

SUMMARY REPORT

About the CARE Study

Access to sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) content and affirming comprehensive sexual health education in schools is important to 2S/LGBTQIA+¹ youth well-being^{2,3}. Teachers are uniquely positioned to create safe and affirming school environments for youth, but they need support to do so! Recent sociopolitical shifts — including laws newly introduced in Alberta (AB) and Saskatchewan (SK) — threaten to limit the delivery of SOGI and sexual health education (SHE) content in schools. SK and AB have also introduced laws that require caregiver consent prior to using affirmed name/pronouns for students under 16. Together, these laws can contribute to hostile school environments for 2S/LGBTQIA+ students.

The CARE Study explores what teachers need to address SOGI in the classroom and to deliver affirming, comprehensive SHE. The survey asked teachers about their experiences, perspectives, and support needs, particularly in the present sociopolitical climate. This report summarizes what we learned about teachers' experiences cultivating affirming classroom spaces.

Who could answer the survey

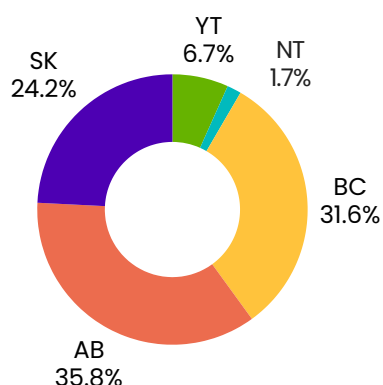
The survey was open to anyone who had taught grades K-12 in the past 12 months. We reached teachers in British Columbia (BC), Alberta (AB), Saskatchewan (SK), Northwest Territories (NT), and Yukon (YT).

How we reached teachers

Survey data were collected from May to November 2025 by recruiting participants through teacher newsletters, word of mouth, teacher magazine advertisements, and social media advertisements.

Who we heard from

1,036 teachers answered the survey! We heard from participants in each of the eligible regions:



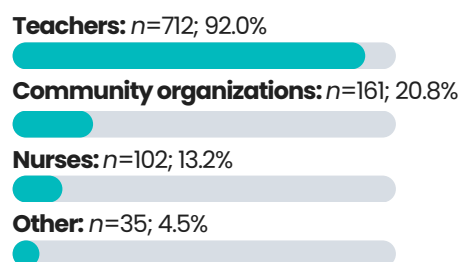
Teaching experience

The majority of participants taught in a public school ($n=889$; 86.1%) or religious public school ($n=121$; 11.7%). In addition to teachers ($n=923$, 89.4%), we heard from counselors ($n=27$, 2.6%), teacher-librarians ($n=20$, 1.9%), resource teachers ($n=91$, 8.8%), and principals ($n=41$, 4.0%). Participants reported a median 20 years' teaching experience.

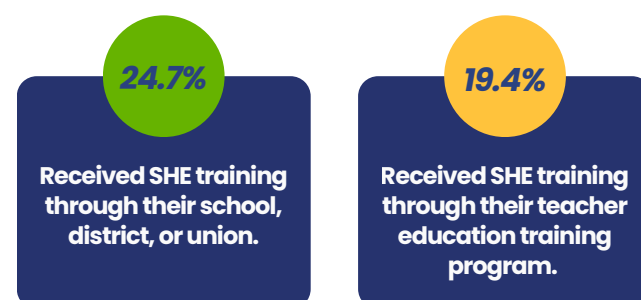
SHE Experiences

Participants told us about their SHE experiences — including the training and resources they want to support them. Overall, 76.9% ($n=598$) of participants had previously taught SHE. **The majority of participants ($n=561$, 72.4%) said they believe SHE delivery should be shared between teachers and external sex educators.** This highlights the potential benefit of a collaborative educational model, where external sex educators complement the lessons provided by teachers.

Who teaches SHE at your school?



Although most participants had taught SHE, opportunities for SHE professional development were notably lacking. **The majority of participants had not received any SHE training through formal education or professional development.**

