025; Vigneau et al., 2023). Some educational facilities in the Yukon have moved to gender-neutral washrooms, while others have applied temporary accommodations such as designating a staff washroom or accessible washroom as a gender-neutral washroom. These accommodations aren’t without issues.

Turning an inclusive accommodation for specific needs such as the accessible stall into the only gender-neutral washroom may go against the inclusive intention to accommodate people with disabilities. Oftentimes these designated gender-neutral washrooms are isolated or not accessible during extracurricular activities.

It is concerning that a Yukon educational facility still has an active procedure stating the following:

“All gender identities are welcome in the dorm. However, due to the limitation of our facility all students are placed in either the male or female section as determined by their gender at birth.” (Gadzoosdaa Student Residence Handbook, 2025). This is in contrast to the Young Offenders Facility, which maintains a commitment to remaining “a gender-neutral custody facility” - Professional



In-School Implementation

Youth Leading the Way

The most significant part of SOGI policy is how its impacts are landing in the school environment. Are they tangibly improving the inclusivity and safety of Yukon classrooms? The policy highlights the work of incredible young Yukoners who have led the way in championing 2SLGBTQIA+ rights. As always, YCAO is inspired to see young people exercising their right to give their opinion freely on issues that affect them (UNCRC 12) and advocating for their voices, experiences, and perspectives to be heard and considered. The updated 2023 SOGI policy itself is thanks to the advocacy of students from the Rainbow Room at Porter Creek Secondary School, who successfully petitioned YG to commit to reviewing the outdated 2012 SOGI policy, as well as proactively ban conversion therapy in the Yukon before it was done nationally.

As of 2025, there are nine active Gender and Sexuality Alliances (GSAs) or similar student groups (ex. The Rainbow Club) in the Yukon's 40 schools and educational programs. These groups, and dedicated students and staff in schools without groups, continue to achieve incredible steps within the education system. Important markers of inclusivity such as Pride flags, posters, and rainbow stickers are now present in many schools, identifying safe spaces and safe contact staff. Inclusive language and respect for pronouns and preferred names has grown through youth peer education and advocacy, with GSA workshops, displays, fundraising, and coordinating events such as Queer Prom, Pride events, Pink Shirt Day, and more. Resource availability for books, gender gear, nurse visits, guest speakers, and non-governmental organization support have also resulted from continued youth advocacy.

The Empowering School Communities (ESC) youth team from the Territorial Youth Collective (formerly known as Communities Building Youths Futures Yukon) provided the Creating Safe Space workshop for educators in 2024 "as a reaction to many calls from youth and youth serving organizations that students aren't feeling a sense of belonging at high school. [Youth] found that teachers often have the opportunity to make students feel welcome and can be a trustworthy resource for students who might not get that support outside of school" (CBYF Yukon, 2024). After four workshops delivered, this ESC initiative was reportedly discontinued due to limited uptake beyond dedicated educators and difficulties accessing schools' PD days to reach out to more educators.

Concurrently, the Territorial Youth Collective developed a Territorial Youth Strategy (Territorial Youth Collective, 2024) notably signed by the Yukon Premier at the time, Ranj Pillai, and Deputy Premier Jeanie McLean who was also the Education Minister. The leader of the opposition party at the time, Currie Dixon, recently elected Yukon Premier, also signed on this Territorial Youth Strategy.

Did you know?

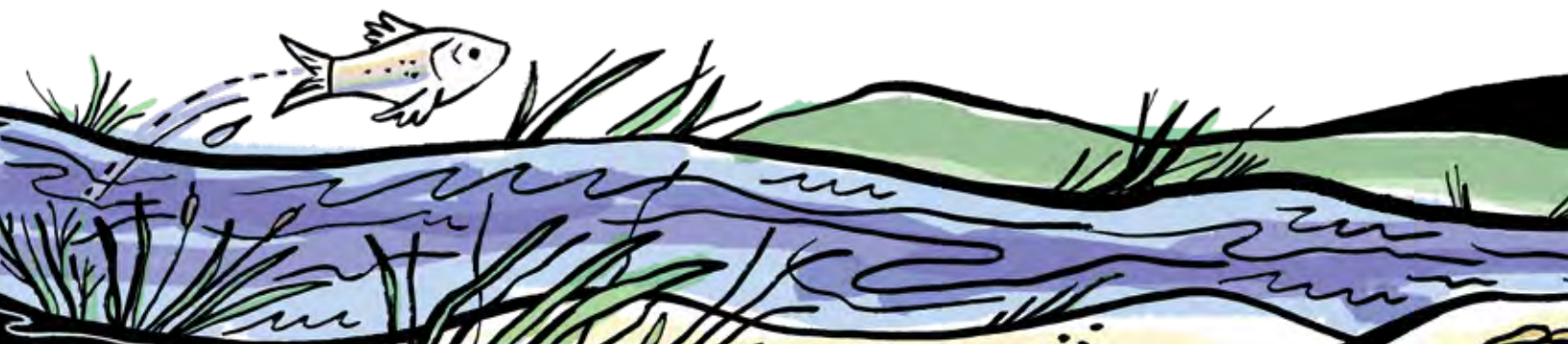
Article 12

States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.



This document lays out a list of relevant needs, urgencies, and priorities for and from Yukon youth resulting from years of public engagements. Among others, the needs and urgencies relevant for our review are “Mental Wellness crisis; Lack of hope for positive future; Need for increased sense of belonging in schools to address education disengagement; Poor communication to youth about services, resources and opportunities; Need for conversation around how these crises intersect” (Territorial Youth Collective, 2024).

For several years now, students that are a part of their schools’ GSAs have participated in annual Child Rights Impacts Assessment (CRIA) training, delivered yearly by YCAO and the Territorial Youth Collective to YG, First Nation governments, youth organizations, and non-governmental organizations. The young people come to share their stories and expertise and let adults know how their decisions have tangible impacts on youth. Of note is that EDU has applied a CRIA for work on the SOGI policy at least twice since 2023.






Excerpt chosen by Ivan Coyote from the SOGI Intergenerational conversation

“I know how to speak like this because this is a survival mechanism, you know? This is how I know that I get respect. And that’s how I have been trained. That’s what I was taught as from a very young age, is that if I want people to take me seriously, I need to talk in a certain way. Like when I’m with my family, I talk very differently, you know, because it’s just, and it’s like, I feel safe with you guys, but this is engraved in me, right? I’m not going to let down my guard, because it’s been unsafe in so much times.

And you need to have respect for each other. Because I don’t care if you like me, but respect me because I don’t care if I don’t like you, I will respect you. And that means I’m not going to put you down. I’m not going to make you feel weird. If we’re sharing a space, who cares? I don’t need to talk to you. And I think when we’re thinking about our children and our youth who aren’t adults yet, I think that in and of itself, I think is an amazing tactic and tool to have when you’re an adult is learning how to respect people even if you don’t like them. Because the minute you graduate, the minute you start working, the minute you go to school, the minute you do anything, you’re going to encounter people that are going to tear you down. You’re going to encounter people who aren’t going to like you, who are going to be mean to you for no reason. And that’s the easiest thing, is to hold your head up and keep going.

Because you don’t need to like me, because I want to focus on things like indigenous joy and excellence. We are not just our trauma, people of color, queer people. We are not just trauma. We are joy. We are excellence.

We are knowledge keepers. We are teachers. We are people who are raising people. We are community members.

So you don’t need to like me. You don’t need to like my lifestyle, as some people like to say, even though it’s like I was born this way. That’s another thing too, but you need to respect me, because you’re a person and I’m a person. We’re all going to be born. We’re all going to die. We all got to eat. We all got to drink water. We all learn from each other.” - Youth

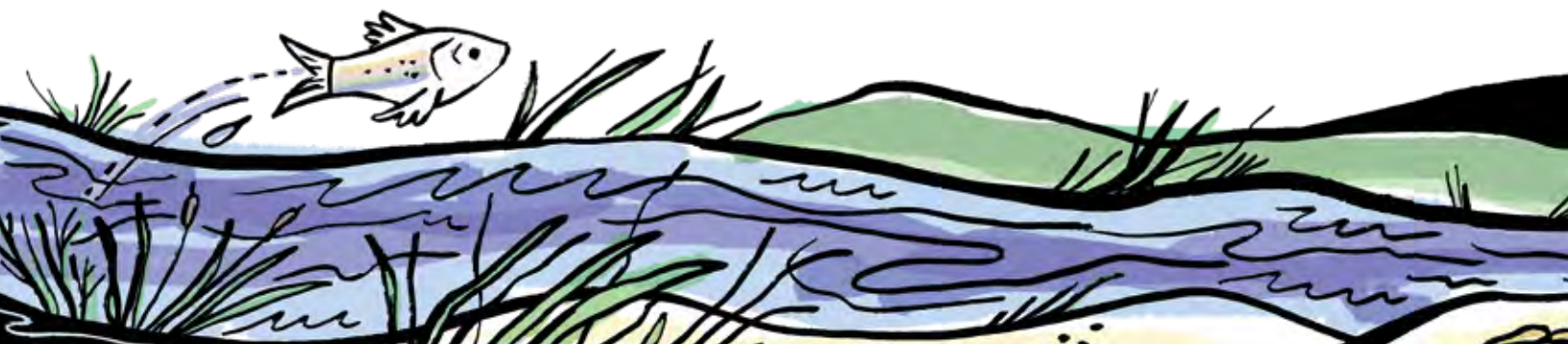
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SOGI-inclusive Educators in Schools

It is integral to have SOGI-inclusive staff within schools to both act as mentors and safe adults for 2SLGBTQIA+ students, as well as to lead initiatives for programming, events, curriculum development, and more. Bailey et al. (2022) clearly explain that young people in their adolescence “need adult role models who offer examples of mature ways to understand one’s sexuality” (p.238). These staff must be supported and resourced by both their administrations and EDU, as opposed to the current model where school staff who actively promote SOGI inclusion and comprehensive sexual health education face an additional workload and unacknowledged emotional labour as a compensation for their efforts and passion. Nonetheless, those efforts have led to encouraging, if not isolated, wins as reported:

- Integration of SOGI content in lesson plans through educational material (books, videos, etc.) created by 2SLGBTQIA+ people or talking about 2SLGBTQIA+ realities.
- Assigning work and reflective prompts around social or historical topics related to 2SLGBTQIA+ issues in Canadian history.
- Inviting local 2SLGBTQIA+ guest speakers or attending local events related to SOGI or the 2SLGBTQIA+ Pride.
- Modifying daily classroom vocabulary to be more gender neutral.
- Being mindful to not separate groups by gender or sex where irrelevant (ex. the child’s sex doesn’t change their ability to throw a ball or respond to a question).
- Supporting the creation of safe spaces.
- Supporting the activities of the GSA, or similar clubs, such as fundraising for GSA activities, prevention and myth busting around pronouns and chosen names, displaying informative posters in schools, advocating for 2SLGBTQIA+ children and their rights in schools.
- Identifying or being identified as safe adults.
- Displaying Pride flags, stickers, and positive messaging of support for 2SLGBTQIA+ in the school environment.
- Selecting and displaying educational resources and support resources about diverse families, comprehensive sexual health, mental health.
- Encouraging and supporting colleagues by providing advice and resources on SOGI.
- Addressing homophobic and transphobic slurs as bullying incidents.
- Ensuring reflection of proper identification in school records or deferring to a generalization of neutral identification in records and shifting when requested by students or family.
- Inviting the YG Sexual Health Educator (HPU) and the YG Youth Outreach Clinic Nurse to provide teachings, resources, referrals and clinical support.



While this review lifts up school staff who are taking action on SOGI inclusion, it is difficult to gauge EDU's commitment to the policy when school staff largely assume responsibility for GSA and SOGI-related activities on their own time or during breaks, often with varying levels of broader support from EDU. These staff are also often the targets of opposition or challenge from some families, colleagues, and administrators - including school council members - which has sometimes escalated to alleged harassment. In these cases, an extremely delayed, or lack of, response from EDU has left staff feeling like they have to fend for themselves. Even minimal gestures like putting up rainbow stickers or temporary Pride exhibits have sparked conflict with people opposed to such efforts, with some stories reaching the media and some SOGI-inclusive staff being perceived as challenging by EDU. Further, inconsistencies and lack of clarity around how the policy is meant to be implemented have led to human resource investigations, with the SOGI policy being used as grounds for dismissal or suspension of EDU staff both perceived to be overstepping or going against the policy.

Currently the framework for identifying SOGI-inclusive staff is convoluted and confusing due to some directives being mandated, and others being voluntary. In 2025, thirteen years after the original SOGI policy, EDU worked with ARC Foundation to develop a draft procedures template to support schools in implementing the policy. This template was shared with school administrators for review and was intended to be ready for the start of the 2025/2026 school year.

The ARC Foundation's fundamental role in aiding EDU with policy implementation has been to offer support through its SOGI 123 program, which offers programming, curriculum development support, and other resources for SOGI-inclusive education. One of the program's major roles in the Yukon has been the development of the Yukon SOGI Educator Network, with the purpose of identifying staff members in schools who can act as safe authority figures for 2SLGBTQIA+ students, while also leading SOGI-inclusive initiatives within the school. The program was established at the start of the 2023/2024 school year, with a designated lead in participating schools reporting to designated departmental leads in EDU. This structure is intended to meet the policy requirement to "appoint at least one member of staff as a safe contact for 2SLGBTQIA+ students." However, because not every school opts to access the SOGI 123 program, not every school has a SOGI Lead. Some schools have a safe contact, also known as a SOGI Champion. If the safe adult identified is not a teacher, they have reported not having access to all the SOGI resources and training provided to teachers. These roles are not to be confused with schools that separately have teachers leading GSA student groups, while the Yukon Association of Education Professionals (YAEP) has its own SOGI subcommittee.

Currently, of the 40 schools and educational programs under EDU's authority, one have no designated SOGI Lead, no identified SOGI Champion (safe contact), and no GSA. In ten schools or programs, a member of the administration team (principal, vice-principal, or administrative assistant) serves simultaneously as the SOGI Lead, SOGI Champion, and/or GSA lead. In 17 schools or programs, there is no clearly identified safe contact (which is the mandated role), or it is unclear whether the SOGI Lead is also fulfilling this role, highlighting ongoing confusion in roles and responsibilities.



“Because it’s one of those things where you can be pulled aside and they’ll talk to you, they’ll give you the same speech every time, and you can just kind of nod and go with it. And then the behavior usually repeats, right?” – Student

“You need to address like if you hear it in the hallway to address it right away, then don’t pull them aside. Like do it in front of people to show that it isn’t tolerated in this space.” – Student

While the establishment of the network is encouraging and has identified some clear champions for SOGI-inclusive education, with five SOGI Leads from Elementary Schools, two Leads from High Schools, six Leads from K-12 schools (ARC Foundation, 2025), review participants reported that the SOGI Leads processes in the schools are convoluted and it’s not clear what they are doing “*beyond putting rainbow stickers on windows.*” (Professional)

Another professional note “*I feel like the messaging [of the Policy] is ‘we will provide a small space of support’ (i.e. one person, an area, further training to ‘identified staff’ only, etc.) Make it bigger - fly a flag, train everyone (and make it mandatory, not just an ‘offer’ of training); have every staff be a safe contact (and perhaps have an ‘expert’ who is the resource point person).*”

There is no concrete data to prove whether students and families know who the identified safe contact in their school actually is, as required by the SOGI policy. Similarly for the SOGI Lead in schools participating in SOGI123 - do staff know how to access this resource person? GSA leaders seem to be an obvious safe contact for students, though once again, there is a lack of concrete data to prove this. Additionally, it is important to interrogate how certain adults were identified as being “safe.” Have students been included in the decision-making process about who is safe and able to provide the type of support they need?

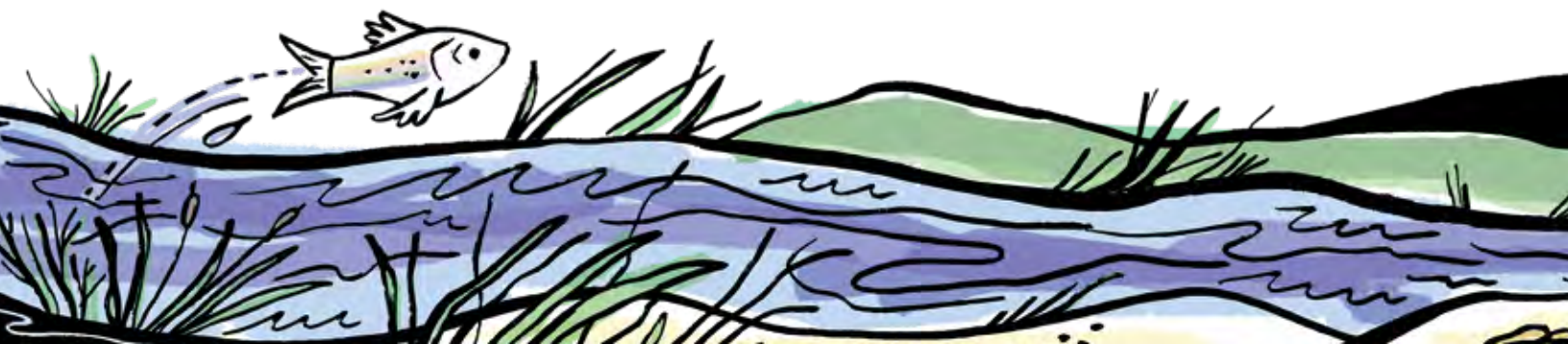
SOGI-related Incidents: Reporting, Responding, and Tracking

Children and family members who are part of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community report that when they bring forward concerns of bullying and/or microaggressions to the school administration, there is often nothing else done beyond talking to the wrongdoer, which usually does little to change the situation. Students who experienced bullying also expressed that when teachers check in after an incident, it often felt inauthentic and that the check-in seemed like the right “corporate” thing to do. In these situations, students said they didn’t feel safe or cared for. It is important to note that school staff also reported being targeted by overt and covert homophobia and transphobia themselves, while their colleagues and/or fellow school community members who may have differing opinions about human biology and sexuality feel free to make harmful statements without consequence from EDU and with little regard to the harm caused.

*“It’s one thing to see a rainbow on a wall, but it’s another thing to be able to go into a classroom and have that conversation with a staff member and sort through the s** that you might be facing” - Professional.*

“People really need to be able to push themselves outside of what’s comfortable and be like, okay, I want to engage.” - Professional.

Data indicates that a major contributing factor of this is that record-keeping, and therefore tracking of incidents, responses, and resolutions, are incredibly lacking at the school level. The review asked all schools, school boards, and EDU to submit a list of issues reported and resolved regarding SOGI and sexual health education matters in the Yukon educational system between 2019 and 2025. Of the 40 schools



and educational programs, 19 schools either lacked a stable administration, chose not to submit data, or indicated that no SOGI-related issues occurred. Because the sample represents less than half of the school system, findings should be interpreted as indicative of trends within responding schools rather than exhaustive. The analysis of this data reveals that the most frequently reported issue types were homophobic and transphobic bullying and harassment, followed by issues related to school and educator compliance with SOGI policy, including staff training, accountability, authority and roles in curriculum and administration, and procedures for resources and support on school councils.

Most reports were submitted by parents, followed by teachers and then students. Additional reports came from politicians, community members, faith leaders, media, non-governmental organizations, superintendents, and contractors. SOGI-related concerns were most often directed to school administrators, with the Education Minister receiving the second-highest number of complaints. School counsellors, teachers, and school council liaisons were among the least used reporting channels, though EDU communications staff, EDU unit directors, policy analysts, and media outlets also received complaints. From an accountability perspective, it is reasonable that senior officials receive complaints and, where appropriate, delegate their resolution. Theoretically, these reporting trends may reflect both the perceived seriousness of SOGI-related issues and limited awareness of, or confidence in, intermediary reporting channels. It may also indicate that many cases are sufficiently complex to warrant escalation.

