



“Students feel safer here, and more included”: Evaluation of SOGI 123 in BC

Dr. Elizabeth Saewyc, Dr. Mauricio Coronel Villalobos, Dr. Monica Rana
Shannon Srivastava, & Ley Fraser
Stigma and Resilience Among Vulnerable Youth Centre
University of British Columbia

October 2024



Stigma and Resilience
Among Vulnerable
Youth Centre

Project Team

Elizabeth Saewyc, PhD, RN, FSAHM, FCAHS, FAAN, FCAN

Professor & Executive Director, Stigma and Resilience Among Vulnerable Youth Center

Monica Rana, PhD, MPH

Research Associate & Managing Director, SARAVYC

Mauricio Coronel Villalobos, PhD, MERM

Research Associate, SARAVYC

Shannon Srivastava, MA

Research Assistant & Quartermain SOGI Fellow

Ley Fraser, MA, PhD candidate

Research Assistant & Quartermain SOGI Fellow

Funding

Funding for this project has been provided by:

The Quartermain SOGI Fund

and

The Canadian Institutes of Health Research, grant #FDN 154335

(Saewyc, Principal Investigator)



Ethics

The research conducted for this evaluation received ethics approval from the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board, certificate #H21-03569, and approval from several school district ethics offices (unnamed to protect confidentiality).

Recommended Citation

Saewyc EM, Coronel Villalobos M, Rana M, Srivastava S, & Fraser L. (2024). *“Students feel safer here, and more included”: Evaluation of SOGI 123 in BC*. Vancouver, BC: Stigma and Resilience Among Vulnerable Youth Centre, University of British Columbia.

Copyright

Copyright 2024 Creative Commons 4.0 BY-NC-ND, by the Stigma and Resilience Among Vulnerable Youth Centre, University of British Columbia.

Cover image from Canva Premium Repository, adapted by Sushmita Roy, used with permission.

We gratefully acknowledge that SARAVYC at the University of British Columbia is located on the ancestral, traditional, and unceded territory of the xwməθkwəy̓ əm (Musqueam) First Nation.

Executive Summary

The UBC Stigma and Resilience Among Vulnerable Youth Centre in the School of Nursing has conducted a mixed methods evaluation of SOGI 123 over the past few years with two key aims:

- To identify any impacts of SOGI 123 for LGBTQ+ and heterosexual students on bullying and discrimination;
- Elicit insights into barriers and facilitators for implementing SOGI supports in schools, and recommendations for further enhancements to SOGI 123.

Drawing on data from BC Adolescent Health Survey across 10 years from more than 98,000 students in grades 7 to 12, in 482 schools in 55 of 60 school districts across BC, we found:

- LGBTQ+ youth are still more likely to experience bullying and sexual orientation discrimination than their heterosexual peers; however,
- The training and support for school staff that SOGI 123 provides, plus the support for students through policies, teaching materials, and strategies to foster inclusive schools, together reduced some forms of bullying and sexual orientation discrimination targeted toward LGBTQ+ youth; the impact was separate from the impacts of Gender and Sexuality Alliances (GSAs) where schools had both.
- SOGI 123 also reduced bullying and sexual orientation discrimination among heterosexual students, and effects were sometimes stronger than from GSAs.
- The longer SOGI 123 and/or GSAs were in a school, the greater the impact toward reducing bullying and sexual orientation discrimination.

SOGI 123 appears to be effective for reducing violence and fostering more inclusive environments in BC schools. The longer it has been implemented, the greater the improvement. GSAs also have an impact, but SOGI 123 has effects above and beyond GSAs, including for heterosexual students.

From interviews with 21 District and School SOGI Leads in 6 districts purposively selected for rural and urban settings, more experienced and active implementation vs. more limited engagement or newer SOGI Leads, we learned:

- Most identified positive impacts on inclusion and acceptance of 2SLGBTQ+ youth, none identified negative impacts.
- They valued the SOGI 123 resources for policies and teaching, leveled by grade, although some wanted additional advanced materials, and updated content to better reflect the diversity in their classrooms .
- An important factor for successfully implementing SOGI 123 was supportive leadership, while lack of financial resources and pushback from communities were key barriers.