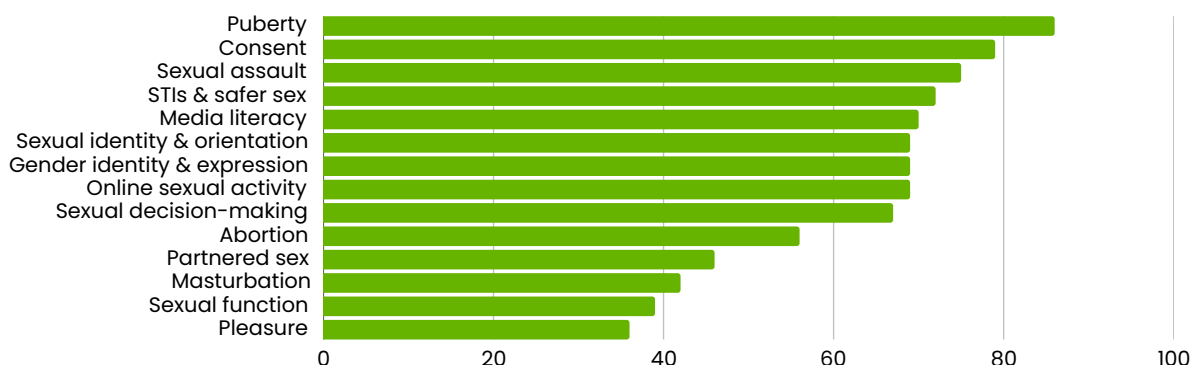


(1) Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, and other sexuality or gender minority people

Teacher Comfort

Despite notable training gaps, the majority of teachers reported that, in general, they felt comfortable ($n=392$, 68.5%) and prepared ($n=340$, 59.8%) to teach SHE. However, when asked about their comfort teaching specific topics within SHE, there were stark differences. Over half of participants ($n=298$, 54.6%) noted that lack of training was a major contributor to their discomfort delivering SHE.

Percentage of participants who indicated that they felt comfortable teaching specific SHE topics to the appropriate age group, as outlined by the curriculum:



SHE for Students With Diverse Abilities

Students with diverse abilities are not consistently included in SHE lessons with their peers and/or do not receive the sexual health information that they need⁴⁵. Training in how to make lessons accessible for students with diverse abilities can help improve students' experiences.

Despite the importance of adequate teacher training, the majority of participants ($n=509$, 93.4%) did not receive any training to help them ensure their SHE lessons are accessible for students with diverse abilities. Accordingly, many participants reported feeling unprepared to deliver SHE to students with diverse cognitive ($n=256$, 46.9%), or physical abilities ($n=217$, 39.8%). Lack of resources or support staff was the most commonly reported reason that students with diverse abilities were excluded from SHE lessons ($n=255$, 51.1%). Participants emphasized this in open-text responses:

“We don't have support staff, it's me and 30 kids. It doesn't matter how well trained and well intentioned we are when we don't have the staff to support the programming.”

Public School Teacher, BC

Together, these findings highlight the need for strengthened training and resources to better support teachers in providing inclusive SHE.

Improved Support for Teachers

Findings highlight notable gaps in training for teachers — this is of particular concern given attempts in some regions to limit the availability of external sex educators who often fill these gaps in teacher knowledge. In this context, it is particularly important to equip teachers with the information and tools they need to deliver affirming SHE. Participants identified a wide range of resources to support them in this work. **The most commonly reported resource needs included:**



Educational videos
 $n=386$ (59.3%)



Professional development
 $n=436$ (67.0%)



Lesson plans
 $n=491$ (75.4%)



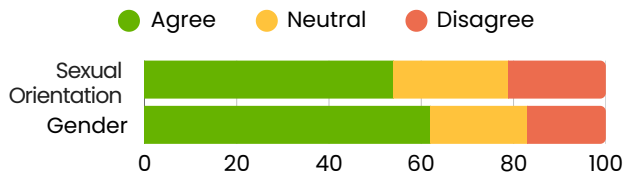
Resource lists
 $n=388$ (59.6%)

Supporting SOGI in the classroom

We asked participants about their experiences and needs when discussing SOGI in the classroom. We wanted to understand the factors influencing teachers' comfort and motivation to address SOGI.

SOGI Inclusion

We asked participants whether it was important to them to integrate SOGI-related discussions in their classrooms:



Participants' open text responses regarding the importance of SOGI content highlighted a wide breadth of motivations for including — or not including — SOGI in their classrooms. Some participants felt that SOGI content should be excluded, citing religious beliefs, personal values, or concerns about age appropriateness of the content. However, **the majority of participants emphasized that SOGI-inclusive classrooms can support students, foster safe environments, and cultivate compassion and understanding of diversity among students.**

It's a part of our lives and our identities. Typically parents don't even want to broach the topic so we are the only adults there to answer questions for the kids and open their worlds.

Public School Teacher, SK

Because queer kids exist, have always existed, and will always exist.

Public School Teacher, SK

Knowledge is power; ignorance is vulnerability. Teens cannot make good choices for their futures if they are kept from the information to make those choices.

Public School Teacher, AB

Two-Spirit Inclusion

When asked about their approaches to integrating Two-Spirit or Indigiqueer-related topics in the classroom, only 41.4% ($n=332$) indicated that they felt comfortable discussing these in the classroom. In open text responses, many participants indicated that they would like more Indigenous-led resources and cultural supports in order to discuss Two-Spirit or Indigiqueer experiences in a culturally safe and appropriate manner.