Operationally, however, this approach is inefficient and problematic. It highlights the persistent disconnect between frontline schools and EDU, despite the presence of intermediate bodies such as school councils, school boards, and the Education Appeal Tribunal, all of which could potentially handle many complaints. A review of complaint-handling processes at the school council and board levels could help identify systemic bottlenecks. This review observed resolution times ranging from several weeks to multiple years, while ongoing bullying and daily microaggressions against 2SLGBTQIA+ students and school staff need timely and consistent responses to change the school climate.

A more evenly distributed, holistic approach is necessary in the creation and maintenance of inclusive school spaces, as well as responses to SOGI-related incidents. Relying solely on school administration is simply not feasible when timely responses are required. SOGI Leads (SOGI 123 Schools) and SOGI Champions (all schools) should also be empowered to respond to incidents within their capacity, comfort, and training.

EDU SOGI policy sets clear expectations that schools must establish procedures that define consequences, take all complaints seriously and respond accordingly, mandate staff intervention when bullying occurs, and include effective processes for resolving individual or group complaints.

Did you know?

The EDU SOGI policy says:

3. School-based procedures or guidelines to prohibit discrimination based on sex, gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation must state the consequences of discrimination and harassment. Administrators must take action to address such behaviors and document all actions following an incident of discriminatory behaviour.
4. School administrators must take all complaints about discrimination based on sex, gender identity, gender expression or sexual orientation seriously, and must ensure that they are dealt with effectively through consistently applied procedures and guidelines. [...]
7. All staff have an obligation to intervene in any interaction involving the use of epithets and slurs and behaviours targeting sexual orientation or gender identity, regardless of the speaker's intentions, and to convey that such comments are against policy and will not be tolerated in the school community.
8. School-based procedures or guidelines must include procedures through which individual or group-based complaints will be effectively resolved and which specify any consequences of breaching this standard of behaviour.



Did you know?

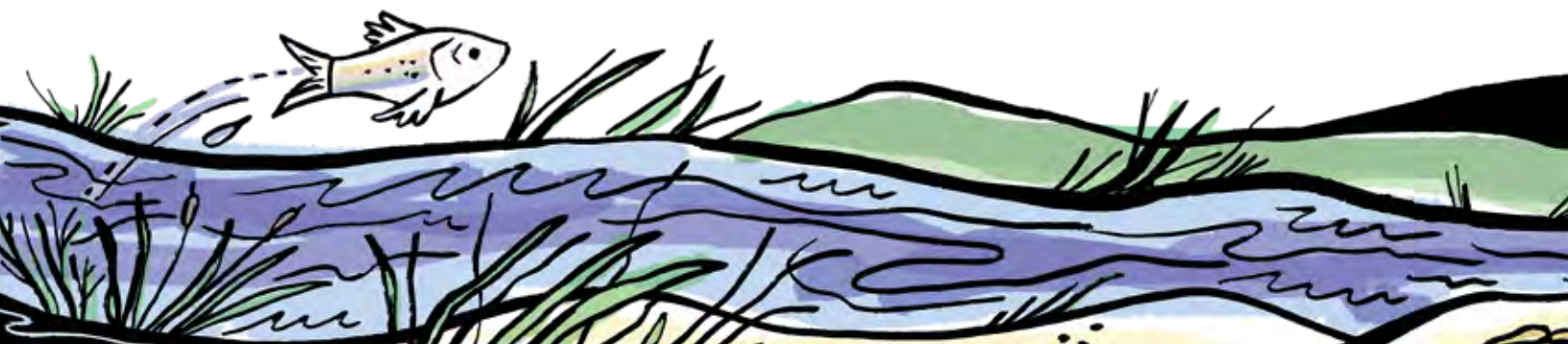
The Education Act says in section 39:

- (1) A School Board or Council and, if no School Board or Council has been established, the superintendent shall review, modify if necessary, and approve rules for the school and procedures for the enforcement of the rules as developed by the school administration in consultation with school employees and after having requested input from students.
- (2) The rules that affect students shall be posted in conspicuous places in the school and shall be reviewed with the students of the school at the start of each school year.
- (3) The rules established pursuant to this section shall be applied without discrimination to all students and shall be consistent with this Act and the regulations.
- (4) Discipline of students shall be administered in accordance with this Act and the rules and procedures established by the School Board, Council or superintendent.

These requirements align with the *Education Act* (section 39), which assigns the responsibility for rules and enforcement approaches to school boards and councils. Schools are meant to review the school rules with students annually so that they have a clear understanding of how to conduct themselves within the environment. These rules are meant to be applied consistently and without discrimination, and disciplinary responses should be made in accordance with the *Education Act* and school rules.

Other EDU policies are relevant to the conversation. The *Safe and Caring Schools Policy* prohibits behaviours motivated by hate or bias, including discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation, while the *Post-Incident Communications Guidance* treats incidents involving abuse or harm as reportable to external authorities - the RCMP and Family & Children's Services. Despite this, neither policy provides a clear, consistent system for documentation, monitoring, or long-term tracking of incidents.

EDU's *School Council Dispute Resolution Procedure* outlines an escalation process for disputes involving students and parents and assigns school councils responsibility for developing responses in consultation with school leadership. Schools are mandated to create SOGI-specific guidelines by the SOGI policy. In practice, however, almost no schools have created SOGI-specific procedures beyond the general policy - as of 2025, only one school has a SOGI-specific procedure, and two others have general discrimination procedures. Documentation is required only if an issue escalates to the Assistant Deputy Minister, meaning incidents resolved earlier are not officially recorded. The *School Procedures Handbook* references incident reporting only in narrow contexts and remains under review, leaving uncertainty about reporting consistency including where SOGI-related incidents, if recorded at all, are stored. This review finds that many incidents aren't directly recorded in ASPEN. Most schools are overwhelmed by the expectation to identify and document SOGI-related issues and to establish processes to address them, largely because no standardized or enforced system exists for tracking such incidents. Each school's tracking and reporting process is different, with many incidents' records remaining in email inboxes for indeterminate amounts of time. Many never make it to the school's, much less EDU's, digital or paper records. The lack of a consistent reporting and monitoring framework has resulted in irregular responses to SOGI-related concerns, and produced significant gaps in reliable data on both incidents and outcomes. More concerning, it leaves a door open for bullying and discrimination to repeat, as incidents, responses, and response efficacy are not recorded consistently enough to inform tangible systemic shifts. This is exacerbated by continued issues of high staff turnover within schools, where valuable understandings of histories, relationships, and situational context are often lost when staff change positions, due to an inadequate recording system.



“There was some really great support from the teachers. One time I was in class, this wasn’t a specifically queer issue, but one of the other kids in my class was being really racist about native people. And the teacher immediately stopped class and spent the next ten minutes just chewing him out in front of everyone. And I think that’s the appropriate way to go. It has to be immediately addressed. Don’t pull them aside, show that it’s not tolerated in your classroom, if they said something really homophobic, I’d expect the same thing. When it comes to bigger bullying in [high school name], the way that they would go about it is a lot of assemblies which are not effective.” - Student

“The teachers have to be willing to stand up for their students.”
- Student

“They certainly weren’t enforcing it [the SOGI policy] because I got called every name in the book “faggot, queer, etc.” in school. They made fun of AIDS. They put up straight pride posters. But I was relentless and I made [the principal] suspend kids... And when [students] told me there was some kids saying something in class, I made [the principal] address it. And I was, “We’re both going in and you will say this and I will talk about this.” And ... there was ... the grade 12 [class] we went into, I was talking at this point because whenever they had questions about gender sexuality, that’s when I was asked to answer the questions. And when [a student] got up and threw a chair across the room and stormed out, we just kept going.” - Professional

“They have to be willing to speak out. They have to be willing to make a scene.”
- Student

“If you have people running around calling black people the N word, or if you have people running around calling Indigenous people “backwards” for them, why is it okay for me to hear “gay faggot” all day? When those other things get addressed, why doesn’t this get addressed?” - Professional

“And the open homophobia and transphobia by the teachers, by the students at [high school] broke my heart. So our GSA at the time, ... we would get these complaints notes being left for us ... that there were too many flags ... asking us things who identified for those flags, kind of telling ... you can only have a flag if we have a [student identifying as such].” - Professional



Administrative Issues and SOGI

A key indicator from schools of the slow uptake of SOGI policy is in administrative operations - records, attendance lists, and databases all continue to be spaces where 2SLGBTQIA+ students are invalidated and disrespected. Respecting chosen names and pronouns is both an inclusion principle and an administrative requirement in the SOGI policy. This expectation applies to all members of the school community and conceivably should be handled the same as nicknames or preferred names (ex. going by a middle name) unrelated to gender. That a Samuel can go by Sam or a Katherine can go by Katie without needing parental approval proves that respecting what a child wants to be called is not a difficult ask:

“Oh, my gosh, it is so hard if you don’t have your name legally changed. And even if you do, it is so hard to get it to be used in the school.” - Student

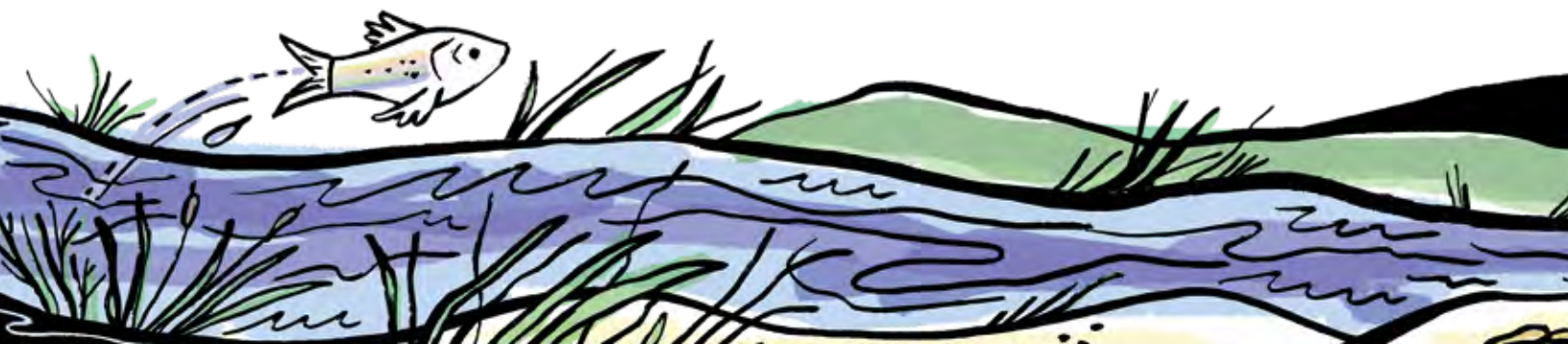
“A substitute teacher should not be saying, ‘Is Mrs. Jane Doe here? Is Mr. John Doe here?’ You know, that is not appropriate because so [many] kids, whether it’s their first name, last name, anything, whether you’re trans or not, that name is a trigger. That name is awful. And [teachers] would not listen, you know.”- Youth

In practice, however, inconsistent systems and practices across schools have caused harm, particularly when legal or chosen names are not updated across all records, attendance systems, and databases.

This review finds that inconsistencies, errors, and incomplete updates in administrative systems can be triggering and expose students to distress and misgendering. Students then feel forced to either speak up for themselves, which is a tiring prospect when done repeatedly, or accept being invalidated in their own school. Even when names have been changed legally, students report continued barriers, including their name not being changed in school records. One youth went directly to EDU offices to request the change to be made, only to be sent back to their school to discuss it with their administration:

“...Before I had my name legally changed, I went up to the front office at [high school] and I had it changed, but it wouldn’t show up on attendance records for some reason, so they’d still use the wrong name like subs would accidentally use my name. Then it causes a scene where I have to go up and be like, ‘Hey, that’s not a good name. You need to address me...’. And it puts you in a vulnerable position, of course. And then even when I got my name legally changed, the Department of Education wouldn’t change it. My name was legally changed and it would still come up as the wrong name on my paperwork. I tried to get an appointment with the person to get it changed, and they told me to get my principal to email. They weren’t willing to talk to me. They wouldn’t even give me their email. They just said, your principal will know it.” - Student

Additionally, communication with students’ families must necessarily reflect the inclusivity practices of the school. This requires proactively updating forms,



databases, and other policies that may present heteronormative and/or trans-exclusive messaging. Field trip documentation, for example, still reflects gender binaries for both students and staff, leaders and chaperones. While seemingly small, these sorts of administrative inconsistencies that don't reflect EDU's SOGI policy guidelines can actually be extremely invalidating for queer and trans people, and at times can violate their basic rights.

"It needs to be consistent. There can't be gaps where like it's not on, for example, attendance records, because that puts the student in a vulnerable position and it puts them in a spot where they have to advocate for themselves to potentially not open person. It exposes their identity. Every student should be given the right to privacy, and that includes privacy about their identity. As soon as you have that gap, it puts a spotlight on them. And they might not be open. Maybe they don't even want people to know they're trans. They deserve that right to privacy. They shouldn't have to be put in that position of just because the system doesn't work." - Student

Not being thorough, consistent and mindful with name change administration can contribute to prejudice against children and youth, compounding with the fact that some teachers are allowed (because there is no real consequence) to deny the child's respect and rights because they "don't believe in it."

"...From personal experience that quite a few different schools, including elementary schools if you're younger and you might be transitioning and, you know, that's a scary time already, you're in vulnerable spot, like, hey, this is my new name and stuff. Certain teachers might be a little bit what's the word? Not hesitant, but not very open to it. Rather old fashioned sometimes in the idea of, well, I'm not going to do that because I don't believe it or I don't agree with it or something. And I think that's even as a teacher, even if you don't agree with something, it's your job to be respectful and to be there for your students and to support them" - Student

It is important to note that EDU has worked to update some forms for gender neutrality, and that some schools have followed suit with their own forms. On at least two occasions schools have received complaints for standardizing a "they" pronoun for all student report cards and family communications, to which one school responded by reverting to binary pronouns and another school responded by reverting back only for the complainant's child.

Crucially, inclusive communication practices must extend to the family members of students as well. Some parents and guardians shared of not having their updated names, titles, and pronouns used in communication to them from their child's schools.

"I am not a person that would apply the policy in the school. I thought that it was up to each individual school to follow the YG policy." - Professional

Did you know?

Article 8

1. States Parties undertake to respect the right of the child to preserve his or her identity, including nationality, name and family relations as recognized by law without unlawful interference.
2. Where a child is illegally deprived of some or all of the elements of his or her identity, States Parties shall provide appropriate assistance and protection, with a view to re-establishing speedily his or her identity.



"If we're going on a field trip and we have two female staff and a certain number of kids, we need to make sure we bring a male staff. But I don't understand why they need the male staff because they don't need a trans staff when they take a trans kid, and they don't bring a non-binary staff when they take a non-binary kid... Because if you have to have a male and you have to have a female, should you not really have to have a trans person if there's a trans kid? Because you can't assume the male and female are going to have any knowledge to contribute... We might not even know there's a trans kid... It just always comes back to nobody understands the rationale [behind it]." - Professional

"A significant issue is when kids legally change their name and their gender and they report it to school administrators. The admin assistant at the school will often change it internally in Aspen. But if they do not know, which many don't send the legal name and gender change down to the Ministry of BC for the TRAX [Graduation reporting], then what happens is when they have a standardized assessments, whether it's like the FSA's at elementary school or whether it's like the grade ten numeracy, literacy or grade 12, when those ministry standard assessments come, they come in and their birth name and gender show on the screen. And that's a major issue that I've seen repeatedly happen where kids get so triggered, especially in elementary school, because it pops right up on the screen at this formal assessment time. And they haven't seen or been exposed to that in years. And now they're expected to write this assessment. And so lots of times the school will change it. But they don't know to take the extra step." - Professional

"We don't need SOGI in our schools. THERE IS A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RESPECTING OTHERS' view point and Promoting them!!! We are promoting and confusing kids about genders! It goes too far! Stop this." - Professional

"Anti-rainbow clubs should be allowed." - Family member

"There are teachers that are transactivist and ally and they have no place in raising our children." - Family member

Evaluating Policy Implementation

EDU's updates for the 2023 SOGI policy relied heavily on data collected during the public consultation for the *LGBTQ2S+ Inclusion Plan*, published in 2021 by the Women and Gender Equity Directorate. As no EDU-led public engagement took place prior, this means that the policy updates primarily considered data stemming from a targeted population with lived experience and their allies, leaving no opportunity for dissenting opinions to be heard. This review is of the opinion that a SOGI policy grounded in transparent community engagement would necessarily hear from, and be able to respond to, a broad spectrum of community voices and perspectives, thus likely proactively mitigating legitimate concerns from people and community groups who feel their concerns weren't heard by EDU.



When EDU did engage students on SOGI topics, it was in response to issues raised by students in schools. Between 2019 and 2025, EDU heard directly from GSA-attending students only when they advocated for themselves and brought concerns forward to EDU independently or with the support of adults leading GSA groups. EDU conducted two internal surveys of school administrators prior to 2023 to assess the extent to which the SOGI policy had been implemented through school procedures since its introduction in 2012. Since 2023, more internal evaluations have taken place. EDU surveyed some secondary school students about “demographic factors” including SOGI (religion, sexual orientation, LGBTQ2S+ identification, allyship, gender expression, Canadian identification) at least once, through a Report on Student Outcomes and School Climate (EDU internal communication, 2023). This survey gives a snapshot of students’ self-identification in 2023. Between 20 and 30 % of students consider themselves to be 2SLGBTQIA+ or describe their sexual orientation/preference as follows: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Two-Spirit, Queer, identify in another way, unsure or questioning. About 20% expressed their gender as somewhere in between feminine and masculine, or preferred not to say. Of note, no information about the number of students or schools who participated in the OurSchool survey was provided, so it is difficult to assess if these numbers represent the broader school population.

Otherwise, EDU’s only other engagement with students was to ask YCAO to complete this review, thereby placing the onus of public engagement on another external organization. While YCAO is confident in its methodologies, mission, and ability to undertake such work in a respectful and ethical way, the result is that EDU continues to have done no proactive public engagement at all when it comes to their SOGI policy. This is a difficult decision to justify when a primary point of contention from many concerned community members is exactly the lack of communication from and consultation between EDU and the broader school community. Alongside ARC Foundation’s role and important work in supporting SOGI policy implementation, this accounts for two outsourced responsibilities where EDU would have had the opportunity to further grow its own capacity.

ARC Foundation’s evaluations of policy implementation from the 2024 and 2025 school years, summarized in SOGI Leads’ year-end reports to EDU, communicate similar findings as this review:

“Educators continue to sustain activities, clubs, and networks that create safer and more welcoming schools, but these efforts rest on fragile foundations of time, staffing, and clarity of role. Compared to last year, the picture is cautiously encouraging: opposition is less frequently cited as a major barrier, GSAs are more widely present, and reliance on central resources points to greater accessibility. Yet these gains exist alongside persistent concerns about parental pushback and the uneven uptake of inclusive practices across schools.” (ARC Foundation, 2025).



Summary

The Department of Education's (EDU) intentions with their SOGI policy may be laudable, but the actions taken at all levels (from departmental to school administrations to classrooms) have predominantly been reactive, temporary, and non-committal. Some educators and administrators dedicated to implementation have concentrated efforts on the less risky things - visibility of inclusive posters, stickers, and flags, or supporting Gender and Sexuality Alliances (GSA) in their schools. Having a GSA is often perceived as proof the school is inclusive, without considering the high level of pushback and continued discrimination that both members and supporting staff have to deal with.