Background

In the 2015-2016 school year, the SOGI 123 initiative and resources were developed to help reduce discrimination and bullying and improve inclusion for 2SLGBTQ+ youth in schools in BC. SOGI 123 was created by ARC Foundation in partnership with school districts, teachers, parents, students, community groups, the UBC Faculty of Education, and the BC Ministry of Education. In developing SOGI 123, they drew on evidence around best practices for fostering inclusion and safety, because research had shown generic anti-bullying programs were not effective in addressing bias-based bullying that targeted specific groups¹. SOGI 123 focuses on guidance for school policies, teacher and staff training, curricular resources for teachers and students, and evidence-based strategies that support a SOGI-inclusive environment, including strategies such as Gender & Sexuality Alliances (GSAs). SOGI 123 engages SOGI Leads at both the school and the district level to help school leaders, teachers, and staff foster inclusive environments for all.

Nine school districts were involved in SOGI 123 as a pilot in the 2016/2017 school year, and over the next two years, all BC school districts signed on to access the resources and engage both SOGI District Leads and SOGI School Leads at schools.

In collaboration with ARC Foundation, the UBC Stigma and Resilience Among Vulnerable Youth Centre in the School of Nursing undertook a mixed methods evaluation of SOGI 123 over the past few years. The study involved statistical analyses of province-wide data from students over 10 years, from 2013, before SOGI 123 was implemented, to 2023. It also involved interviews with SOGI District Leads and SOGI School Leads from a varied sample of school districts. The evaluation aims were: 1) to identify whether there were detectable impacts of SOGI 123 for LGBTQ+ and heterosexual students related to bullying and discrimination; and 2) to elicit insights into how SOGI 123 contributes to educator and student experience and school climates; barriers and facilitators for implementing SOGI supports in schools; examples of impacts that SOGI Leads observed that might not be measurable with existing student data; and recommendations for further enhancements to SOGI 123.

The two evaluation methods to address these aims will be detailed separately in the following pages of this report.

¹ Russell S.T., Kosciw J., Horn S., Saewyc E. (2010). Safe schools policy for LGBTQ students. *SRCD Social Policy Report*, 24(4), 1-17.

Quantitative Analyses: Evaluating the Impact of SOGI 123 for LGBTQ+ and heterosexual students

Methods

We used data from the BC Adolescent Health Surveys (BC AHS) of 2013, 2018, and 2023 (McCreary Centre Society; Dr. Saewyc is also co-Principal Investigator of this survey). The BC AHS is a clustered, stratified adolescent health survey of classrooms randomly sampled every 5 years across school districts and health regions among grades 7 through 12. The large sample size each year (30,000+) ensures that classes in most schools will be selected every year of the survey. This allows us to track changes in student experiences in schools over time.

- Our study included 482 elementary and secondary schools in 55 of the 60 BC school districts that participated in all 3 survey years.
- The analyses involved 95,490 students across the 3 survey years.

To conduct the study, we added how long SOGI 123 had been implemented in each specific school district to student data. Since GSAs are also identified in other research as an effective strategy to support wellbeing of LGBTQ+ and heterosexual students^{2,3}, and SOGI 123 and GSAs often co-occur in schools, we also included the length of time that a GSA had been established at each school (schools with no GSA got a 0). This allowed us to tease out the impact of SOGI 123 separately from the impact of GSAs on bullying and other school outcomes for students.

Note: These analyses focus on students grouped by sexual orientation and sex rather than by gender identity. This is because in 2013, the BC Adolescent Health Survey did not have a valid measure of trans, nonbinary or other gender diverse identities, this was only included in 2018 onwards. However, we know from the 2018 and 2023 surveys that gender diverse youth are also far less likely to identify as heterosexual. For example, in the 2023 BC Adolescent Health Survey, only 6% of nonbinary youth identified as completely straight, while 3% identified as mostly straight, 45% as bisexual/pansexual, another 14% as gay/lesbian, 12% as asexual, 4% as “something else,” and 15% as not sure⁴. Therefore, we can be confident that gender diverse youth are primarily included in the LGBTQ+ category in our analyses, although they cannot yet be reported on separately. We are limited to reporting our trends and impact analyses by a combination of sexual orientation and sex assigned at birth, grouped as LGBTQ+ Boys, Het+ Boys,

² Li G, Wu A, Marshall S, Watson R, Adjei J, Park M, Saewyc E. (2019). Investigating site-level longitudinal effects of population health interventions: Gay Straight Alliances and school safety. *Social Science & Medicine: Population Health*, 7, 100350.