SOGI Comfort

Although most participants were supportive and invested in cultivating SOGI-inclusive classrooms, their comfort integrating SOGI-related topics in their classrooms varied. When asked whether they felt comfortable discussing diversity with their students as part of lessons or broader classroom discussions, **55.8% ($n=448$) said that they were comfortable integrating sexual orientation-related topics and 60.0% ($n=480$) said that they were comfortable integrating gender identity-related topics.**

In open-text responses, participants told us about a range of factors contributing to their comfort — or discomfort — when addressing SOGI in the classroom.

I feel ok, but always looking to feel more comfortable. Honestly, my level of comfort depends on the pressure/resistance I feel from student's parents and is critical that I feel supported by my admin.

Public School Inclusion Support Teacher, BC

Some participants indicated that they were comfortable and committed to integrating SOGI discussions across a wide range of topics. They emphasized the importance of this approach in building informed and empathetic students. However, many indicated that they did not receive enough training, did not feel sufficiently supported by their administrators, and were concerned about resistance from parents and other community members.

Supporting SOGI in the classroom

Sources of Support

Participants were asked about influences on their approaches to SOGI-related classroom content. Students ($n=235$, 29.5%), school staff ($n=217$, 27.0%), school administration ($n=167$, 20.9%), and school districts ($n=178$, 22.3%) **were the most commonly reported sources of support for including SOGI content in the classroom.** Participants most commonly reported being discouraged from including SOGI content in the classroom by provincial governments ($n=233$, 29.6%) and parents/caregivers ($n=137$, 17.1%).

These findings help to illustrate the tensions teachers face when addressing SOGI.

Laws Affecting SOGI-inclusivity in Schools

School-related laws in AB and SK have further complicated SOGI inclusion and affirmation in schools. We asked teachers how they felt about laws requiring parental consent to use students' affirmed names/pronouns at school:

- 91.2% ($n=732$) have heard of the laws in AB and SK
- 71.4% ($n=574$) believe those laws are mostly harmful

In open text responses, participants who were critical of these laws told us that they threaten the safety of gender diverse students, erode trust between teachers and students, and contribute to a hostile school environment for gender diverse youth.

Even if no one actively gets punished by the law, we feel its weight like an axe. It's such a cruel statement that students can't trust the government. Students have to risk their teacher outing them to the parents. [...] These laws really just punish students who have a hostile parent.

Public school teacher, AB

Some of my current students have admitted to me that they've self-harmed because of these laws. Many students have told me they feel unsafe at school because of these laws and the use of the notwithstanding clause against them in this province.

Public school teacher, AB

Supported teachers, safer classrooms

Findings highlight teachers' deep commitment to supporting their students' safety, well-being, and capacity for free and informed decision-making. Participants shared the varied ways that they ensure their students' needs and experiences are reflected in classrooms, to cultivate empathy and respect among students. Integrating SOGI discussions and affirming SHE are integral to this. Yet many participants need and want more resources to help them address SOGI and SHE with their students. Increased training, resources, and staff time are essential to supporting teachers to deliver SHE that is accessible and applicable to their students.

Further, many participants were concerned about discussing SOGI, for fear of community pushback. Laws in AB and SK limit teachers' ability to affirm students' identities, or to deliver SHE and SOGI content effectively. The majority of participants indicated that these laws are harmful to students, teachers, and the school social climate. In order to support teachers' ability to provide inclusive and affirming education, they must be better equipped with practical tools and institutional support as they navigate the current sociopolitical climate.

About Us

We are a research team based out of Simon Fraser University's Faculty of Health Sciences. The team leads a range of mixed-methods studies that explore 2S/LGBTQIA+ health equity. Learn more!

The CARE Study is supported in part by funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Questions?

Contact us!

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reaffirm.ca/care-study

(2) Goldfarb, E. S., and L. D. Lieberman. 2021. "Three Decades of Research: The Case for Comprehensive Sex Education." *Journal of Adolescent Health* 68 (1): 13–27. doi:10.1016/j.jadohealth.2020.07.036

(3) Goldfarb, E. S., L. D. Lieberman, and K. Conklin. 2025. "Three Decades of Evidence: Promising Approaches to Effective Comprehensive Sex Education." *Journal of Adolescent Health* S1054139X2500285X. doi:10.1016/j.jadohealth.2025.06.034

(4) Davies, A. W. J., Bryan, M. K., Martin, T., Shay, B., Akers, T., Soud, R., Balter, A.-S., O'Leary, S., & Neustifter, R. (2023). Dismantling barriers to access: The necessity of crippling sexuality education in Canadian schools. *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, 32(1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cjhs.2022-0031>

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