Beyond the numerous updates on these easy wins, however, there is a general lack of EDU's internal knowledge and capacity relative to making Yukon schools SOGI-inclusive. Outsourcing implementation support to an external program from the ARC Foundation has to happen alongside effective and sustainable capacity building for EDU itself. Unfortunately, this has not been the case; EDU demonstrates its own limited internal awareness of implementation efforts over a 13-year lifespan. Numerous departmental staff were unaware that the review itself had been requested by the Minister of Education, and many could not articulate what SOGI implementation entailed beyond the presence of GSAs. When asked about procedures, evaluations, or accountability, reviewers were frequently redirected back to individual schools. "Communication" was repeatedly cited as the primary response to internal contradictions or challenges, underscoring a lack of concrete systems for problem-solving or policy monitoring.

There is no efficient records management or evaluation process. Staff turnover and poor and/or interrupted knowledge transmission further impact the gaps in services. There is also an obvious disconnect between the public messaging made by EDU in SOGI and CSHE-related communication and the realities in schools, as shown in school councils' minutes.

The top-down approach adopted by EDU since the policy's inception has led to a situation where students and families remain confused as to the systems and processes in place to protect 2SLGBTQIA+ people in Yukon schools. Consequently, there has been a breakdown of trust and feelings of safety counter to what the policy was intended to foster. Dissatisfaction as result in the survey can be understood at different levels and across all participating categories: Students, Family Members, Educators, School Administration, Community Members. Reported feelings of fear and confusion are related to a lack of clear, ongoing dialogue, and proactive education about CSHE and SOGI. Much of the discontent came from a small group of people who feel that EDU hadn't provided legitimate time or space to voice their concerns about the policy. It's important to note that most review participants remain cautiously supportive or simply uninformed rather than actively opposed to SOGI policy.

Ultimately the major factors impacting the effectiveness and efficiency of EDU's SOGI policy implementation - Communication, Governance, and Reporting, Records, and Tracking - reflect longstanding systemic issues, many of which have been discussed in previous reports (YCAO, 2021; 2022; 2025; YCAO and YFNED, 2025). This affirms YCAO's assertion that gaps for students are deeply interconnected, and progress in any of the above areas will have positive benefits for the broader education system beyond merely SOGI-related matters.





Students, families, school staff, and community members highlighted these positive outcomes from the implementation of SOGI policy in Yukon schools:

- More young people feel confident to talk about SOGI matters and feel they can access a safe adult at school
- More openness and acceptance for 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals in schools

Students, families, school staff, and community members highlight these ongoing concerns related to SOGI-inclusion in Yukon schools:

- Ongoing homophobic and transphobic bullying, microaggressions, and discrimination.
- Lack of accountability or relevant discipline for students and staff who perpetrate anti-SOGI behaviour.
- Mental health challenges and lack of sense of safety for 2SLGBTQIA+ students.
- Absenteeism, particularly in gym (Physical Health Education) class.
- Gaps in comprehensive sexual health education that is relevant for 2SLGBTQIA+ students and students with IEPs and/or special needs.
- Students removed by parents from CSTE class or from learning SOGI-inclusive curriculum without consideration for the child's views and choices.
- No formal process to vet and assess alternative sexual health education for students removed from this course; increases risks of students seeking information from problematic and/or dangerous sources.
- Basic SOGI and comprehensive sexual health information provided by privately paid psychologists, when it is supposed to be offered and available for free in children and youth environments.
- Due to fear of backlash, and lack of training, educators are nervous to teach on topics related to SOGI and comprehensive sexual health information.
- The school climate, particularly in younger grades of secondary schools, isn't conducive to empowerment and safety feeling: students are worried to be visible and targeted, or the gender neutral washroom, or being seen reading information about SOGI or related content (books or info displays). Students reported other students pushing each other on the GSA doorsteps, as if putting a foot in the GSA room would make them gay.
- Lack of SOGI-related resources.
- Lack of SOGI-related curriculum.



"I am in a queer relationship and I am not totally comfortable expressing that in school." – Student

"I find that the GSA is like a safe space. I think that in the school in general, I probably wouldn't be completely comfortable with being open about my sexuality, I guess. But I do think that the GSA is a safe space and it's also just like mostly a place that we just hang out." – Student

"I heard the f slur dropped very casually a lot. And teachers will walk by, look at what they're doing and just ignore it. No one ever speaks up and they let it just happen. And it's become so normalized that people are starting to use those words against other people, which is not good...And then I feel a lot of the time, if you say "Oh, don't say that." They'd be like, "It was just a joke." – Students

"Then I just sat there and cried with them because I didn't know what to do...they're still hurting so bad that they're going in the bathroom at lunch and cutting themselves open like that... [Professional] and I ... had to patch them up...I got permission to [take the student] to the emergency counseling for non-binary people." – Professional

"I think it [the SOGI policy]'s great. It's just making people feel more comfortable. It's really important." – Student



"If you're worried about how everyone is perceiving you, or you're worried about making sure you fit in, or you're worried about making sure you perform fem well enough, then yeah I'm not paying attention to math. I don't give a s** about chemistry." – Professional

"It's so scary. It's so scary to speak up because you don't know what the consequence of that [coming out/ being visible in school] is going to be now, because you don't always know who's everybody that's around you." – Student

"I mean I find it would take a lot of courage for me to say something [against bullying/slurs/discrimination from adults and peers] because I normally just like fade into the background." – Student

"My day-to-day representation is definitely more masc [masculine]. You know what I mean? But I would like to present myself more feminine. It's intimidating... Just the idea of being rejected for going out into the world as who you want to be." – Student

"So much of us never get old. Literally, I've always been someone who feel that I'm never going to get old, and growing more older is such a privilege. And... so much people in my life have either died from substances, suicide, tragic accidents ... And so it's hard when even in my personal life, I don't know any older Two-Spirit people. I met my first Two-Spirit Elder literally like three months ago." – Youth

"Oftentimes the information [sexual health education] is wanted, but the teachers don't know how to facilitate. And the people who run it are like allies of the queer and trans community, but they recognize that they don't actually have sex educators in the territory who are members of the LGBTQ+ community. So there is a recognition that there's gaps and that there's cultural pieces that they're missing out on. But still trying to provide the information." – Professional

"Why is this [comprehensive sexual health education] not standardized like math and science? Why are people given the option to opt their kids out?" – Professional

"Since the letter [from the Bishop sent by EDU], there was more students withdrawn for sexual health education." – Professional

"There's probably some teachers that are gun shy because they're worried about the jump back from parents. Then they might be shying away because they don't want 18 complaints tomorrow." – Professional

"If you don't have the knowledge, then you wouldn't want your child to have the knowledge because now they might ask you a question you don't have the answer to. And God forbid." – Professional

"Somehow silences are sometimes just as bad as saying bad things. Like that idea that, 'Oh, we have to be quiet about this somehow.' I agree with what folks are saying, and I see this as really important, [the GSA], but I also see things like education display boards as being important too, because it's saying to the whole community, this is part of who we are. It's not some hush hush thing once a week..." – Student



"I've been afraid of the GSA since I was 13 [because] there's always been this association with the GSA to being part of the LGBTQ+ community. [As if] you can't just be an ally. What is that?! [Now, I feel the GSA] is the safest place and I feel I can be myself [there]." – Student

"I feel some people might treat other people better if they just knew a little bit more.

- Yeah, that's what we try and put up bulletin boards or posters so that we can sort of try and educate people.
- Totally. Then you put them up and it's all of a sudden nobody can read it..
- There has been a few people that have stopped there and looked at.
- ... the best thing is watching students walk past and look and make sure nobody's watching, then they read and they learn. And when I see that, that's "Yes!". And then they try not to be found." – Students

"The majority of the teachers are accepting and stuff, but I just feel the students, not that they're against queer people, but they're just uncomfortable around it. You feel that a lot of students feel maybe that if they're seen near somebody queer, then people will think that they're queer as well. And then, of course, there are people who just make jokes about it." – Student

"You might feel you have a bit of a target on your back. That's very real. That is a serious issue. For example, let's say you wanted to go to the your school's library at lunch because it's one of your only safe space to go. You'd worry the wrong people/person would see you go in there because more often than not you'll get harassed, made fun of, or threatened. And that's sadly just a fact. And there never seems to be any repercussions for their actions, which enables these situations to keep happening. Teachers will tell you they'll have a chat with whoever may have caused the issue(s), but it's always the same basic, reused, empty of any real meaning speech you can imagine with no actual consequence. Sadly I think it's because teachers either don't know what to do or just don't care. And truthfully I don't think they care." – Student

"They'd be like, 'Oh, don't go in there [the GSA]. There's people in there'. And I was like, 'What? It's not like, what do you guys are even talking about?' And they're trying to push each other in there because it was just apparently the worst thing in the world [to step in the GSA room]." – Student

"In general, resources are scarce, especially in the Yukon. Like it's like an underground tunnel. If you want to navigate your way, you got to know the right person who knows that person." – Professional

"The only time it's taught [SOGI related curriculum] if it's like something that happened in the past, like we learned about, like how in concentration camps, there were queer people as well. That's the only time they ever mentioned because something happens" – Student

"One of them was just sort of like educating on what the different flags represent. For example that one's the trans flag. And we would had a little explanation of what being trans is. And I mean, I find a lot of time people don't know." – Student

"Is anything queer actually taught here? Is it talked about or is it kind of kept like 'Oh yeah, there's a GSA.' But we don't talk about that kind of thing. Is that how it is?"

- Yeah. Yeah.
- Okay.
- Well, it's actually the same at [high school]." – Students

"I don't think there's many outlets for people to find their local queer history in Whitehorse, Yukon, in general... I didn't really see any queer history or education [related to queer history]." – Student



Ghosts in the Road

by Ivan Coyote

Vignette 4

Most days I am so happy to be living back in Whitehorse. Most days. My eyes recognize the shape of the curves in the clay cliffs, even when they are closed. I drive past our old house on Hemlock street, and can't believe those giant birch trees are the same ones I helped my mom plant in grade three, and we brought the little saplings home in the trunk of her Corolla. I love this little city, I was born here, and so was my mother.

Both of my grandmothers, three of my uncles and one of my cousins are buried up on that mountain I can see from my kitchen window. The Yukon is the only place I have ever felt like I really belong. It feels good and right to be home, most days. But every once in a while I will take a corner in the dark in my truck and a ghost will be standing in the road to remind me. Jack Hulland. Porter Creek Secondary. F.H. Collins. I am nearly fifty-seven years old, happy, and loved, and successful, but still. The roads around all of the schools I went to are full of these ghosts, and they will not let me forget anything.

I remember when I left for real the first time, just days after I graduated from high school. Packing all my stuff into that rusty old van and steering due south, alone with the stereo cranked and Alaska Highway dust in my teeth. I knew that Whitehorse couldn't change fast enough to keep up with who I needed to become. I knew

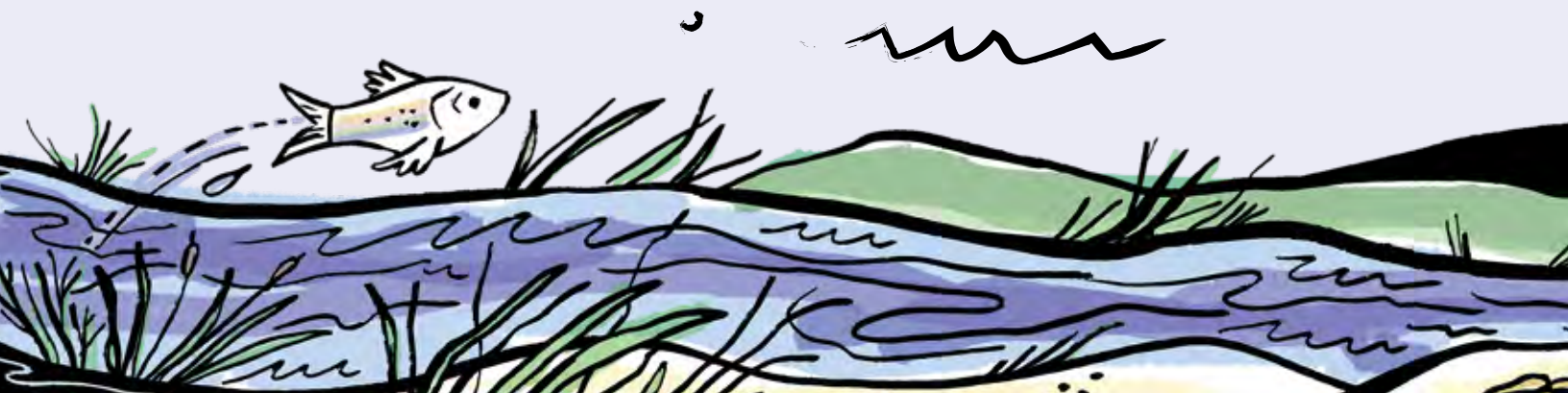
I could not unravel myself with all of my history gathered around me repeating over and over who I used to be, who I was supposed to be. Pat's daughter. Dan's cousin. Florence's oldest grandchild. Carrie's big sister. Whitehorse was no place for a queer kid in 1987. I had no words for who I needed to become, and no one I could ask to teach me the language.

I came home for good in 2023 to care for my father who has dementia. I came home to watch my nieces and nephews get tall and need new shoes. I came home to help build a little city that someone sort of like me wouldn't need to leave at seventeen.

Do you remember that campaign in 2010, I think it was called It Gets Better? It began in response to a rash of suicides that claimed the lives of several queer and trans youth. It started off as one video on Youtube urging younger LGBTQ2S people to stay true to themselves, despite bullying and other challenges of adolescence.

Actors and politicians and famous people making videos promising struggling youth that "it gets better."

Except that it didn't. It didn't get better. It is 2026 now, and the anti-SOGI folks are bolder and more empowered than ever. Second-term [current U.S. President]'s brand of transphobia has sought and caught root in many provinces across Canada, and our schools have become the battleground, and queer and trans and non-binary youth are the accidental foot soldiers of this rising hate.



Last summer I sat at a round table in an office downtown with three other queer and/or trans people and we told stories about what going to school here in Whitehorse was like for us. A gangly teenager, a confident twenty-something, a fifty-six-year-old me, and a proud and determined woman in her late 60s. Four generations of us. I was not surprised when the elder spoke, and told us that she had hitchhiked south out of town as a teenager, five decades ago, because she knew that if she stayed here it would kill her.

I guess I hoped that the two youngest of the four of us would have better stories to tell.

I'm not saying things haven't changed. There are Rainbow Rooms in several schools, and rainbow stickers on classroom doors and rainbow flags fly in June, and we have rainbow crosswalks, too, but you don't need to scrape much of that multi-coloured paint off before the old Whitehorse shows us its bones. The city workers still haven't scrubbed off those skid marks someone left on the pride crosswalk at the foot of Main Street.

I know a guy, we went to school together, and I see him now and then buying groceries at Wykes. He beats on his stepdaughter because she is trans. I never say anything to him because I'm not supposed to know this, and his stepdaughter has not asked me for my help, and because he is the boss of a relative of mine, and I don't want to make trouble that I can't fix.

This is my city, and these are its people.

The teenager tells us a story of how he finally had to leave regular school and try to finish his high school at the Individual Learning Centre. The name of a principal is spoken out loud, and the twenty-something shudders in recognition.

I think about a story I remember, but do not tell it out loud in that little office at that small, crowded round table.

This story that I have been carrying around like a tumour for four decades now. About my friend, and the gym teacher. About how he was only convicted of one of the charges, and how even that one charge was overturned. About how he never spent even one night in jail for what he did to her. This is a ghost that sometimes blocks the road into Riverdale for me. Sometimes I have to pull over and wait until that giant ghost finally turns and lumbers towards and finally disappears into the bush across the street from F.H. Collins.

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2. CULTURE OF INCLUSION

Preamble

This second section investigates the Culture of Inclusion that exists to varying degrees throughout the Yukon. No policy related to inclusion in schools, no matter how thoughtfully constructed or intentionally implemented, will succeed if the culture of the environment is not prepared to welcome and foster it. Through the course of this review, as well as data from YCAO's individual and systemic advocacy files, it is evident that despite the efforts of students, dedicated staff, and EDU strategies, Yukon schools remain largely unsafe places for 2SLGBTQIA+ people. This section considers the factors that are necessary to foster a culture of inclusion in all educational environments that is welcoming, affirming, and celebratory.

The first theme about Comprehensive Sexual Health Education (CSHE) and SOGI addresses the common misconception that CSHE and SOGI policy are the same thing, a frequently repeated concern from SOGI policy detractors. This section explicitly lays out the difference between, and importance of both, while clearly speaking to the need for robust CSHE as requested by students and their families. Currently CSHE is not provided regularly across schools as it depends on staff capacity, confidence, and comfort. Delivery is outsourced to external providers which takes place inconsistently, and at the scheduling availability of the provider. These challenges underscore the need for safe and supportive learning environments in which CSHE can be delivered effectively without fear of backlash or harm to students or educators. This is particularly relevant in rural communities where preparation needs to be done and connections need to be made meaningfully prior to guest presenters visiting the community.

The second theme questions the current one-size-fit-all lens of the SOGI policy, which universalizes the 2SLGBTQIA+ experience and contributes to the erasure of the diverse and unique experiences of queer and trans Indigenous, racialized, and disabled people. Failing to engage with these intersections leaves many students and staff feeling unrepresented by the policy, or that it does not consider them. Other cultural considerations and/or relationships with SOGI are diverse, important, and part of the broader dialogue. A culture of inclusion that is considerate of all students, staff, and families must take into account the diversity of 2SLGBTQIA+ Yukoners and their experiences and beliefs. Doing so requires an analysis grounded in the theory of intersectionality, which considers the myriad of ways that identities overlap to create different experiences of oppression for marginalized people. Intersectionality interrogates the way that homophobic and transphobic violence are both directly linked to colonial legacies of heteropatriarchy and misogyny, and how these legacies are reproduced in school environments.

The third theme argues that in order for inclusion initiatives to actually be inclusive, they must represent the communities they purport to include. This is especially important in school environments and curriculum. Despite the existence of the



SOGI policy, there has been little progress toward accurate, diverse, and meaningful representation of 2SLGBTQIA+ histories, perspectives, and lived experiences. Once again, the onus is on the individual school staff to incorporate SOGI-inclusive content into their teaching without clear support mechanisms in place from EDU, other than the existence of SOGI 123. This absence points to a consistent theme throughout this review, which is that EDU's ideas, as represented in the SOGI policy, are good in theory, but they have not yet developed adequate resources and supports to empower school staff to put them into practice. This extends to a lack of clear guidance or a framework for inclusive participation in sports.

Comprehensive Sexual Health Education (CSHE) & SOGI: not the same

Lack of clear communication from EDU around the SOGI policy has led to a misguided conflation between SOGI inclusion and CSHE. Unfortunately, the confusion is a persistent issue across Canada; in recent years, there has been constant back and forth between parental rights lobbyists, education advocates, 2SLGBTQIA+ rights activists, and religious groups about exactly what SOGI is and is not (SFU.ca, 2025; Dickson, 2023). A Frequently Asked Questions information sheet put out by the Nechako Lakes School District, which uses the exact same BC Ministry of Education curriculum as the Yukon, explains the difference between SOGI and SHE as follows:

SOGI is a distinct and separate topic from sexual health education. [The SOGI Policy] 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. (SD91, SOGI Myths and Facts)

Yukon school administrators echoed this distinction in a letter sent to families in September 2023, which explains that the intention of SOGI policy is “[promote] diversity in our school communities,” and that CSHE education information is already part of the regular K-10 Physical Health Education curriculum (EDU internal communication, September 2023). Unfortunately, this review finds the quality of SHE in the Yukon to be lacking on multiple levels. Some high school students reported that they haven't received any SHE in school, or if they had, it had been at a basic and uninformative level. Participants shared about staff's discomfort to teach CSHE or discuss SOGI topics, despite being a mandatory part of the curriculum.