³ Saewyc E, Konishi C, Rose H, & Homma Y. (2014). School-based strategies to reduce suicidal ideation, suicide attempts and discrimination among sexual minority and heterosexual adolescents in Western Canada. *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies*, 5 (1), 89-112.

⁴ Smith, A., Poon, C., Peled, M., Forsyth, K., Saewyc, E., & McCreary Centre Society. (2024). *The big picture: An overview of the 2023 BC Adolescent Health Survey provincial results*. Vancouver, BC: McCreary Centre Society.

LGBQ+ Girls, and Het+ Girls (where LGBQ+ includes mostly heterosexual, bisexual/pansexual, gay/lesbian, and queer, and Het+ includes heterosexual, unsure, and no attractions yet).

Outcomes Measured

There are three types of victimization in school, plus sexual orientation discrimination, that were our main negative outcome measures for these analyses:

- **Verbal harassment**, defined as being seriously teased or insulted at school in the past 12 months.
- **Social exclusion**, defined as being left out of things on purpose at school in the past 12 months.
- **Physical assault**, defined as being physically assaulted at school in the past 12 months.
- **Sexual orientation discrimination**, defined as being discriminated against because of your sexual orientation, or because people thought you were gay, lesbian or bisexual, in the past 12 months.

While the discrimination measure did not specifically say discrimination at school, so this could take place outside of school, in the 2023 BC AHS, we also asked where discrimination had taken place, and the majority of young people said they experienced discrimination at school.

Analyses

We used three types of analyses for our evaluation:

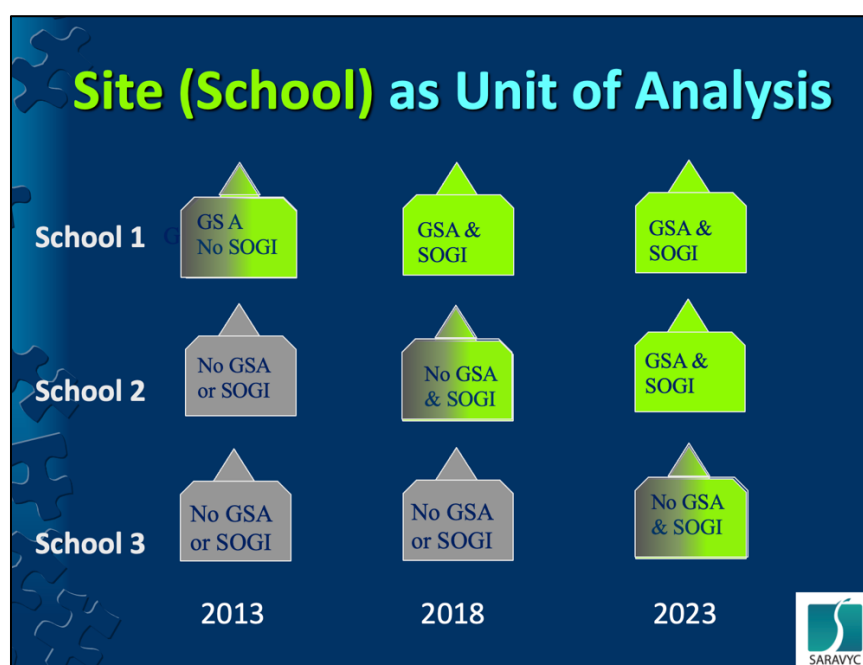
Trends and Gap Trends. First, we calculated the overall trends in all of the outcome measures across the years within each orientation/gender group (e.g., for LGBQ+ boys, HET+ boys, LGBQ+ Girls, and Het+ Girls) and between them, at the provincial level, without taking into account SOGI 123 or GSAs involvement in the school or school district. In this report, we round all percentages for ease of reading, omitting decimal places. As part of these analyses, we control for age, in case there are differences in average age between orientation groups and in samples between years, as LGBQ+ youth came out earlier in more recent years. We calculated the gap between orientation groups within genders across each of the years, reported as age-adjusted odds ratios, and finally conducted a “gap trend” analysis, to determine if the gap between heterosexual and LGBQ+ youth is narrowing, widening, or unchanged over time. These trends and gap trends analyses are an approach we developed in 2016, which have been used widely to document trends in health disparities among marginalized groups.⁵