“Teachers said ‘I’m not touching that with a 10 foot pole’. It’s disheartening how teachers are uncomfortable. It feels like the satanic panic, where everyone is worried about being perceived as grooming” (Professional).

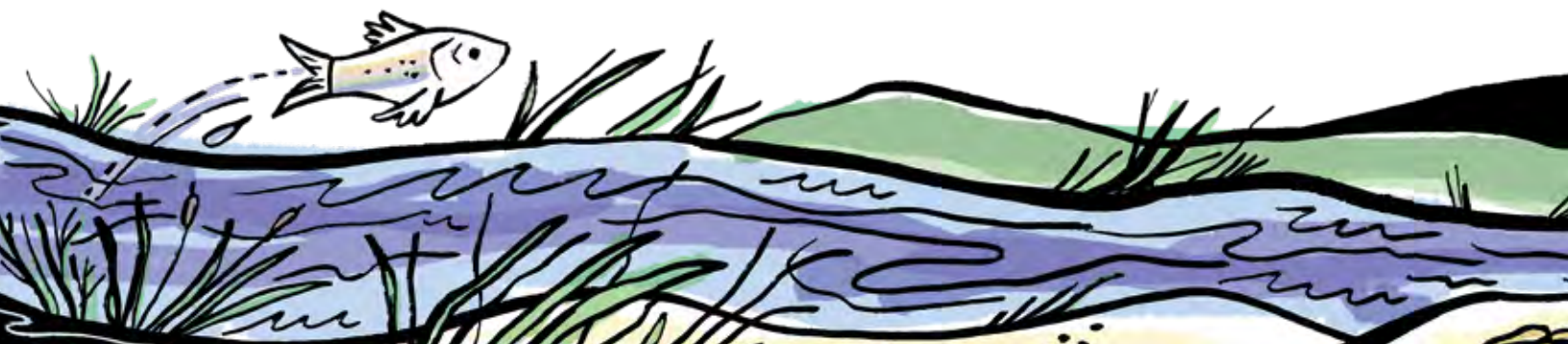
“So we get lots of questions about different things, but mostly it's they just want to have information on like how to explore their gender, how to explore their sexuality in ways that aren't going to get them in trouble.”
- Professional



This is not a Yukon-specific phenomena, to be clear. Barrientos-Saavedra (2025) discusses the fear that many educators have around teaching SOGI due to various factors, including job security, lacking the resources to teach effectively, being labeled 2SLGBTQIA+ themselves, and politicizing the classroom. Lesson planning is challenging for many educators because they lack content knowledge or the “affective disposition” to teach them (p.15).

It is no surprise then that schools often contract external organizations or governmental agencies to offer these lessons. Promising practices such as partnering with the nurse from the Youth Outreach Clinic or sexual health educators from the Health Promotion Unit (HPU) are necessary initiatives that need to be appropriately funded and staffed to provide sustainable services in all Yukon communities. Currently the Youth Outreach Clinic Nurse is a one-person project, and the HPU has two sexual health educators who offer one-hour-long sessions, which is often all a class will receive for the year.

60



Excerpt chosen by Ivan Coyote from the SOGI Intergenerational conversation

“What we are talking about is basic human rights [comprehensive sexual health education in school]. This is not, we are not asking for a lot. That’s why I go back to that respect. That’s why I go back to the bias. And that’s why I go back to our principals, or educators, or everyone needs to be held accountable, and someone needs to do that, whether it’s someone and honestly, it should probably be someone who’s not in the educational space. It’s someone who’s getting brought in because people need to feel safe, that it’s actually confidential, and that it’s not friends and that it’s not all these things. I also think people are desperate. All of us, we are desperate for basic human rights. This is ridiculous. You know, we’re in 2025 and we don’t have basic human rights. Sometimes it feels like we’re going behind, especially right now. You know, it’s terrifying. And then also, if we look at our education system, we’re desperate for teachers. We’re desperate for principals. We’re desperate for EA’s. We’re desperate for everyone. So it’s also like, I don’t know about you guys, but every time I’ve made poor decisions in my life is, when I’ve been desperate.”- Youth

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"I've sat in school council meetings and I've heard a superintendent actually say [about sexual health education], 'Oh, well, that's health.' Well, what we're talking about is education. As if these two things aren't just profoundly connected, but that's a systemic challenge." - Professional

Did you know?

YG's response to this review was as follows:

"We are currently gathering ideas on how to improve the delivery of Yukon's required sexual health curriculum to ensure all students, regardless of neurodiversity, are able to access and process the important learning." (EDU-YCAO communication, November 2022)

Additionally, the classroom delivery of mandatory CSHE remains largely exclusive of non-normative experiences. While it is not realistic to expect non-governmental organizations or HPU staff to provide tailored or individualized CSHE, it is the responsibility of EDU to ensure that these modifications are made. Currently, young people in care, or otherwise not attending school regularly frequently miss out on receiving adequate CSHE, while 2SLGBTQIA+ students report that content is often not relevant for or considerate of their realities. Young people with special needs or are neurodivergent have often not received any CSHE throughout their time in school. This is extremely concerning given that children with special needs are at increased risk of sexualized violence and exploitation (Helton et al., 2018), as was the tragic case at Hidden Valley Elementary School several years ago. This is in direct contravention of Recommendation 4 from *Responding to Sexualized Abuse in Yukon Schools: Review of Policies and Governmental Response*, in which sexual health information that is appropriate and accessible be provided to all students, including those with Individualized Education Plans, on Student Support Plans, etc. (Yukon Child & Youth Advocate Office, 2022, p.26).

Of note, the Yukon government (YG) report on Health and health-related behaviours among young people in the Yukon Territory (2025) notes that 16 to 25% of teenagers in the Yukon are sexually active, with the biggest red flag being gender disparity in sexting-related pressure and non-consensual sharing, especially affecting young girls. Teen dating violence statistics report over one in three youth who have experienced

"Sexting is when one person sends sexual messages, pictures, or videos to another person by text message, email, or on social media."
(SIECCAN, 2023)



and/or used violence in dating in the past 12 months, which is often a predictor of intimate partner violence among adults. Concerningly, the report found that “victimization and perpetration of teen dating violence was most common among gender-diverse youth and those who experience social marginalization” (p.117). These findings point to a need for comprehensive, inclusive sexual health education that emphasizes consent and respect.

The End Violence Yukon Campaign Call to Action 5 is a good reminder of what is truly a CSHE and that should be implemented:

“We hear from students regularly that sex education is not taught consistently, focuses on reproduction and STIs [Sexually Transmitted Infections] only and doesn’t cover consent, healthy relationships, and identity, it does not cover safe sex for 2SLGBTQQIA+ youth, it’s not always taught in culturally relevant ways for Indigenous youth and it is not well taught to neurodivergent kids or kids with disabilities...Creating a comprehensive sexual health education strategy within our schools and youth spaces across the Yukon that has tailored supports for teachers and adult role models to tackle these topics with confidence, that is cultural relevant and addresses the unique needs of 2SLGBTQQIA+ students. Co-develop this plan with leadership from youth and equity seeking organizations.”

“They have it [the sexual health education] all tied into gym and the gym teachers, which are usually these butch guys often in the high school, and it doesn’t sound very good coming from them. But my concern is the kids that I work with being special needs do not partake in gym classes. How are they getting sex ed? They’re not, the special ed classes. And, so the the reason why I’m not [working with this student anymore] is because I would name it. And the teacher got very uncomfortable in me telling [the student] to put his penis in his pants because I would help with toileting and we’d be pulling up his, you know, ‘Tuck your penis into your pants’. ‘Oh, you’re not the sex ed teacher!’ [the teacher said], ‘But I’m [just] naming it!’ [I responded]. I’ve been told that before too. Only now, the teacher’s take is that it’s only the nurses that can talk about that.” - Professional

“Where do the rights of the child fit in?... They didn’t even want the nurse to be allowed in the school because the potential for the nurse providing like sexual health information. And it’s like, well, a child has a right to health. ... And they they’re not always in safe homes themselves.” - Family member



Supportive Comprehensive Sexual Health Environments

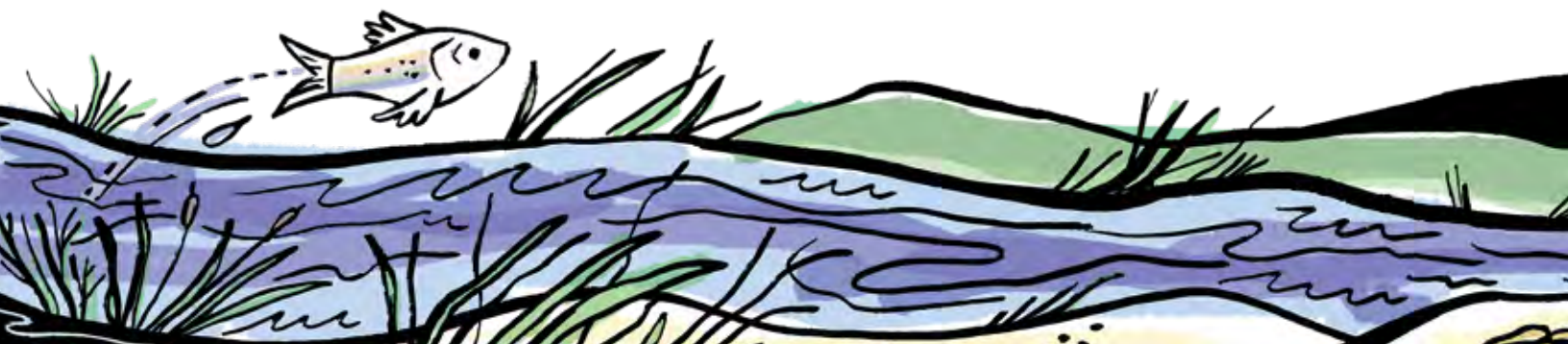
Education needs to be paired with supportive home, school, and healthcare environments, along with accessible resources for young people. Research finds that when wrap-around services such as an in-school health clinic exist, school attendance improves over time, particularly for students with mental health issues and, more generally, a significant decrease in absenteeism and increased engagement at school learnings is observed. It also helps families and can contribute to improvement of school climates. (Yau and De Jesus, 2017; Lim and al., 2023; Connor and al., 2024; Kjolhede and al. 2025). In the Yukon, the Yukon First Nations Education Directorate (YFNED) is proving the effectiveness of a wrap-around model, as their Mobile Therapeutic Unit ensures Indigenous children's holistic needs are met in a safe and culturally inclusive way.

Another initiative that started in 2024 through YG's Department of Health and Social Services is the Youth Outreach Clinic pilot project, which provides low-barrier access to health and youth friendly, non-urgent primary care services by a Registered Nurse. Youth aged 12-18 can access services related to health system navigation; mental health; substance use; sexual and reproductive health; blood collection; and immunizations through temporary walk-in clinics in schools. Currently the Youth Outreach Clinic relies on one person to coordinate and deliver care to youth across the Yukon. This service needs more sustainable funding to hire a permanent team that could be available along the CSHE delivery by teachers or the HPU sexual health educators.

Cultural Considerations

Talking about inclusion means talking about culture. Working towards SOGI inclusion in the Yukon is not a one-size-fit-all approach - the social and educational landscape is shaped by a wide range of cultural, religious, and historical contexts, all of which influence how SOGI content is received and understood. Universalizing a singular approach to SOGI topics risks reproducing forms of exclusion, particularly for communities and cultures whose understandings of gender and sexuality differ from a colonial framework. For example, many Indigenous cultures throughout North America have their own understandings of sexuality and gender that predate colonial concepts (Shaugnessy, 2025; Wright Cardinal and Cardinal Lennie, 2025; O'Sullivan, 2021; Hunt and Holmes, 2015.)

At the same time, cultural considerations also involve acknowledging that some communities in the Yukon may be cautious or resistant toward SOGI-inclusive ideas or education due to a number of factors, including religious beliefs, lack of education, or cultural differences. Ignoring these concerns while trying to drive through a blanket policy on something as contentious as SOGI issues is dismissive of concerns, can deepen mistrust between schools and families, and ultimately runs the risk of alienating those who may have genuine questions or concerns.



Ghosts in the Road

by Ivan Coyote

Vignette 5

In the early summer of 2021 I get asked by [media outlet] to talk about being non-binary for a feature they are doing for Pride Month. They send a cameraman out to interview me. I know him, we went to high school together, and he married a friend of mine. They had two kids, who are both young adults now. He confesses to me while he was setting up the gear and tweaking the lights that his youngest kid was transitioning, and that he was having some big emotions coming up about it. “Don’t get me wrong”, he says, his eyes filling up with tears that he will not let spill over and run. “I’m not a hater. I’m not a phobe. I’m really not. I love both of my kids to the moon and back. It’s just...we are Indigenous. I mean, racism is enough to have to deal with, right? My only son...I mean my daughter, sorry, is now going to have to tackle transphobia, too? As a father, that is a lot for me to worry about for her.”

That was just months before his cancer diagnosis. I wish he was still with us, so he could see how beautiful both of his daughters are. How talented and fierce and proud they both are now.

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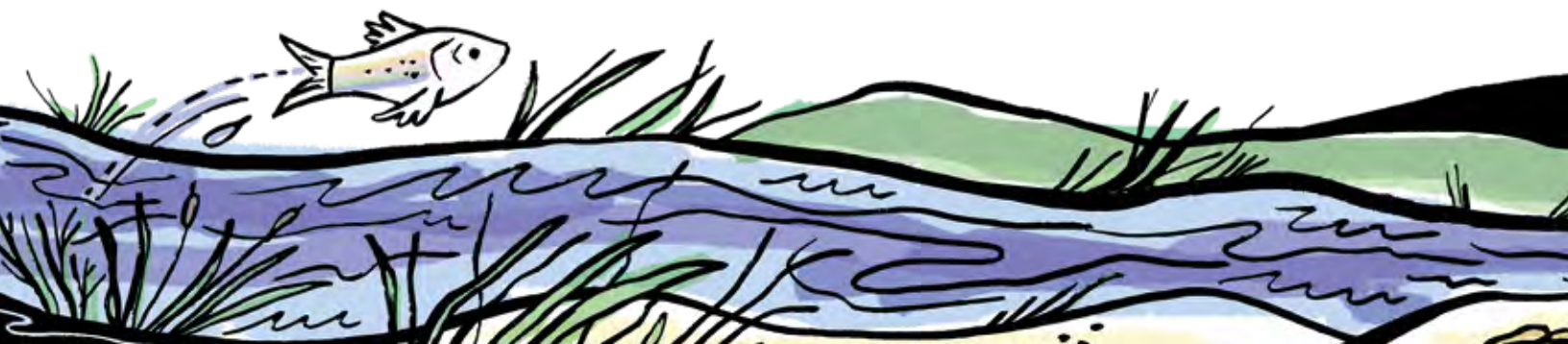
“The History of Two-Spirit and Indigiqueer in the Yukon isn’t as present, and it’s hard to create space for it when the knowledge isn’t there. There is anxiety within the young population. They’re not sure what it means either, trying to leverage the traditional cultural pieces ... Parents don’t even know either much, and info is limited with parents who didn’t go out [of the community] a lot.” – Professional

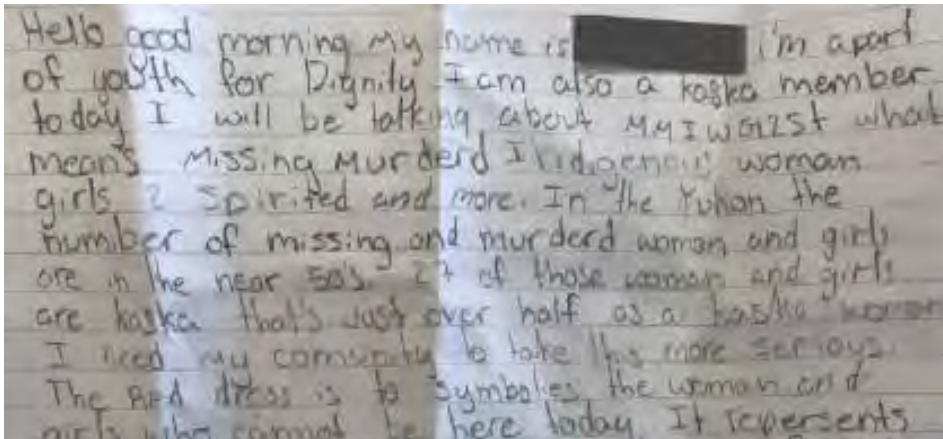
Indigiqueer and Two-Spirit Inclusion

Review participants expressed disappointment and concern with the lack of Yukon First Nation content and representation in the SOGI policy, especially the lack of teachings and resources related to Yukon First Nations’ histories of gender roles, identity, sexual expressions, and cultural relevance. In the course of this review YCAO hasn’t heard about teachings, guest speakers, ceremony or field trips touching on the different cultural aspects of gender expressions and roles that exist among Indigenous people and elsewhere in the world, such as Two-Spirit Dances and Pow-Wows. The former Education Minister, speaking in her capacity as Women and Gender Equity Directorate Minister alongside the then-Health and Social Services Minister, spoke to this powerfully in an official statement on March 19, 2025:

“Two-Spirit and Indigenous LGBTQIA+ identities, expressions and experiences have always existed. Indigenous peoples have long had complex gender systems in place. Broadly speaking, Two-Spirit people were well-loved and respected and often held important roles in their communities, such as negotiators, healers, counsellors, storytellers and knowledge-keepers. However, colonial violence – both historical and ongoing – has had enormous negative impacts on Two-Spirit+ and Indigiqueer people. A colonial understanding of gender binary creates an unequal power dynamic between all of us, as well as those who conform to it and those who don’t. It perpetuates discrimination, disadvantages and violence. Recognizing and honouring Two-Spirit and Indigenous LGBTQIA+ identities is a step towards healing and we lift our hands up to those Two-Spirit and Indigiqueer people in the Yukon and beyond who have advocated for this day.” (Yukon.ca, March 20, 2025).

Contrary to this statement, the SOGI policy’s reduction of the breadth of sexuality and gender to narrow definitions meant to be addressed by a singular definition contributes to the erasure of pre-colonial and other epistemologies of sexuality and gender. It is critical to emphasize that in adopting a universal approach to something as inherently diverse as SOGI, EDU’s policy fails to draw the crucial connections between dominant understandings of SOGI and other colonial frameworks such as heteropatriarchy and white supremacy, among others. These connections are important to name and interrogate for the purposes of informing responses and systemic changes that address root causes, rather than merely surface wounds. This is the crux of how schools can help their students learn the historical and contemporary linkages between initiatives like Pride, Black History Month, Orange Shirt Day, and others, instead of seeing each as disparate events meant to acknowledge separate and unconnected realities. National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and Two-Spirit People, also known as Red Dress Day, is one such event. While it has become relatively commonplace to see schools putting up red dresses or iconography to commemorate the day, this review found that only two out of 40 Yukon schools and educational programs actually have structured and intentional lessons examining the context behind Red Dress Day.





Speech from a student participating in the Youth for Dignity's walk honouring the National Day of Awareness of MMIWG on May 5, 2025.

Colonial Legacies of Heteropatriarchy and Toxic Masculinity

The connections between violence against Indigenous women and violence against Two-Spirit people are historical, myriad, and representative of ongoing colonial amnesia (Wei et al., 2024; Chiefs of Ontario, 2023; Stahn, 2020), and yet the SOGI policy makes no mention of the fact that murders and disappearances of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse individuals (MMIWG2S+) are statistically more likely than those affecting non-Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people (Statistics Canada). Review participants, along with various experts, warn that SOGI inclusion is not possible unless sexism is addressed alongside it (Chiefs of Ontario, 2023; Hunt and Holmes, 2015). Sexist ideas like misogyny and toxic masculinity are intrinsically connected to and mutually reinforcing of homophobia and transphobia (Poulin & Widdis, 2024). Research indicates that pre-adolescent boys who use homophobic language are more likely to sexually harass girls in adolescence, while over a third of boys report hearing their peers making sexual comments or jokes about girls daily (Reichert & Nelson, 2020). Homophobic language is also used as a form of socializing behaviour among largely homogenous student populations: "This is particularly important...in conservative rural communities where religious issues often collide with more liberal national and urban policies" (Bailey et al. 2022).

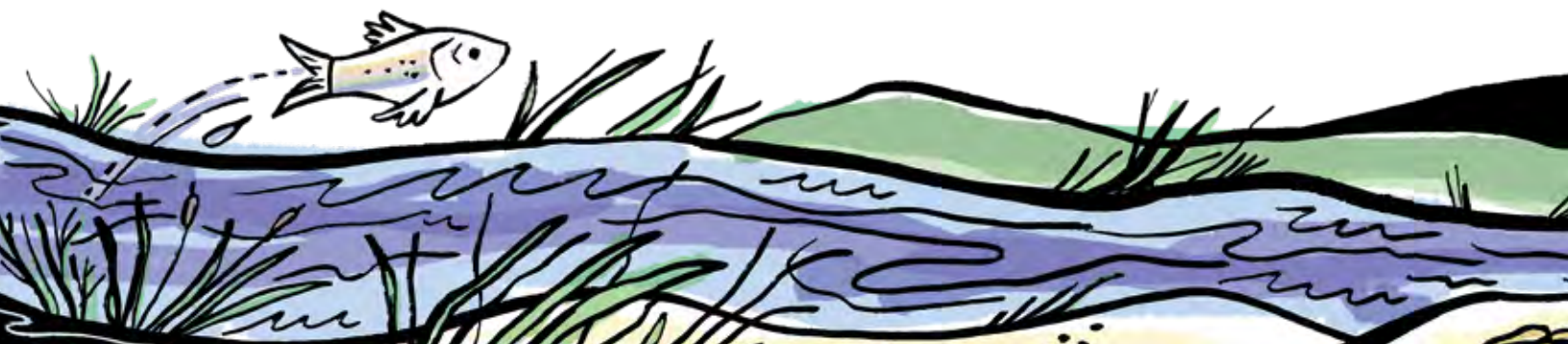
"[People in Whitehorse, compared to another southern town] will walk up to you and scream it in your face. ... They're a lot more used to people kind of conforming to this specific thing [the gender binary]. And then if you don't, they have this idea of well we can beat that [transphobic slur]..." - Student

Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous families in the Yukon have been heavily impacted by the destructive force of heteropatriarchal structures. Colonial understandings of gender, gender roles, and power within relationships, informed by the prevalence of patriarchal hierarchy in Eurocentric belief systems, were



imposed upon Indigenous students in residential schools (O’Sullivan, 2021). The matrilineality of Yukon First Nations governance structures was ignored. Moreover, the schools deliberately suppressed some Indigenous gender systems (such as Two-Spirit identities) and imposed a binary, heteronormative framework, mirroring the patriarchal, paternalistic attitudes of wider Canadian society (Robertson, 2018).

“It’s this weird hate that they don’t understand can put them in danger, as much as they’re putting the other person in danger, if not more. Because this is mostly native town and I am related to most of the population here. I know for a fact it’s residential schools because of the fact that even just two generations ago, it was people in full residential schools, and the previous generation was still residential day schools. That’s why I wholeheartedly believe that her [speaker’s mother] lack of support is that. She actually went to a couple of the schools here and one of them is still running.” -Youth



Excerpt chosen by Ivan Coyote from the SOGI Intergenerational conversation

“A Deputy Minister called me up one day and asked me for lunch. And so I met with him and he was over at the department there. And he says the reason for our meeting is I’d like to get some advice from you. I said, you want advice from me, you know. He says, yeah, I’ve got all these pictures on the wall. They were all residential school pictures. And his staff was harassing him to take them down. This was when the residential school stuff started surfacing. And he says, what do you think?

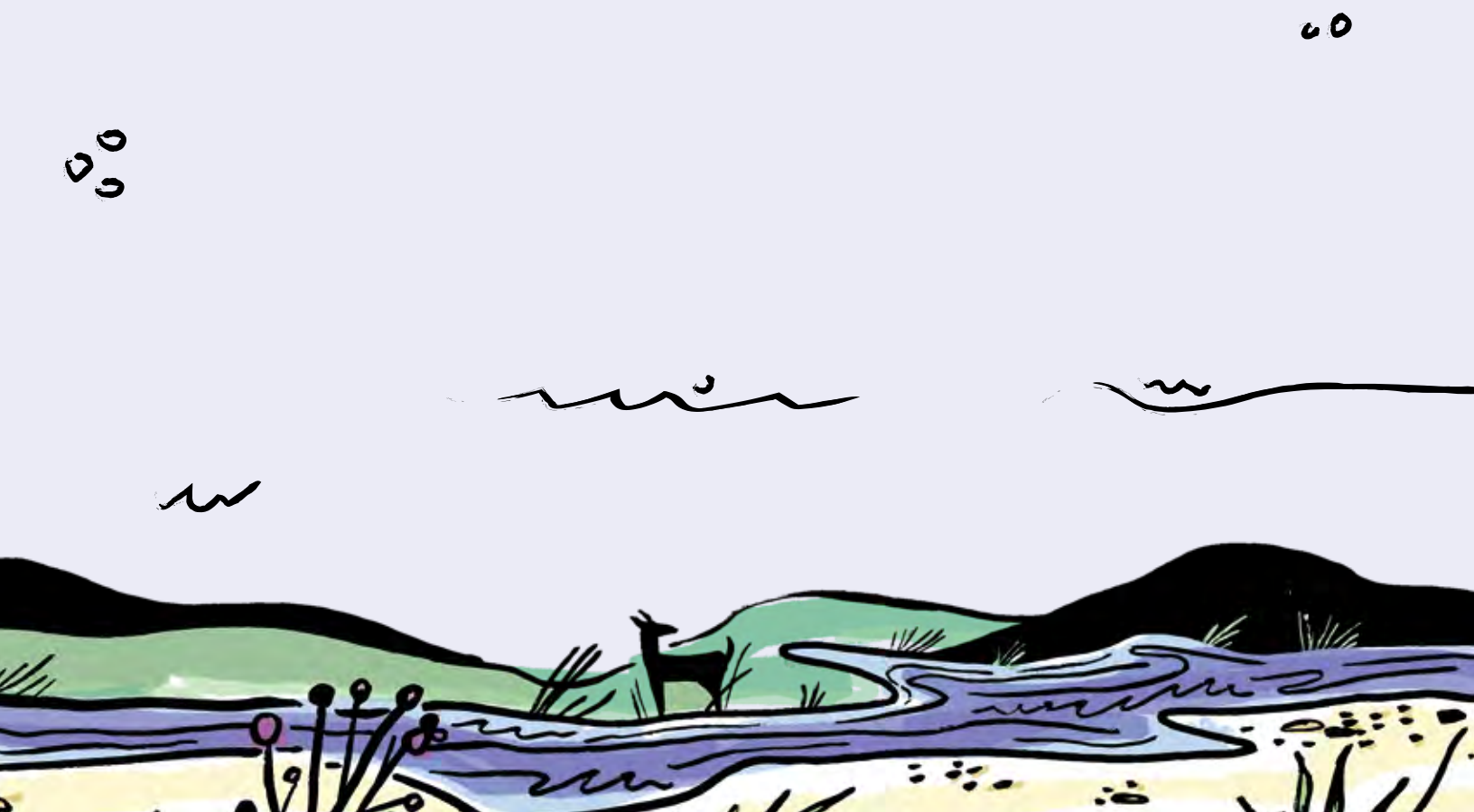
And I said I hear what you’re saying. I hear what your staff is saying, but I think you should leave them up. Because that’s a reminder for them. It’s not theirs to carry because you know, for me, as a residential school survivor I wasn’t proud of myself at all.

I didn’t even like myself. But being able to talk about, you know, what I endured and what I learned through the process, the journey I had to go to save myself, I thought, wow, you know, and I survived. I think that’s why I’m here today.

He left them up because he wanted people to know, you know, there’s a group of people out there that are angry about what happened at these places. But he wanted to know them, to know that, you know, they did nothing to hurt us. It was another generation, but it’s reality. It really did happen.

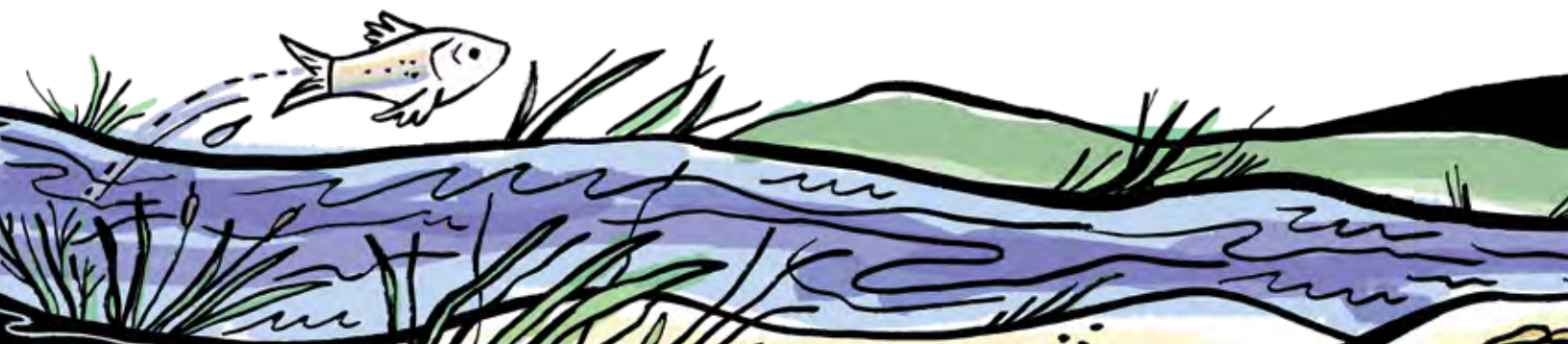
And to find out that we weren’t those ugly little ducklings we had, we were put in a place of, you know, we were good people. Geez, we come out of there as doctors, lawyers and look at where we are now. And at one time I was ashamed. But I’m not ashamed of who I am now. I’ve finally started liking myself because I’m working on my life story. I don’t feel that shame, that they tried to instill in me as a First Nation child, youth, adult, two times cancer survivor, residential school survivor and now an Elder.”- Elder

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“I made a little two spirit wall and they, like, took down and covered it up eventually.”
- Professional

Yukoners prove daily that women hunt, fish, trap, cut wood, make fire, operate heavy machinery, and drive big trucks. Yukoners also prove that men sew, dance, berrypick, cook, care, teach, clean, and parent. To insinuate otherwise is to disclose one’s ignorance of the Yukon. However, the colonial gender narrative is pervasive, and even in a territory that demonstrates the fallacy of gender roles, the rigidity of heteronormative constructs continues to harm students daily who don’t “perform” gender the way they’re told to. Learning to identify and disrupt these systems at play in educational spaces is a crucial part of SOGI inclusion in schools. Without this type of systemic shift, token expressions of solidarity such as rainbow stickers or red dresses can actually cause further harm to Indigenous queer and Two-Spirit students who are reminded a) that colonial legacies continue to erase Indigenous cultural values; and b) that their identities don’t necessarily fit in with Eurocentric understandings of queerness.



Ghosts in the Road

by Ivan Coyote

Vignette 6

The news is full of anti-trans hate these days. They voted on a bill in B.C. last week, a bill that if passed, would have outlawed rainbow flags in that province. It was voted down, but still. These are dangerous times for my community. I think about the kids who will be forced out of homes and schools and small towns and churches and families by this rising tide of hate and misinformation. We have to be ready for them. We must collect the tools and the words and the compassion they will need. We must do them no more harm.

I think about the parents and loved ones of people who are coming out as trans or non-binary right now, into this current political climate, and my heart catches in my chest for their understandable worry and fear for us.

I think about my trans brothers and sisters and siblings, trying to survive and thrive despite this unsettling swing to the far right, and its daily implications for our basic rights and freedoms and access to public spaces as the anti-trans hysteria blows air into the lungs of bigots and tech billionaires and even presidents.

I think of the silence of people who I had hoped would speak up for us but have not.

The rule of work is supposed to be that the longer you do it for, the better you get at it. We are told that the more work that you accomplish, the less of it there is supposed to be left for you to do. I wish that were the truth for the work I have done to make this world safer for LGBTQ2S people. It is hard for me to admit that things feel worse for us now than they ever have, that the clock has not only stopped, but been rewound by decades.

In my previous life I was an electrician. I was twenty-three years old when I first went to school to study electricity and electronics. I graduated at the top of my class, with a nearly perfect grade point average. Electrical school is mostly math, and I've always loved math.

I still to this day remember the mathematical equation for work, mostly because to my storyteller ears, it sounded like a poem. Work equals force times distance over time. Work equals force times distance over time.

I promise to continue to work so that every little boy can cry and play the flute and hug his best friend without being shamed, and every little girl can excel at math and own and protect her own body and grow muscles and be a firefighter without being told to be less, to want less, and every trans and or non-binary or two-spirit kid can be celebrated instead of tolerated, and wear what makes them feel handsome or beautiful, or both, and grow up and thrive in what is supposed to be one of the richest and most tolerant countries in this world. I mean, why would any of us expect any less than this, for all of our children, and for ourselves.

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“But our traditional teachings were so based in respect that they were inclusive of everything. That respect piece was so, so important to us as Indigenous people and how you treated others...How those traditional teachings can come in and bring back that sense of respect? And where does it start from? And how do you outwardly show it? How do you protect others that are trying to protect themselves? How does it all work together?” – Professional

SOGI and Indigenous Cultural Safety

It is a significant omission that Yukon First Nations are not named in the policy updates, nor are Yukon First Nations epistemologies acknowledged. Any mention of indigeneity appears only in the glossary. At the same time, the *LGBTQ2S+ Inclusion Action Plan* upon which EDU based their 2023 updates for the Sexual Orientation and Gender Inclusivity (SOGI) policy clearly states that EDU will work “with students, families, central administration and school staff, **Yukon First Nations**, partners and school communities to develop and implement a plan to improve and modernize the department’s inclusive education programs and services...” (p. 13-14).

This runs in contrast to the First Nation School Board’s (FNSB) approach to implementing SOGI policy thus far. Through a SOGI Committee and following the lead of their Communities Committees, FNSB’s goal is to consider the ethical perspectives of inclusion in the traditional teachings and how they can respond to SOGI questions. FNSB, while still upholding the *Education Act*, models how to approach SOGI inclusion through a lens of cultural safety, rather than subscribing to a universalized approach:

“At FNSB, we are committed to a locally grounded, community-led approach. We do not prescribe a single model, resource, or partner for Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. Instead, we look to each community to define how this work should take shape — always grounded in respect for the values, voices, and priorities of that First Nation. At the same time, we expect all staff to meet the obligations outlined in the SOGI Policy, including maintaining safe and inclusive environments for all learners.” (Yukon Government Required Yearly Training, 2025; fnsb.ca)

In the same document, FNSB goes on to acknowledge the possible disconnect that may arise between Community Committees and school staff regarding the understanding, comfort level, and readiness regarding SOGI implementation, and provide clarity on how to proceed:

“Working with your Community Committee to receive community direction before any SOGI-related initiatives or programming are introduced in your school, [sic] this is particularly important when creating community-based SOGI resources. Please note that you and your staff may be ready to move this work ahead, but we must take the lead of our communities and when they are ready to move forward with this work. [Encourage] ongoing engagement between staff, students, and the community to support inclusive practices that reflect local First Nation values... This work will evolve differently in each school and will grow over time. FNSB is here to support you in holding space, facilitating dialogue, and responding to the direction set by your communities.” (Yukon Government Required Yearly Training, 2025; fnsb.ca)



Of note here is that FNSB does not seek to impose a singular way of implementing SOGI policy in its schools, but rather operates with curiosity, cultural humility, and patience. In such a way they remain respectful that different communities and First Nations may have their own approaches to and relationships with SOGI topics, while still centering student and staff safety in schools. This approach is of increased importance in rural communities, where

“social problems are so complex that having these conversations [about SOGI] are too far away... trying to have them would get, ‘I just need to get through tomorrow, why are we having these conversations?’” - Professional.

The process of working with the Community Committees to receive community direction on SOGI-related initiatives or programming may not produce the same sort of immediate results that more directive approaches take, but honours relationship, collaboration, and trust. Decisions and actions that result from such dialogue will inevitably be far more effective in moving forward the goals of SOGI policy in culturally relevant ways.

“Here [the staff are] definitely trying hard and doing really great work to build relationships with students, create those safe spaces, trying very hard. Doing really cool things to build relationships. So I think the mountain can feel huge. It’s a slow climb, which I totally can appreciate. And also even we talked briefly about having a some sort of alliance somewhere, something of some sort of opportunity. There’s just so few people resources to do a whole plethora of things.”- Professional

On a separate but related issue, there is little to no information regarding education curriculum in Social Studies, History, First Nations Studies, or Sexual Health Education (SHE) on the impacts of the HIV/AIDS pandemic on Indigenous Canadians. As public SHE in Canada originates from this pandemic, it is a matter of national historical and ongoing significance, especially given the context of disproportionate representation of Indigenous populations impacted by HIV/AIDS due to structural factors in healthcare stemming from colonial legacies (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2022).

“My brother was Two-Spirit and we were residential school survivors. One of the residential schools was just over here ... and the other one was across the street, and in order for him to just live, he had to leave the Yukon completely. And a lot of shame because people, other friends, students mocked them and made fun of him. But it opened my eyes because I have a lot of friends who are Two-Spirit and gay, and I have so much fun with them. We learn from each other ... And I’m going to share a part of my life regarding my brother. My brother died from AIDS, and in order for me to accept who he was, I learned about who he was. When he got sick, I met his medicine lady, and she taught me how to mix his medicines, and how to care for him, how to prepare his foods and everything.

“I have not heard of this policy. My hope is that it’s culturally sensitive.”
– Professional

“People still use ‘Gay’ like a derogatory term here routinely. And nobody is really addressing that. In my perception there’s so many things that they’re [the adults in the school] doing well. It just feels like that one falls... I think there’s a lot of pervasive undertones here. Just challenging.” – Professional



And I learned so much about him as a person, a Two-Spirit man who was very proud and who loved his family dearly but just couldn't come back here because of the harassment and not for who he was. But when I came home, it took me a lot to come home. But when I came home, I went to our office of the day, which was Blood Ties, here in the Yukon..., I said, this is who I am, and my brother was the first First Nations person to die from AIDS. And I went, from community to community and said, this is who I am, and this is why I'm speaking out. And the only thing I want out of this is education, everybody to be treated fairly... I shared the love I had for my brother because I truly believe, it doesn't matter who we are in life, we are all the same human beings and we deserve to be respected and cared for."- Elder

Intersections of Identities

Apart from Indigenous perspectives, the universalizing nature of the SOGI policy silences the experiences of other communities as well. SOGI and related realities such as gender-based violence and homophobia all demonstrate the interconnected nature of systemic oppression; racism and poverty, for example, accentuate gender-based violence which disproportionately impact poor and racialized communities (MacDougall, A. M., Walia, H., Wise, M., 2022). As stated in *Health and health-related behaviours among young people in the Yukon Territory (2025)*, “bodyweight, gender identity, sexual orientation, race or skin color were the most prevalent reasons students reported being bullied for” (p.121). For 2SLGBTQIA+ students who live at the intersections of these identities (with more than just one identity marker), violence often takes on complex forms and can feel deeply overwhelming, particularly when systemic responses overlook those intersections (Chan et al., 2022).