SLEPHI analyses. After the overall trend analyses, we conducted an advanced multi-group, multi-level analysis, the *Site-level Longitudinal Effects of Population Health Interventions*, or SLEPHI, to identify the impacts of SOGI 123 and GSAs on these outcomes. This award-winning

⁵ Homma Y, Saewyc E, & Zumbo B. (2016). Is it getting better? An analytical method to test trends in health disparities, with tobacco use among sexual minority vs. heterosexual youth as an example. *International Journal of Equity in Health*, 15:79

advanced statistical approach lets us make causal inferences⁶ about the impact of school-level interventions like SOGI 123 and GSAs. The approach involves considering the school as the main unit of analysis, with different student's data at each time point; in one year, the school might not have been involved in SOGI 123 or have a GSA, while the next time around they might have one or the other, or both. Other schools have had GSAs since well before 2013, and others still do not have GSAs (see the figure below as a visualization). SLEPHI analyses take into account when interventions started, controlling for differences in students, and whether the school was part of the intervention or comparison group at each time point, as well as changes over time within and between schools. These analyses allow us to tease apart specific impacts of SOGI 123 from those of GSAs where either came first, or where there is only one and not the other.

Figure 1. Example of schools with/without interventions in SLEPHI analyses



We conducted SLEPHI analyses for each of the bullying and discrimination outcomes, for each of the four groups, to explore the impacts of SOGI 123 separate from and beyond any impacts of GSAs for students in schools over time. The estimates that are produced by this complex statistical approach are not easy to translate, but for those who have some knowledge of statistics, we calculated standardized estimates, which is what we have included in this report. These standardized estimates can be interpreted as: for every 1 year of time that the school has been involved in SOGI 123 (or has had a GSA), the standard deviation of that outcome increases or decreases by the estimate amount.

⁶ Li G, Wu A, Marshall S, Watson R, Adjei J, Park M, Saewyc E. (2019). Investigating site-level longitudinal effects of population health interventions: Gay Straight Alliances and school safety. *Social Science & Medicine: Population Health*, 7, 100350.

In plain language, this allows us to determine whether the longer schools are involved in SOGI 123, the more an outcome improved or not for the different groups, separately from any impacts GSAs. This also gives us similar results for GSAs controlling for involvement in SOGI 123.

Note. This analysis does not allow us to differentiate to what extent a school took up the various elements of SOGI 123; some schools may be more enthusiastic in adopting strategies and policies and teaching content than others in the same school district, or compared to other schools in other districts that enrolled in SOGI 123 during the same years. However, we use an “intent to treat” approach to analyses—whether a school did anything or not, they’re included in the intervention group in the year their district began implementing SOGI 123, regardless of to what extent. **Thus, these results can be considered conservative assessments of the positive effects of SOGI 123 on these outcomes.**

Sample Details

The BC Adolescent Health Survey student participants for these analyses across all three years included:

- 98,823 total youth across 2013, 2018, and 2023
- 53% HET+ boys, 47% HET+ girls; but 26% LGBTQ+ boys, 74% LGBTQ+ girls
- Percent of LGBTQ+ students in the 482 schools increased a lot over time among girls, but only slightly for boys
- More than 13,400 LGBTQ+ students were part of our analyses

Table 1. Number of participants by year in each group (N = 482 schools) in BC

	2013	2018	2023
LGBTQ+ Girls	1,935 (14%)	3,250 (18%)	5,018 (29%)
HET+ Girls	12,399 (86%)	14,653 (82%)	12,438 (71%)
LGBTQ+ Boys	902 (7%)	1,199 (7%)	1,531 (9%)
HET+ Boys	12,938 (93%)	16,147 (93%)	16,413 (91%)
Total	28,174	35,249	35,400

Results of the Quantitative Analyses

Trends in Bullying and Discrimination

Table 2 below shows the percents of students in each group reporting the various types of bullying and discrimination over the past 12 months in each year of the survey. For ease of view, we also show trends in outcomes for boys and girls in line graphs on the following pages, to document significant trends and show the gaps between orientation groups. (Recall that in testing for trends we also control for age, which cannot be shown in the table or line graphs, so we will report which are significantly different over time in **bold**).