“There was a lot of sometimes feeling alienated, which it's hard to say how this was for other kids because I'm a person of color, I'm Hispanic and African, mostly Hispanic presenting. And of course the leader in there [GSA] was White. And most of the kids in there are White. And [I was like], 'Okay, I'm having troubles with this. Who do I go to when they call me these racist terms and transphobic? And who do I go to then?' Because I can't go to [the GSA leader] because he's White. He wouldn't understand. He wouldn't understand that struggle and what that felt like. There was support, but only if you were a specific type of person... There's a lot of support for you if you're a Queer or Trans person that's White. But if you're not, you're kind of out of luck...it's a safe space, but it's not all that inclusive.”- Student



While the SOGI policy defines QTIBIPOC in its glossary, there is little guidance given to teachers on how to work with realities specific to QTIBIPOC students, or how to support them. An intersectional approach would compel EDU to interrogate the universalizing nature of the SOGI policy in its current iteration, and instead put forward a policy (amidst other systemic changes) that addresses the diversity of avenues towards inclusion (Bell, 2016).

At the same time, EDU must consider that belief systems and cultural values of Yukon's growing newcomer population can sometimes conflict with Western SOGI ideals (Wang, 2025; Bragg, 2017; Leung, 2017) and be mindful of how to navigate this dissonance while ultimately working towards inclusion. While this review does not focus on this particular phenomenon, it does concede that this conflict of values is both an urgent yet complex conversation for EDU to navigate, and that, similar to FNSB's collaborative approach to facilitating SOGI implementation with First Nations and community schools, the emphasis should be on respectful dialogue, cultural humility, and patience. As always, what should be consistent is the centering of student and staff safety in schools and educational environments (Leung, 2017).

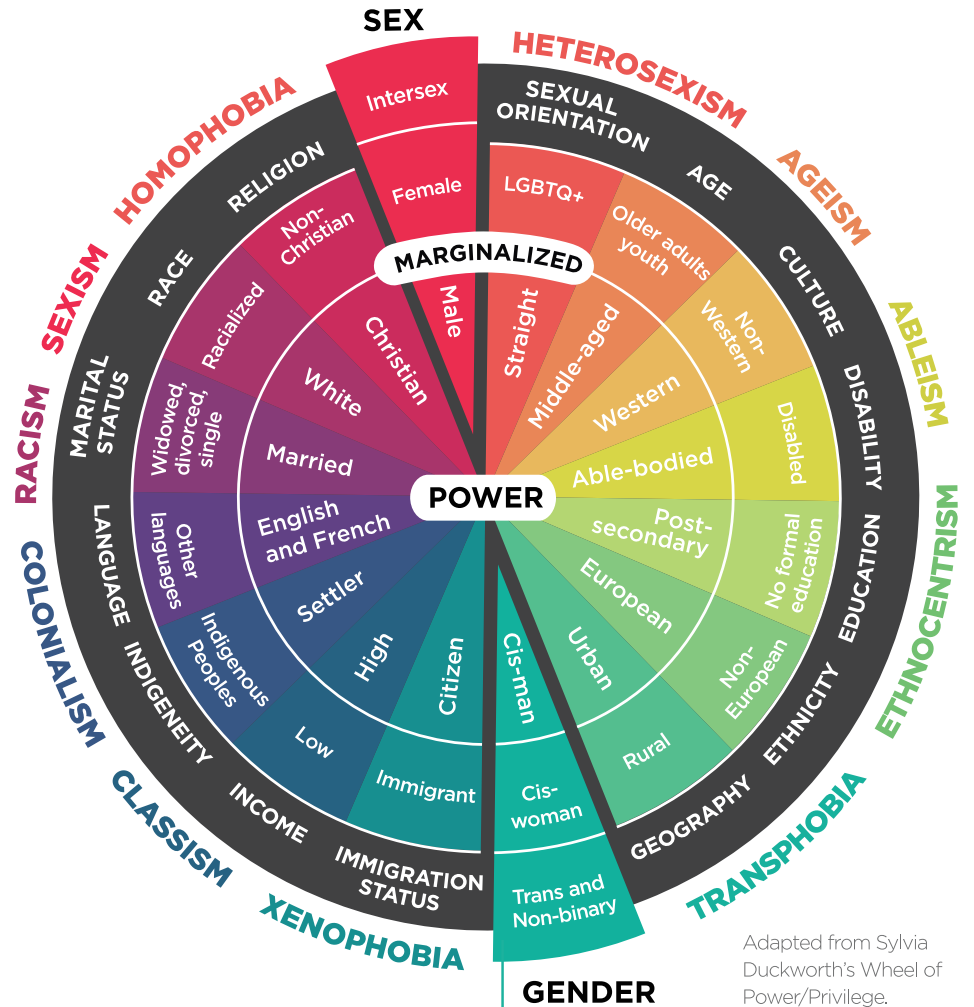
Some review participants expressed a desire to receive more education about SOGI and CSHE so they would understand what their children are talking about, and would have the information to be able to support their children, as in their own language(s) it is possible that no equivalent words or concepts exist. Additionally, some participants spoke to these being culturally or familially taboo topics about which silence was the norm. The contrary exists also, where review participants came from places where the gender binary isn't culturally the norm and non-heterosexual orientation isn't taboo, and that they've seen more cis-heterosexual normalization in Yukon schools than they're used to.

Even for those who grow up in Western contexts, the language of SOGI and what it entails isn't a given. Opportunities for parents and caretakers to receive information and education relative to what their children are learning need to be consistently offered to ensure families feel informed and empowered to support their children. Language awareness and accessibility are important. SOGI considerations require glossaries and definitions (similar to the one included in the SOGI policy) because they explain the realities that many individuals may have limited exposure to or familiarity with. Learning SOGI-inclusive language and concepts is akin to stepping into a new place where the language and cultural norms are unknown to us. Though at first it may feel uncomfortable or confusing, ongoing practice can lead to decidedly more inclusive ways of co-existing with each other.

"The other young population I'm seeing are young immigrants from South Asia, Southeast Asia and Africa who are coming in and trying to access services here, but they're basically still kids themselves and they're coming on their own. So I think some specific resources geared to that population as I'm seeing it grow... It's all newcomers, kids who are like 17 and 18 years old who are coming over ... who have no family, do not understand how Canada works, do not understand what queer and trans stuff means, and are encountering it for the first time, which means swift uptakes in identity changes and folks just asking for resources to better understand because now they have possibilities. And a lot of them are planning on staying because they can't go back to their country as a queer or trans person. So that newcomer population is growing every year of young people... So even just for that population, access to positive sexual health around preventing later pregnancies if they don't actually want more kids because they didn't get to make a choice whether or not to have them at home." - Professional



The diagram below illustrates the concept of intersectionality developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989). It provides examples of identity and social-position variables, showing that experiences of privilege and barriers can occur simultaneously depending on the context and different elements of an individual's identity. The closer one is to the centre of the wheel, the more privileges are experienced. This diagram is adapted from S. Duckworth's Wheel of Power/Privilege and is used by the Canadian Institute of Health Research (CIHR) – Institute of Gender and Health (CIHR, 2021).



Adapted from Sylvia Duckworth's Wheel of Power/Privilege.

Some gender identity terms include:

Agender	Genderfluid	Gender neutral	Transgender man
Bigender	Genderqueer	Non-binary	Transgender woman



Representation and Inclusion

School Environment and Curriculum

Being able to see oneself represented in the learning environment is an essential part of feeling safe, recognized, and included for 2SLGBTQIA+ students and staff. While Pride flags and rainbow stickers can offer some visual indication that spaces are supposedly SOGI-inclusive, and some libraries and hallways have sections or displays of 2SLGBTQIA+ representation, by and large school environments remain overwhelmingly heteronormative and binary-enforcing. This is reflected in the infrastructure of the building itself, and extends all the way to curricular content that continues to marginalize and/or erase 2SLGBTQIA+ realities. The review heard from 2SLGBTQIA+ students in the Yukon who don't know who their 2SLGBTQIA+ elders are, or the contributions those elders have made to 2SLGBTQIA+ history and the advancement of 2SLGBTQIA+ rights in the territory. There is an urgent desire to learn more about this history and to honour these elders and knowledge keepers, along with the work of previous activists and their memories:

"Most of us at this table, statistically, we're not supposed to live, you know?"

- Youth

Despite increasing visibility of various 2SLGBTQIA+ remembrance days, Pride events, and shows, this review finds many participants still feel like SOGI topics are treated like eggshells within school curriculum and classroom instruction. Some students pointed out a gap in the curriculum regarding gender construction and expression, while others emphasized the dissonance of having resources displayed, but no context or education to go along with them:

"From what I can tell, they [the high school] have a fair bit of resources just out on the boards that they have around school and stuff... And there is technically like the GSA space in the classroom. However, there's not much education about it. So a lot of people either, like, don't know what it is or, you know, might have some prejudice towards a lot of LGBTQ people or queer people and stuff like that, because they just don't have any education about it. No one's ever talked to them about it or things like that." - Student

"I didn't do gym at [high school name], so I can't really speak to what they teach in their [Physical Health Education] curriculum. However, I did do gym at [high school name] and there was no mention of queer topics. Okay, there was just none... I did gym both in French and in English. Neither of them had any. They did talk a little bit about sexual health. Okay, but they didn't talk about [being] queer." - Student

"What was the history in the Yukon of Two-Spirit LGBTQ? ... It's not easy to change a curriculum in the school and the things you teach, but I feel it would be very beneficial to have more information and more stuff talked about Two-Spirit people and that kind of stuff. It's important that there's more representation than that, because for me, in school, I was never told about it. I was never taught it or hadn't really heard about it. In History, In socials class, for example, we never touched on any part of that history, none of that. And I think it's unfair that that's not in there, because I think that deserves as much attention as everything else does."

- Youth



“I feel the school is looking to us [parents] to come up with ideas and a plan...There is inaction due to fear of doing the wrong thing.” - Family member

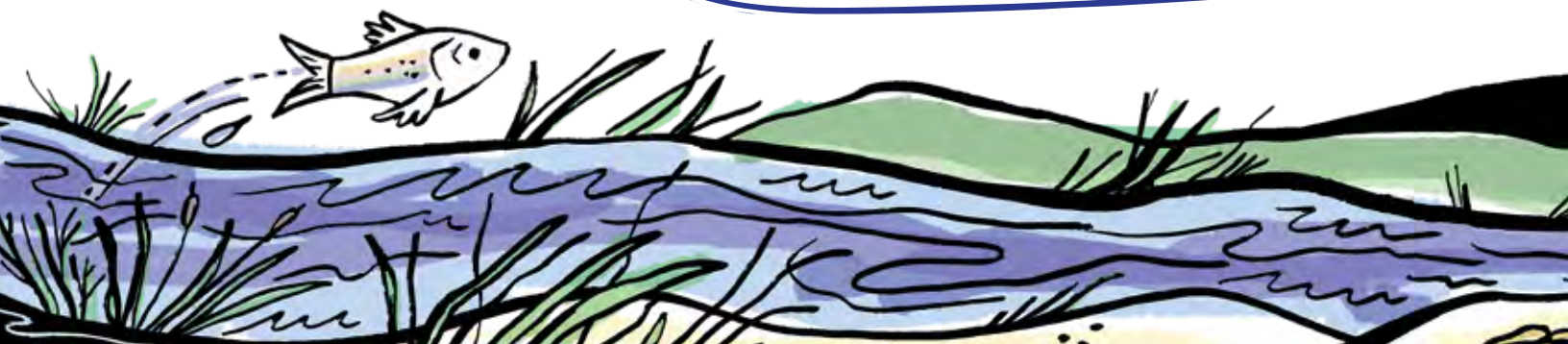
Some families with 2SLGBTQIA+ children reported feeling welcomed and supported by their children’s school staff, but struggled in situations where their gender-diverse children were triggered by the lack of representation in the classroom content. A lack of resources and accessibility to SOGI-inclusive resources in French was also noted. This situation is amplified in rural communities where access to resources and support is more scarce, contributing to increased risks to the safety of 2SLGBTQIA+ children and their families.

It is noteworthy that the SOGI policy explicitly states that administrators are to support teachers to include “positive images and accurate information about history and culture which reflects the accomplishments and contribution of the 2SLGBTQIA+ people,” as well as the acknowledgement of the necessity to address 2SLGBTQIA+ cultural competency in this policy.

“So there are a lot of kids who come to school dressed one way and then change their clothes. Seeing lots of that. They’re just really excited when we’re there, that there’s like adult representation of other queer and trans people because they don’t see very much of it.”- Professional

“I think it’d be very important to make sure that resources are also available in French. It would be really important so that there’s access to the French version curriculum, to those resources and to those spaces. And just so that all professionals are aware, making it accessible to people in French. Also, another interesting point that I could see is like Two-Spirit, making sure that Indigenous voices are involved. So that they can also curate their spaces too...Making sure that there’s accessibility between everyone. And bringing spaces together because indigenous voices are important when it comes to sexual orientation...They have their own culture that has their own experiences.”- Student

“We have offered our services to every school to come in. They either don’t have a GSA or they don’t want us in the school because they think it’s adult sexualizing children. So [we] go to Porter Creek Secondary, [we] go to F.H. Collins, Saint Francis, but [we] can’t bring gender gear. [We’re] not allowed to talk about it or bring it up or bring it in the room. [We] can’t mention nothing. [We] just are not allowed to bring up gender gear or transition [topics]. They’re telling [us] it’s coming from administration, from the parents... But [we’re] also at Selkirk elementary, and they’re totally fine with everything.. [We] give them [our contacts info] and have them contact [us] outside of school and then meet them at [organization] and help them figure out rightsizing or whatever it is. But we can’t do it at school...”-Professional



Excerpt chosen by Ivan Coyote from the **SOGI Intergenerational conversation**

“The goal [for this review] is to make sure that students, especially future students, will have good safety, proper support, and be able to reach out to the people in schools for aid, and know that they can feel comfortable and supported properly there, instead of having to reach out. There’s nothing wrong with reaching out for alternative support, but it’s nice to know that if you needed help, you could go to your principal or someone and say, hey, this is happening, can you help me? And they would help you. I think that the goal is to have that support naturally in schools where it should be, I think.” - Student

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Inclusion: A Baseline of Respect

Gender and Sexuality Alliances (GSA) and similar school clubs are meant to provide a safe space for children and youth to express who they are freely and safely. Sometimes this means other aspects of a young person’s identity can manifest as well. While EDU and school staff cannot reasonably be expected to be fully informed or aware of other people’s realities, the ultimate objective of inclusion policies like EDU SOGI policy should be to facilitate spaces where all students feel safe and respected. Such is the case with therianism, which is growing in popularity among young people (Steadman, 2024), and students who identify as therians who have found some semblance of acceptance and safety in school GSAs. Therians are individuals who self-identify as non-human animals - either spiritually, psychologically, or behaviorally - and may feel that a substantial part of their identity is animal-like rather than purely human (Dirk, Blom, and Sharpless, 2025). Therians, or furies, are not related to sexual orientation or gender. They do, however, relate to the notion of identity and are relevant to consider in context where identity is in development, such as the school environment.

This review heard from professionals who expressed difficulty navigating these situations due to a lack of knowledge and understanding, or because 2SLGBTQIA+ students expressed discomfort to be associated with therians and furies. In a Yukon school, rumours about 2SLGBTQIA+ students using a litter box have led to bullying behaviours towards 2SLGBTQIA+ youth without an adequate response from the school. Additionally, students identifying as therians or furies shared that they experience ongoing bullying, and if they also identify as 2SLGBTQIA+, experience the compounding effects of homophobic and transphobic harassment in schools.

“It’s daily, [the] “I hope you get hit by a car” or “kill yourself”” - Student

In instances where school staff aren’t sure how to address certain topics, identities, and behaviours, the baseline should be respect for the individual and care for their safety and right to feel safe at school: “[Some students] refer to the bathroom as the litter box. It’s a whole vibe, but it’s not causing anyone harm” - Professional

“Since 2013, there has been improvements and there is less segregation and lots more spaces where queer youth can mingle, like GSAs. But it’s not [a] utopia. For lots of youth today, it feels a bit like Mad Max, fending for yourself with lots of it happening all at once and a network of problems” – Professional



Excerpt chosen by Ivan Coyote from the **SOGI Intergenerational conversation**

“I think we made a really vital point about the administration in schools when it comes to the principals and vice principals. We hear way too much principals and vice principals doing effed up shit. And I think there needs to be something saying like, remove your f*** bias. Like, I’m sorry, this is the reality. You are a principal. I don’t care whether our skin color is different. I don’t care whether our gender is different. I don’t care who you marry. I don’t care what you do with your life. Do not care what I do with mine, you know, unless I’m hurting someone. But when you come to work, and especially if you’re going to be a principal and your principal cap is supposed to make me feel safe and you’re transphobic or you’re homophobic or you’re racist, that’s unacceptable.... People need to actually be held accountable...” - Youth

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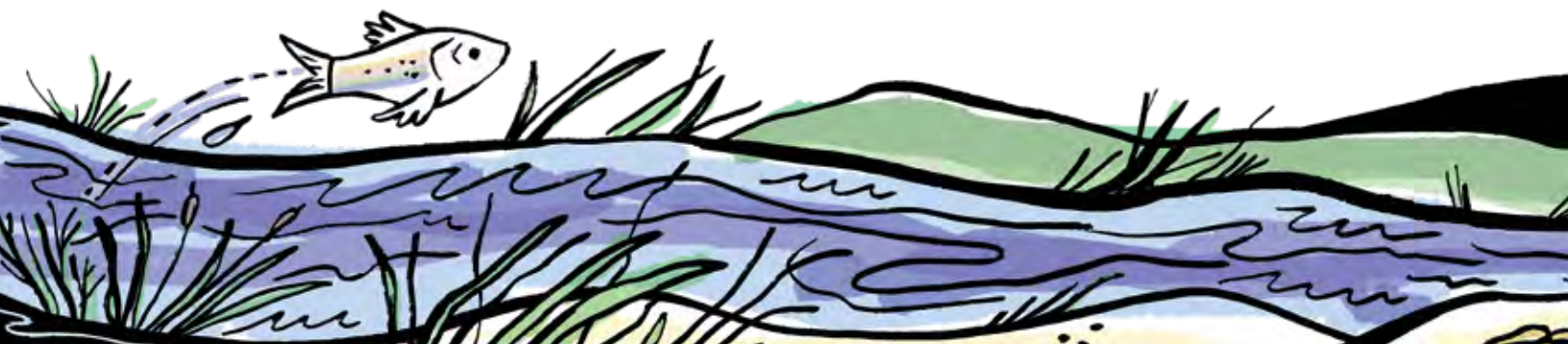
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Inclusion in Sports

Thus far, little to no information is available for children, youth, their families, and school staff in the Yukon about trans students' needs in sports. There have been no cases documented by EDU of trans student-athletes in Yukon schools not being able to join a school sports team of their gender (although this review is aware such incidents have occurred locally), but debates about trans athletes in sports continue to be highly contentious throughout Canada and have become a proxy for broader conversations around trans inclusion (Orange, 2024). EDU's development of a clear policy for trans student-athletes' inclusion in Yukon school sports would be a prudent course of action to proactively mitigate harm to trans student-athletes if an incident of trans eligibility were to become publicized and drawn-out. Things to take into consideration when developing this policy are:

1. Gender-neutral changerooms: EDU and school administrations are well aware that “even though all schools have gender-neutral washrooms available, those are often inaccessible for after-school events, as the gyms are separated from the rest of the school.” (EDU internal communication, May 2023).
2. Physical Health Education (PHE) classes: PHE is often the class where many students, not only 2SLGBTQIA+ students, are the most vulnerable if they aren't deemed athletic. Body image, body dysmorphia, and identity occupy a central place in young people's minds especially when class teachings are largely related to the body's abilities. PHE and school sports in general is also where harmful gender roles and narratives can easily be exacerbated if not proactively considered and addressed by the educator or coach.
3. Tournaments and travel games: EDU, school administration, coaches, trip organizers, and hosts must consider appropriate accommodations for washrooms, changerooms, sleeping arrangements, chaperones, etc. When these concerns are not considered prior to trips or events, 2SLGBTQIA+ students' participation can be compromised
4. Ground this policy in human rights law such as if a party seeking to maintain a discriminatory practice must, on the balance of probabilities and supported by evidence, demonstrate a bona-fide justification for that policy (Orange, 2024)



Excerpt chosen by Ivan Coyote from the SOGI Intergenerational conversation

"I'm just going to say some things. I think it can be really dangerous to make general assumptions about specific schools and communities. We can definitely say, hey, I see a lot of this because A, B, and C, but, you know, as an indigenous person, I have a very different perspective. I actually think all of the schools have their issues. No school is great. No school is amazing. But we need to remember that there are our future generations that are here today with us and that are also coming up and that are in there, who are queer, who are native, who are other people of color, who are all these different things. And I think it's really important that we hold space, that people are getting educated in all these other schools. And I like how we're kind of more dissecting what's going on, because this is not an easy conversation to have, and it's hundreds of things that all contribute.

We want our youth and people to start feeling more comfortable in their schools. We want people to say, my school isn't going to traumatize me because I agree, I did not have. Trust me, I barely went. I did go to high school at Porter Creek, and I barely was even in that school for my high schooling because I went to other different experiential programs. And then I went to college at a young age and different things. And so for me, I think when we're in a space like this, yes, we're talking about our things, but I just want to like put a little bit of a reminder, like, just like, remember who we're doing this for and remember what we're trying to support with because we can criticize, criticize, criticize because we have to, but we also need to uphold what's actually being done and the steps that have been brought forward. Because we all have trauma, and it's easy to just sink into that, but there are kids getting trauma right now in schools, right? And our job at this circle is trying to help mitigate that so that you could have stayed at Porter Creek your whole schooling, right? And that you didn't feel like you had to go to the ILC so that you can be successful and happy.

Do you know what I mean?" - Youth

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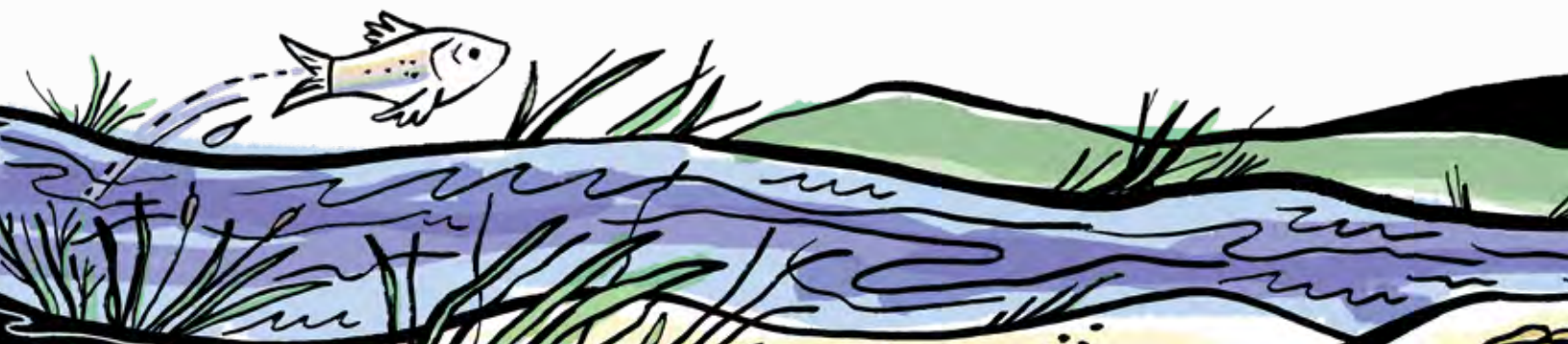
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Recommendations

As it has been discussed throughout this review, EDU must develop and incorporate a robust implementation plan for accountability in order for the SOGI policy to achieve its desired objectives of creating safer and more inclusive educational environments. This review proposes the following:

- 1. YG Response:** This report will be tabled by the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly in Spring 2026. The Advocate respectfully requests that EDU provide an initial response by June 30, 2026 and a follow up response outlining progress made toward addressing the Advocate's recommendations by December 1, 2026, and annually henceforth, until YCAO's systemic progress tracker shows satisfactory outcomes.
- 2. Incident Response:** Schools require guidance on how to respond appropriately and in a timely manner to complaints related to discrimination on the basis of sex, gender identity, gender expression or sexual orientation. The Advocate recommends EDU work to develop and implement standardized procedures for schools to integrate into their school-based SOGI procedures, including documentation, reporting, tracking, communication and evaluation of the effectiveness of the action taken.
- 3. Communication, Dialogue, and Training:** The Advocate recommends that EDU strive to improve learning environments by developing and implementing the following proactive strategies:
 - a. Develop and chair a sub-committee of education partners (such as the Advisory Committee for Yukon Education), to create space for dialogue and exchange of knowledge and experiences. This sub-committee will aim to find common ground in addressing existing tensions regarding topics such as SOGI, racism, sexual health education, and religion in public policies. Reflecting diversity in culture and values, this sub-committee would apply a child rights analysis to the conversations; facilitate vetting of resources and materials; and hold mediated public dialogue, information and training sessions for the school community.
 - b. Meet with the CEC to engage in a respectful, proactive dialogue about the findings of this review. Work with the CEC to establish concrete steps for applying the SOGI policy to Catholic-based educational organizations, religious instruction, pastoral guidance, and religious educational materials used or intended for use in schools, ensuring a child rights-based interpretation of inclusion.



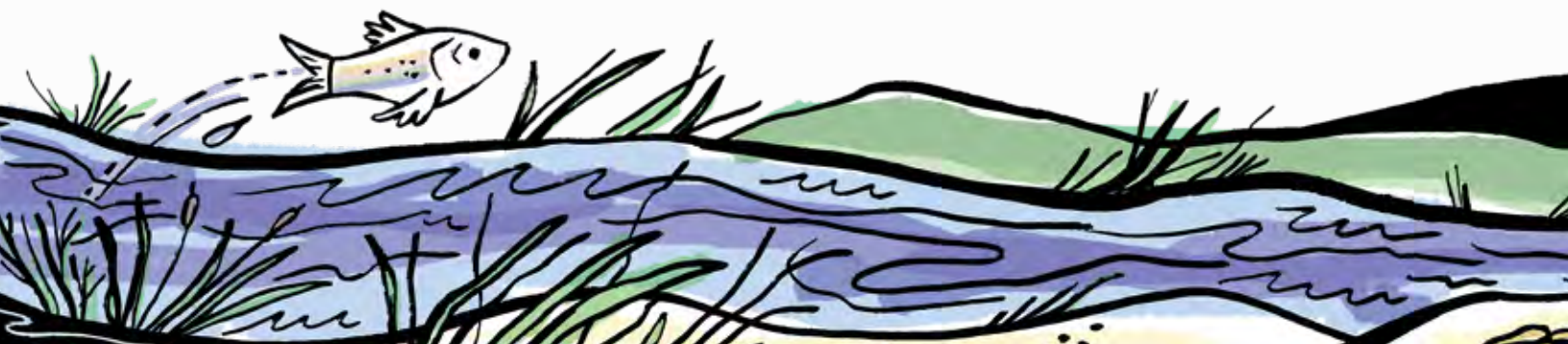
- c. Work with school communities to establish standards for a school-wide code of conduct referencing the SOGI policy and school-based SOGI procedures. Ensure all staff, students and EDU partners (including members of school councils, boards, and community committees) have access to the EDU SOGI policy, school-based SOGI procedures, and are aware of their responsibilities by signing the code of conduct.
- d. Ensure ongoing communication with EDU employees, including education professionals, administration, and departmental staff, about mandatory training and supplemental resources. Track and report on their participation in mandatory training and orientation to the SOGI policy.
- e. Update all existing EDU forms, policies and curriculum to be SOGI-inclusive and to enhance cultural safety.
- f. Develop and deliver specific orientations and trainings for school councils, boards, and community committees to clarify their legislated obligations under the EDU SOGI policy with respect to implementation and monitoring. Develop and implement transparent and sustainable measures (such as mandatory training and evaluation) to uphold accountability of school councils and school boards' decisions, actions and respect of the Human Rights Act, the Education Act, and EDU regulations and policies, during their meetings and communications; including but not limited to a school council dispute-resolution process for issues related to school council members and internal processes.

4. Enhancing EDU SOGI policy and procedures: The Advocate recommends the following measures:

- a. Facilitate a process for students to participate in identifying and selecting safe staff members by amending the existing SOGI policy section "Student Counselling and Support.1." Ensure that at least two staff members per school are appointed as a temporary measure, until the whole school staff is SOGI trained and respectfully implementing the policy.
- b. Modify infrastructures/buildings to ensure inclusion of all students, including during extracurricular activities. Ensure students have access to safe, secure, respectful gender-neutral washrooms, changerooms, dorms, and field trip accommodations.
- c. Support trans and non-binary students in sports by developing procedures grounded in human rights frameworks that consider gender stereotypes and vulnerabilities surrounding body image.
- d. Ensure that SOGI-inclusive content and practices respect students' varied cultural backgrounds and diverse abilities.



- e. Create a clear and transparent process that aligns with EDU policies to vet all educational material, services and resources used or intended to be used in schools.
 - f. Clarify and formalize a standardized process to ensure students' best interests and views are upheld when students are opted out of any lessons from EDU's mandatory curriculum. Ensure the students' access to the required information to meet learning objectives. Assess the outcomes of any alternate program.
- 5. Student Wellbeing and Belonging:** The Advocate recommends that EDU ensures ongoing access to adequate SOGI-inclusive, comprehensive, rights-based, education, resources, spaces and supports by:
- a. Providing access to students to adequately trained in-school safe contacts, school wellness specialists, and health nurses who can connect students to clinical supports and relevant resources. Ensure students have access to identified safe spaces and safe contacts at all times.
 - b. Ensuring all students, staff, and families are able to safely access up to date resources and supports related to SOGI-inclusive and comprehensive, rights-based, sexual health education.
 - c. Ensuring that mandatory sexual health education curriculum is delivered and assessed every year for every student.
 - d. Ensuring education and student activities related to SOGI are promoted and accessible to the school community.



Closing message

YCAO's work has always been guided by four key values: respect, integrity, empowerment, and hope. Through 16 years of advocating for youth across this territory, we have learned a lot about why hope is important to do this work, but in the last 1.5 years of undertaking this review, we have been taught, again and again, how hope helps people survive. The 2SLGBTQIA+ young people who spoke with us for this review, are purveyors of hope. It is not a word they throw around cheaply, nor a concept without tangible grounding. They understand viscerally what hope means, can describe it in detail, can tell us what it feels like, tastes like, smells like. Every queer young person who is alive today, is alive because of hope. They have been able to imagine a world and a future built on it, even when hope is day by day, even when it shows up late sometimes.

When EDU introduced its SOGI policy into Yukon schools 14 years ago, it must have signaled hope. It must have been, in the face of continued judgement, bigotry, violence, and hatred, a semblance of a flicker of a better someday. Hope often goes hand in hand with patience though - 14 years later, and someday is still not today. 14 years later, and queer and trans young people keep fighting, keep having to fight, keep dreaming, keep meeting, keep supporting each other, keep mentoring, keep existing, keep teaching all of us about hope. This policy was a good start years ago, but intentions do not always reflect impacts. Impacts are real, and the reality is, there is still so much work left to do in order to make the Yukon's schools, and the Yukon itself, a place where everyone feels safe, respected, and included. We respect the policy's intentions and look forward to seeing the impacts catch up.

We commend EDU for requesting this review in the first place; entrusting us with this task demonstrates a desire towards accountability and change. We hope you find this review useful towards such ends. We hold up the educators and staff in the schools every day, allies or queer, fighting for your students. Your commitment has literally saved kids, has helped them dream of a world better than what they are experiencing. Thank you for your courage, your passion, and your hearts. Keep doing this work.

More than anything, we are in awe of the kids who have the audacity to be themselves, who have grown up in a world that, despite progress, continues to believe in a very singular idea of what is normal, and what is not normal. We are in awe of the kids who have the audacity to be "not normal," who fight and speak up and claim their truth, and we are in awe of the ones who stay quiet, and curious, and unsure, and we are in awe of the ones who are loud and proud, the ones still figuring it out, the ones still asking questions, and the ones who have always known. More than anything, we are in awe of the kids who dare to hope. Thank you for teaching us this and for showing us how. You are seen, you are loved, you are here, you are needed.

It feels right to end this review with one more story from Ivan Coyote, who is a fire-breathing example of what hope looks like, in full form. We are grateful to everyone who spoke to us and worked with us on this review, and we are grateful to Ivan for capturing those words and experiences in a way only hope can.



Ghosts in the Road

by Ivan Coyote

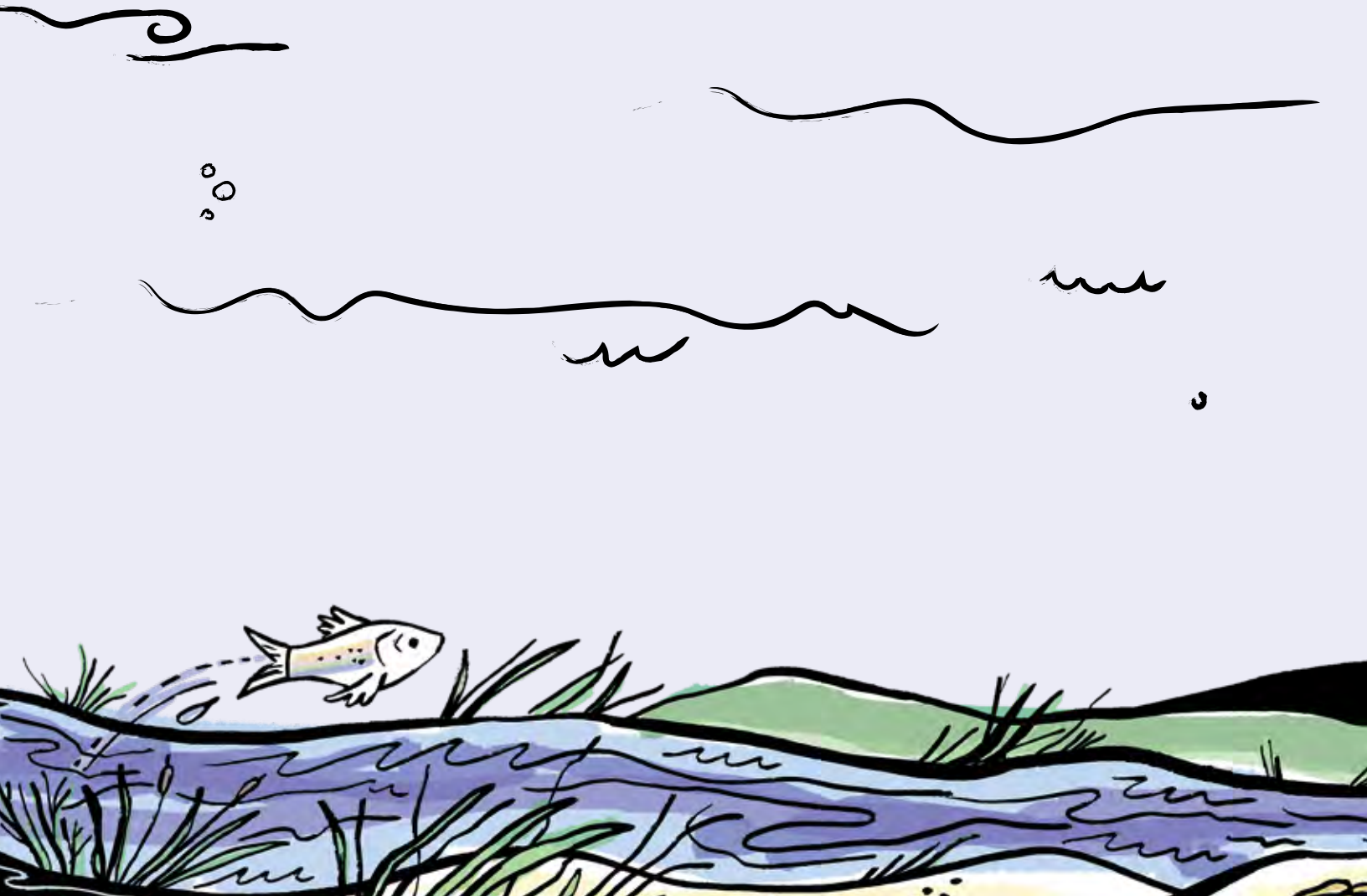
Vignette 7

The right wing are terrified that we will teach their kids to be queer or trans. If there is one thing I can say with total certainty is that if this world could have taught me to be straight, it would have. If the ostracization and violence this world has visited upon me for straying from my assigned gender box could have forced me back into it, I would have returned to it, and safely closed the door behind myself.

Growing up without a single role model or any example of a future me did not make me a good little straight girl, it made me a lonely queer and trans kid without any words to describe who I was. I know in my heart that if my parents had known better, they would have done better, and this makes me one of the lucky ones.

I want you to know that trans people, we don't get up in the morning and make menacing steeple shapes with our unusually long and graceful fingers and plot up new and creative ways to throw a sparkle encrusted wrench into the engine room of your perfectly tuned gender binary. We really don't. We are just trying to go to school, or go swimming, or use the weight room without being hassled. Just like you.

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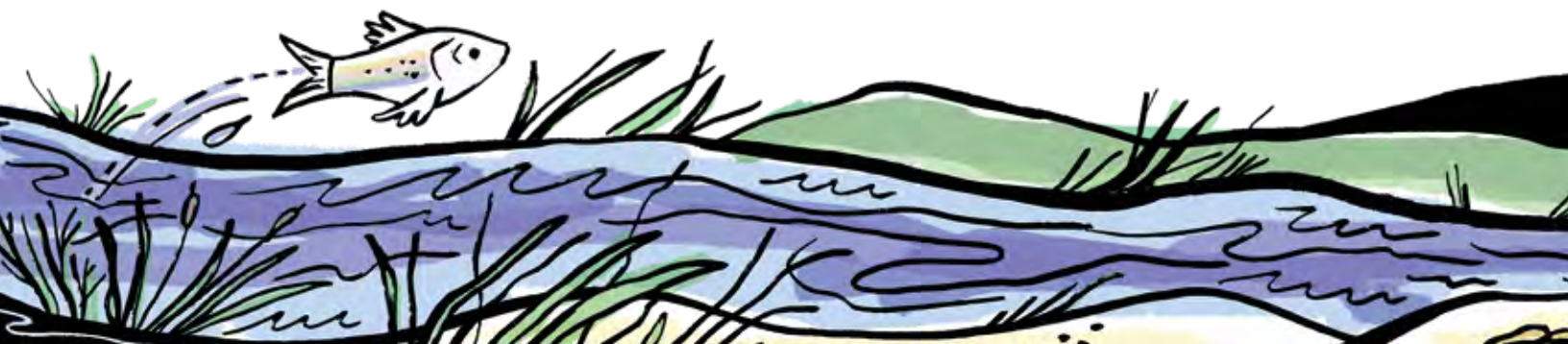
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Appendix A – Terms of Reference



Review of SOGI inclusion policy in schools – Terms of Reference

July 2024

1.0 AUTHORITY:

The Yukon Child and Youth Advocate Office (“the Advocate”) operates under the authority of the *Child and Youth Advocate Act* (“the Act”). The Advocate is conducting a review of the Yukon Department of Education Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity policy. The Minister of Education has made a formal request for the Advocate to conduct a review and make a report of the issue, pursuant to s. 15 of the *Child and Youth Advocate Act*.