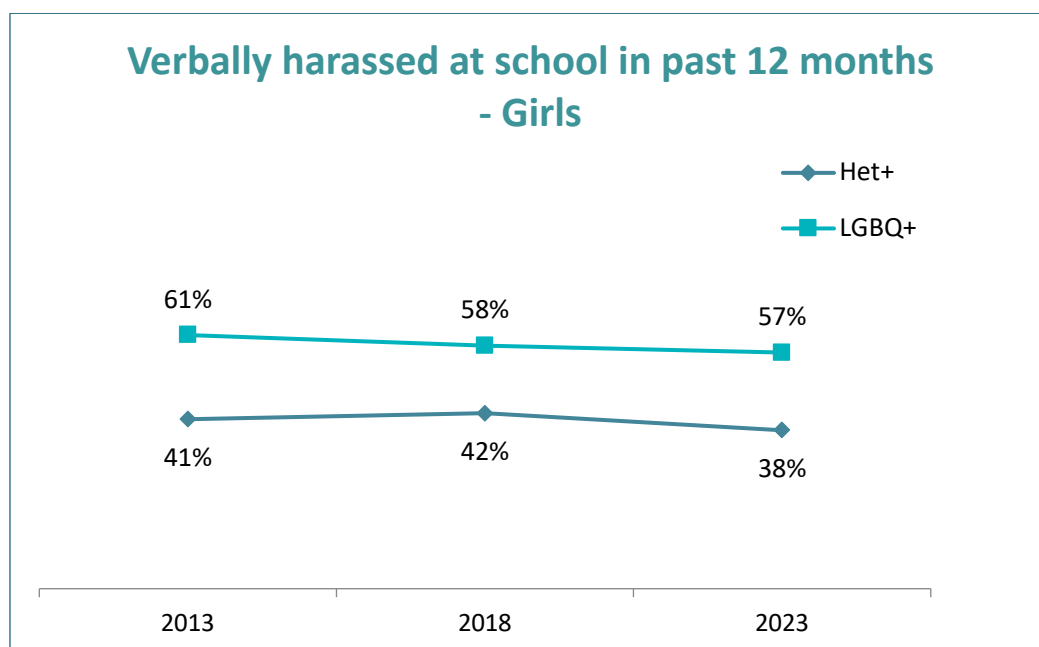
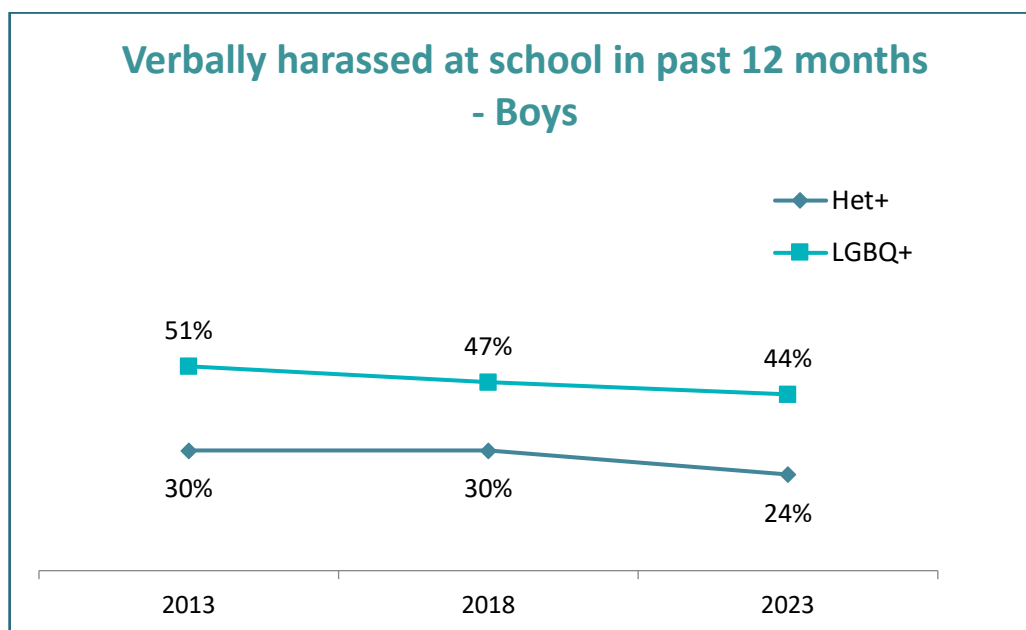
Table 2. Frequencies of bullying and discrimination by year and sexual orientation