The Yukon Child & Youth Advocate and the Minister of Education agree that the Terms of Reference will guide the Review.

15(1) The Legislative Assembly or a Minister may refer to the Advocate for review and report any matter relating to the provision of designated services that involves the interests and well-being of children and youth, which may include a review of critical injuries, a death or other specific incident concerning a child or youth in the care or custody of the government or a First Nation service authority.

15(2) The Advocate must conduct a review and make a report under subsection (1) in accordance with the terms of reference established for the review by the Legislative Assembly or the Minister. S.Y.2009, c.1, 2.15.

2.0 ISSUE:

Children of all sexual orientations and gender identities have a right to an education. They have a right to go to school and to receive an educational program that helps them reach their educational goals and full potential. The Government of Yukon has committed to several actions to strengthen SOGI inclusion at schools in its 2021 LGBTQ2S+ Inclusion Action Plan. Since that time, other provinces have announced policies that might restrict expressions of sexual orientation and gender identity in schools. In view of these trends, the Government of Yukon is seeking an investigation and analysis to assist the Department of Education in understanding the complexities and nuances of the issues so that it can amend its SOGI policy to protect the right to education for children of all sexual orientations and gender identities.

3.0 GOALS:

- The Advocate will analyze and assess the implementation of the SOGI policy in schools and provide recommendations to ensure appropriate guidelines, policies and procedures uphold children's views, rights, interests and wellbeing.
- The Advocate will provide recommendations informing the balance of children's rights and other applicable provisions of any policy or legislation relevant to the Department of Education, with regard to students of all sexual orientations and gender identities.
- The Advocate will provide advice on best practices/approaches when responding to conflict situations and complexities that impact students and staff.
- The Advocate will provide advice to the Department of Education to update the SOGI policy.

4.0 SCOPE/LIMITATIONS:

The Review will

- Involve all Yukon public schools
- Assessment of the SOGI policy and its implementation

- Include all other relevant Department of Education policies and procedures

The Review will not involve private schools, early childhood education, or post-secondary education providers.

5.0 METHODOLOGY:

The Advocate will review:

- Individual and systemic advocacy data
- Department of Education data and records, including legislation, departmental and school-based policies, procedures, guidelines, strategies, training, curriculum, correspondences and administrative processes.
- Personal interviews and surveys with children, youth, families, caregivers, Yukon First Nations, partners in Education, child and youth service organizations, school councils and Community Committees.
- Interviews with EDU, schools and school boards' personnel.
- Relevant reports and research from local organizations, other Yukon Departments and jurisdictions.
- Consultation with relevant experts and advisors.
- Other factors may arise for consideration.

The Advocate will protect the personal information of children and youth involved in the review and will ensure information provided to the public is non-identifying.

6.0 TIMEFRAME and REPORTING:

- Announcement of Review June 2024
- Research and engagement: 2024-2025 school year
 - Public participation and public reporting will occur through personal interactions, social media, and public media throughout the review.
 - Ongoing communication: The Advocate will communicate with the Department of Education, or the Minister throughout the research and engagement period to support timely resolution of issues identified

- The review will be summarized in the Advocate's annual reports.
- Formal Report
 - The Advocate will provide an interim report no later than June 2025.
 - A final report will be provided to the Minister of Education no later than November 2025 to be tabled in the Legislative Assembly.
 - The Advocate will monitor and report on progress towards implementing the Advocate's recommendations.

8.0 CONTACTS:

- The Department of Education will fully cooperate with the Advocate throughout the independent review. A delegated departmental representative will be available to communicate with the Advocate throughout the review.
- The point contact persons for specific questions and requests for information are Michele Royle, Policy Analyst, michele.royle@yukon.ca and Karen Campbell, Director of Schools, karen.campbell@yukon.ca.
- The point contact persons for the Advocate will be Anya Braeuner, Systemic Advocacy Representative, anya.braeuner@ycao.ca.

9.0 ATTACHMENTS:

- Letter from Minister McLean to Advocate.

10.0 SIGNATURES



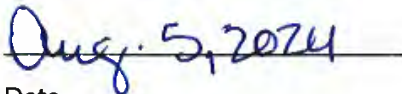
Jeanie McLean

Minister of Education

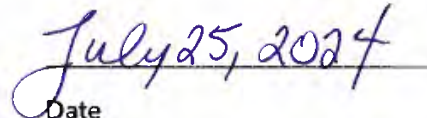


Annette King

Child and Youth Advocate



Date




Date

Appendix B – EDU SOGI Policy

For the complete EDU SOGI policy with the glossary, application and resources please go to: yukon.ca/en/sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity-policy.



SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY POLICY	
Minister Approval: 	Effective Date: 09/05/2012 Date Updated: 08/15/2023

CONTEXT

This policy was updated on August 15, 2023 to reflect the following:

- the 2022 amendment to the Education Act; and
- fulfilling a commitment from the LGBTQ2S+ Inclusion Action Plan to:
 - address the use of a student's correct gender pronouns;
 - update terminology to be trans-inclusive; and
 - clarify points of contact and responsibilities at the department and school levels.
 - Clarify language to differentiate between the Department of Education SOGI policy and school-based procedures or guidelines (referred to as school-based policies in the 2012 version of the policy)

The Department of Education is committed to further evaluating and modernizing the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity policy. This work will include addressing gender identity inclusion in sports, education and training for teachers and school administrators in 2SLGBTQIA+ cultural competency and provision of extra-curricular programming that is inclusive of queer relationships and diverse gender identity. The SOGI policy has always applied to all school-sponsored activities, and trans students continue to be protected and entitled to support. The next rounds of evaluation will include deeper discussions around how to better proactively foster inclusion, with consideration for the inclusion of trans students in sports.

PURPOSE AND PRINCIPLES

The Department of Education values diversity in its school communities and wants to provide safe, welcoming, inclusive and affirming learning environments for all students.

The department recognizes that 2SLGBTQIA+ people face a unique set of challenges within our schools and communities, including being targets for

discriminatory behaviours. All members of the school community share the responsibility for supporting students and staff in addressing and facing these challenges.

Homophobic, transphobic and gender- or sexuality-based discrimination, bullying, and harassment are demeaning to all students, parents or guardians and employees regardless of their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.

The department will not permit or tolerate these types of discrimination, bullying or harassment, whether by commission or by failing to act to end such behaviour.

Staff will respond to all incidents and provide support and assistance to those who are the intended or unintended targets of such behaviour.

2SLGBTQIA+: an acronym for “two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or questioning, intersex, asexual” people. For a list of accepted terminology and definitions, refer to the Definitions section of this policy (see Appendix A).

STANDARDS AND PROCEDURES

1. School Administrators must ensure that students and staff practice appropriate behaviour and actions to prevent discrimination, harassment or bullying based on sex, gender identity, gender expression or sexual orientation through greater awareness of and responsiveness to their harmful effects.
2. School communities, with the support of Area Superintendents, Executive Directors and the School Community Consultant and Curriculum and Assessment Consultants, must develop, promote and implement respectful, pro-active strategies (for example, Gender and Sexuality Alliances) and school-based procedures or guidelines to ensure that 2SLGBTQIA+ members of school communities and their families are welcomed and included in all aspects of education and school life, and are treated with respect and dignity. Educational resources and guidance in developing procedures or guidelines are available through the Department (see Appendix C).
3. School-based procedures or guidelines to prohibit discrimination based on sex, gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation must state the consequences of discrimination and harassment. Administrators must take action to address such behaviors and document all actions following an

- incident of discriminatory behaviour.
4. School administrators must take all complaints about discrimination based on sex, gender identity, gender expression or sexual orientation seriously, and must ensure that they are dealt with effectively through consistently applied procedures and guidelines.
 5. Schools may seek support from the Department of Education Student Support Services and Curriculum and Assessment units.































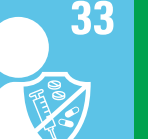








School-based procedures or guidelines must include the following key elements:

1. At the beginning of each school year, the principal must ensure that there are planned initiatives in the school that promote equality and non-discrimination for the current school year,
 - a. which must include student activities relating to gender, gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation, and
 - b. which may include, without limitation, student organizations promoting equality and non-discrimination, such as a gender and sexuality alliance.
2. Administrators, staff and students will recognize people's correct pronouns, as declared by the individuals themselves. This requirement applies to students who have not made official changes to their name or gender in school records.
3. Language or behaviour that degrades or incites hatred, prejudice, discrimination or harassment towards students or employees on the basis of their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identification will not be tolerated. The prohibition of such language and behaviour should be specified in the school's student codes of conduct.
4. The responsibility of all staff is to exercise individual and collective responsibility to identify discriminatory attitudes and behaviours. School staff will work to eliminate systemic inequities and barriers to learning based on a student's sexual orientation or gender identity.
5. All administrators, teachers, counselors, and staff and student leaders will model respect for 2SLGBTQIA+ students and families.
6. Administrators will support teachers striving to include in their teaching positive images and accurate information about history and culture which reflects the accomplishments and contributions of 2SLGBTQIA+ people.

7. All staff have an obligation to intervene in any interaction involving the use of epithets and slurs and behaviours targeting sexual orientation or gender identity, regardless of the speaker's intentions, and to convey that such comments are against policy and will not be tolerated in the school community.
8. School-based procedures or guidelines must include procedures through which individual or group-based complaints will be effectively resolved and which specify any consequences of breaching this standard of behaviour.
9. School-based procedures or guidelines must be posted in a visible place and made readily available to parents and the school community.

Student Counselling and Support:

1. Using best judgment to determine numbers, principals must appoint at least one member of staff as a safe contact for 2SLGBTQIA+ students. School administrators are responsible for informing students, parents and other staff about the location and availability of this contact person(s).
2. Working with the school's safe contact(s), principals will visually mark an area as welcoming and reaffirming for 2SLGBTQIA+ students and staff (for example, through the use of posters and affirming principles).
3. Training and resources shall be offered to all staff and further training to those identified staff members and counsellors to be sensitive and respond knowledgeably to 2SLGBTQIA+ students as well as students with 2SLGBTQIA+ family members. Identified staff and counsellors must receive training.
4. The department supports the rights of 2SLGBTQIA+ students to counselling that is supportive, affirming and free from efforts on the part of counsellors to try to change their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.
5. The Administrator will make best efforts to facilitate the formation of clubs such as Gender and Sexuality Alliances (GSAs), where students or staff come forward requesting this support.

 <p>1 DEFINITION OF A CHILD</p>	 <p>2 NO DISCRIMINATION</p>	 <p>3 BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD</p>	 <p>4 MAKING RIGHTS REAL</p>	 <p>5 FAMILY GUIDANCE AS CHILDREN DEVELOP</p>	 <p>6 LIFE, SURVIVAL AND DEVELOPMENT</p>	 <p>7 NAME AND NATIONALITY</p>
 <p>8 IDENTITY</p>	 <p>9 KEEPING FAMILIES TOGETHER</p>	 <p>10 CONTACT WITH PARENTS ACROSS COUNTRIES</p>	 <p>11 PROTECTION FROM KIDNAPPING</p>	 <p>12 RESPECT FOR CHILDREN'S VIEWS</p>	 <p>13 SHARING THOUGHTS FREELY</p>	 <p>14 FREEDOM OF THOUGHT AND RELIGION</p>
 <p>15 SETTING UP OR JOINING GROUPS</p>	 <p>16 PROTECTION OF PRIVACY</p>	 <p>17 ACCESS TO INFORMATION</p>	 <p>18 RESPONSIBILITY OF PARENTS</p>	 <p>19 PROTECTION FROM VIOLENCE</p>	 <p>20 CHILDREN WITHOUT FAMILIES</p>	 <p>21 CHILDREN WHO ARE ADOPTED</p>
 <p>22 REFUGEE CHILDREN</p>	 <p>23 CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES</p>	 <p>24 HEALTH, WATER, FOOD, ENVIRONMENT</p>	 <p>25 REVIEW OF A CHILD'S PLACEMENT</p>	 <p>26 SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC HELP</p>	 <p>27 FOOD, CLOTHING, A SAFE HOME</p>	 <p>28 ACCESS TO EDUCATION</p>
 <p>29 AIMS OF EDUCATION</p>	 <p>30 MINORITY CULTURE, LANGUAGE AND RELIGION</p>	 <p>31 REST, PLAY, CULTURE, ARTS</p>	 <p>32 PROTECTION FROM HARMFUL WORK</p>	 <p>33 PROTECTION FROM HARMFUL DRUGS</p>	 <p>34 PROTECTION FROM SEXUAL ABUSE</p>	 <p>35 PREVENTION OF SALE AND TRAFFICKING</p>
 <p>36 PROTECTION FROM EXPLOITATION</p>	 <p>37 CHILDREN IN DETENTION</p>	 <p>38 PROTECTION IN WAR</p>	 <p>39 RECOVERY AND REINTEGRATION</p>	 <p>40 CHILDREN WHO BREAK THE LAW</p>	 <p>41 BEST LAW FOR CHILDREN APPLIES</p>	 <p>42 EVERYONE MUST KNOW CHILDREN'S RIGHTS</p>

43-54



HOW THE CONVENTION WORKS

CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

7 Children must be registered when they are born and given a name which is officially recognized by the government. Children must have a nationality (belong to a country). Whenever possible, children should know their parents and be looked after by them.

6 Every child has the right to be alive. Governments must make sure that children survive and develop in the best possible way.

5 Governments should let families and communities guide their children so that, as they grow up, they learn to use their rights in the best way. The more children grow, the less guidance they will need.

4 Governments must do all they can to make sure that every child in their countries can enjoy all the rights in this Convention.

3 When adults make decisions, they should think about how their decisions will affect children. All adults should do what is best for children. Governments should make sure children are protected and looked after by their parents, or by other people when this is needed. Governments should make sure that people and places responsible for looking after children are doing a good job.

2 All children have all these rights, no matter who they are, where they live, what language they speak, what their religion is, what they think, what they look like, if they are a boy or girl, if they have a disability, if they are rich or poor, and no matter who their parents or families are or what their parents or families believe or do. No child should be treated unfairly for any reason.

1 A child is any person under the age of 18.

14 Children can choose their own thoughts, opinions and religion, but this should not stop other people from enjoying their rights. Parents can guide children so that as they grow up, they learn to properly use this right.

13 Children have the right to share freely with others what they learn, think and feel, by talking, drawing, writing or in any other way unless it harms other people.

12 Children have the right to give their opinions freely on issues that affect them. Adults should listen and take children seriously.

11 Governments must stop children being taken out of the country when this is against the law – for example, being kidnapped by someone or held abroad by a parent when the other parent does not agree.

10 If a child lives in a different country than their parents, governments must let the child and parents travel so that they can stay in contact and be together.

9 Children should not be separated from their parents unless they are not being properly looked after – for example, if a parent hurts or does not take care of a child. Children whose parents don't live together should stay in contact with both parents unless this might harm the child.

8 Children have the right to their own identity – an official record of who they are which includes their name, nationality and family relations. No one should take this away from them, but if this happens, governments must help children to quickly get their identity back.

21 When children are adopted, the most important thing is to do what is best for them. If a child cannot be properly looked after in their own country – for example by living with another family – then they might be adopted in another country.

20 Every child who cannot be looked after by their own family has the right to be looked after properly by people who respect the child's religion, culture, language and other aspects of their life.

19 Governments must protect children from violence, abuse and being neglected by anyone who looks after them.

18 Parents are the main people responsible for bringing up a child. When the child does not have any parents, another adult will have this responsibility and they are called a "guardian". Parents and guardians should always consider what is best for that child. Governments should help them. Where a child has both parents, both of them should be responsible for bringing up the child.

17 Children have the right to get information from the Internet, radio, television, newspapers, books and other sources. Adults should make sure the information they are getting is not harmful. Governments should encourage the media to share information from lots of different sources, in languages that all children can understand.

16 Every child has the right to privacy. The law must protect children's privacy, family, home, communications and reputation (or good name) from any attack.

15 Children can join or set up groups or organisations, and they can meet with others, as long as this does not harm other people.

28 Every child has the right to an education. Primary education should be free. Secondary and higher education should be available to every child. Children should be encouraged to go to school to the highest level possible. Discipline in schools should respect children's rights and never use violence.

27 Children have the right to food, clothing and a safe place to live so they can develop in the best possible way. The government should help families and children who cannot afford this.

26 Governments should provide money or other support to help children from poor families.

25 Every child who has been placed somewhere away from home – for their care, protection or health – should have their situation checked regularly to see if everything is going well and if this is still the best place for the child to be.

24 Children have the right to the best health care possible, clean water to drink, healthy food and a clean and safe environment to live in. All adults and children should have information about how to stay safe and healthy.

23 Every child with a disability should enjoy the best possible life in society. Governments should remove all obstacles for children with disabilities to become independent and to participate actively in the community.

22 Children who move from their home country to another country as refugees (because it was not safe for them to stay there) should get help and protection and have the same rights as children born in that country.

35 Governments must make sure that children are not kidnapped or sold, or taken to other countries or places to be exploited (taken advantage of).

34 The government should protect children from sexual exploitation (being taken advantage of) and sexual abuse, including by people forcing children to have sex for money, or making sexual pictures or films of them.

33 Governments must protect children from taking, making, carrying or selling harmful drugs.

32 Children have the right to be protected from doing work that is dangerous or bad for their education, health or development. If children work, they have the right to be safe and paid fairly.

31 Every child has the right to rest, relax, play and to take part in cultural and creative activities.

30 Children have the right to use their own language, culture and religion – even if these are not shared by most people in the country where they live.

29 Children's education should help them fully develop their personalities, talents and abilities. It should teach them to understand their own rights, and to respect other people's rights, cultures and differences. It should help them to live peacefully and protect the environment.

42 Governments should actively tell children and adults about this Convention so that everyone knows about children's rights.

41 If the laws of a country protect children's rights better than this Convention, then those laws should be used.

40 Children accused of breaking the law have the right to legal help and fair treatment. There should be lots of solutions to help these children become good members of their communities. Prison should only be the last choice.

39 Children have the right to get help if they have been hurt, neglected, treated badly or affected by war, so they can get back their health and dignity.

38 Children have the right to be protected during war. No child under 15 can join the army or take part in war.

37 Children who are accused of breaking the law should not be killed, tortured, treated cruelly, put in prison forever, or put in prison with adults. Prison should always be the last choice and only for the shortest possible time. Children in prison should have legal help and be able to stay in contact with their family.

36 Children have the right to be protected from all other kinds of exploitation (being taken advantage of), even if these are not specifically mentioned in this Convention.



THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD – THE CHILDREN'S VERSION

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is an important agreement by countries who have promised to protect children's rights.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child explains who children are, all their rights, and the responsibilities of governments. All the rights are connected, they are all equally important and they cannot be taken away from children.

This text is supported by the Committee on the Rights of the Child.



These articles explain how governments, the United Nations – including the Committee on the Rights of Child and UNICEF – and other organisations work to make sure all children enjoy all their rights.



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