Verbally harassed at school in the past 12 months				
	2013	2018	2023	Change direction
LGBQ+ girls	61%	58%	57%	↓
Het+ girls	41%	42%	38%	↓
LGBQ+ boys	51%	47%	44%	↓
Het+ boys	30%	30%	24%	↓
Socially excluded at school in the past 12 months				
	2013	2018	2023	
LGBQ+ girls	55%	58%	56%	NC
Het+ girls	41%	46%	45%	↑
LGBQ+ boys	43%	44%	38%	↓
Het+ boys	25%	28%	25%	NC
Physically assaulted at school in the past 12 months				
	2013	2018	2023	
LGBQ+ girls	10%	11%	10%	NC
Het+ girls	4%	5%	5%	↑
LGBQ+ boys	18%	17%	14%	↓
Het+ boys	9%	9%	10%	NC
Discriminated due to perceived orientation in the past 12 months				
	2013	2018	2023	
LGBQ+ girls	18%	26%	29%	↑
Het+ girls	2%	2%	3%	↑
LGBQ+ boys	24%	25%	25%	NC
Het+ boys	3%	3%	2%	↓

Note: Significant trends within orientation group in **bold**. NC= no change.

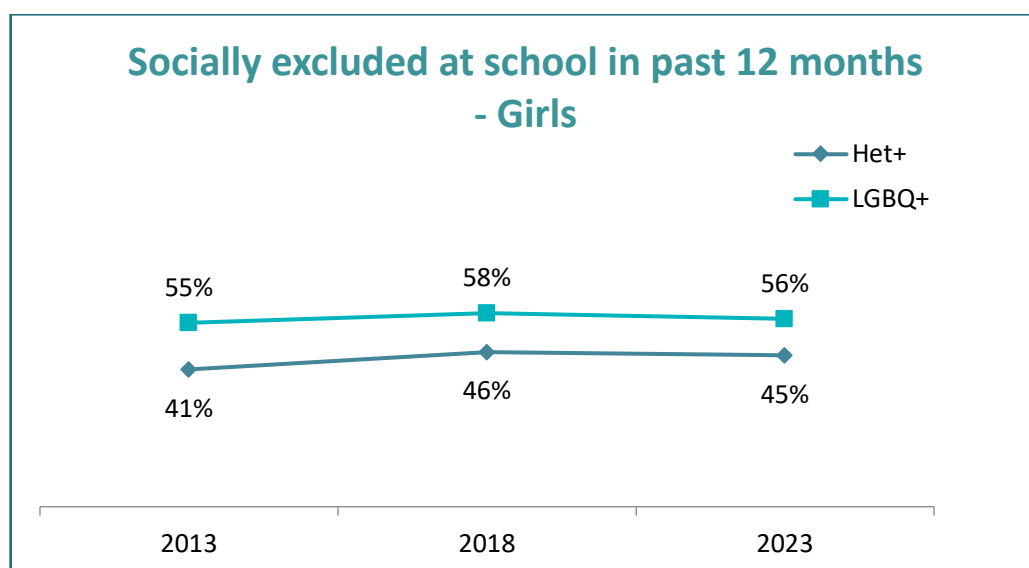
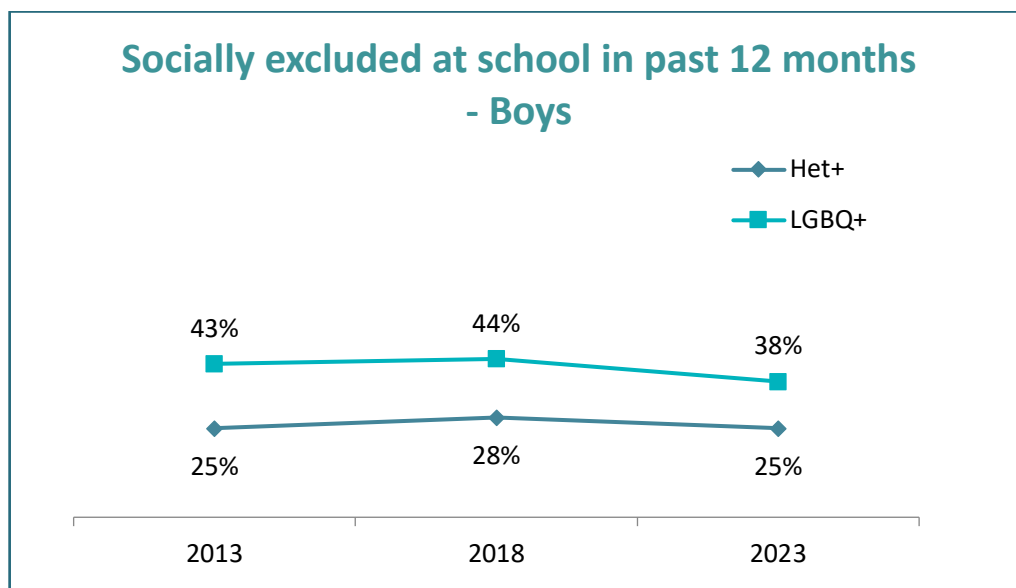
Trends in verbal harassment

Verbal harassment declined significantly overall for all orientation groups compared to ten years ago. However, there was a significant gap between LGBTQ+ boys and Het+ boys in every year, with LGBTQ+ boys having twice the age-adjusted odds of verbal harassment. Based on the age-adjusted gap trends analyses, compared to 2013, this gap appears to be significantly narrowing between boys. For girls, there also was a significant gap between LGBTQ+ and Het+ girls, with LGBTQ+ girls having twice the age-adjusted odds of verbal harassment than their Het+ peers. Compared to 2013, the age-adjusted gap remained unchanged for girls.



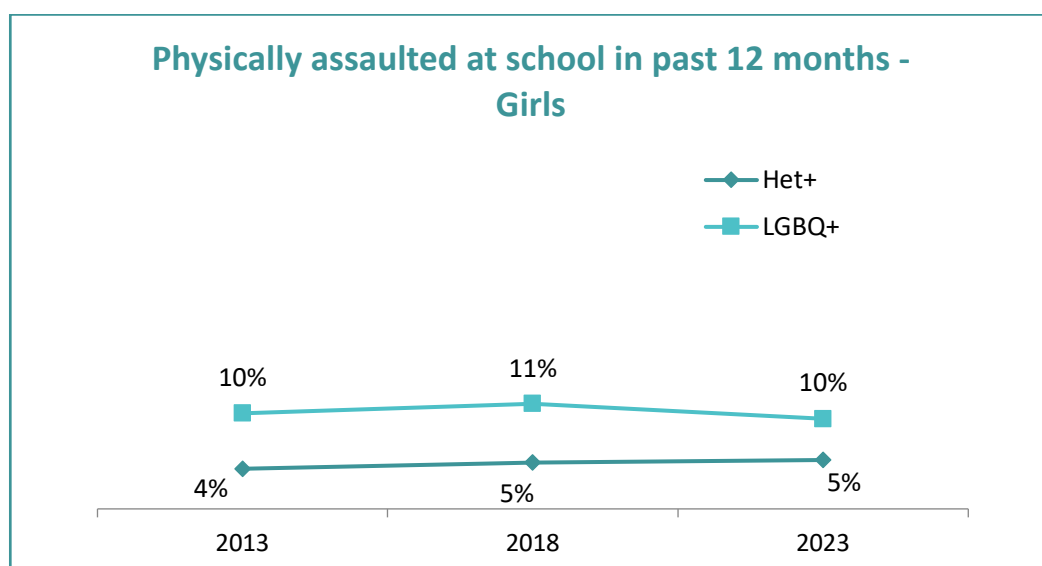
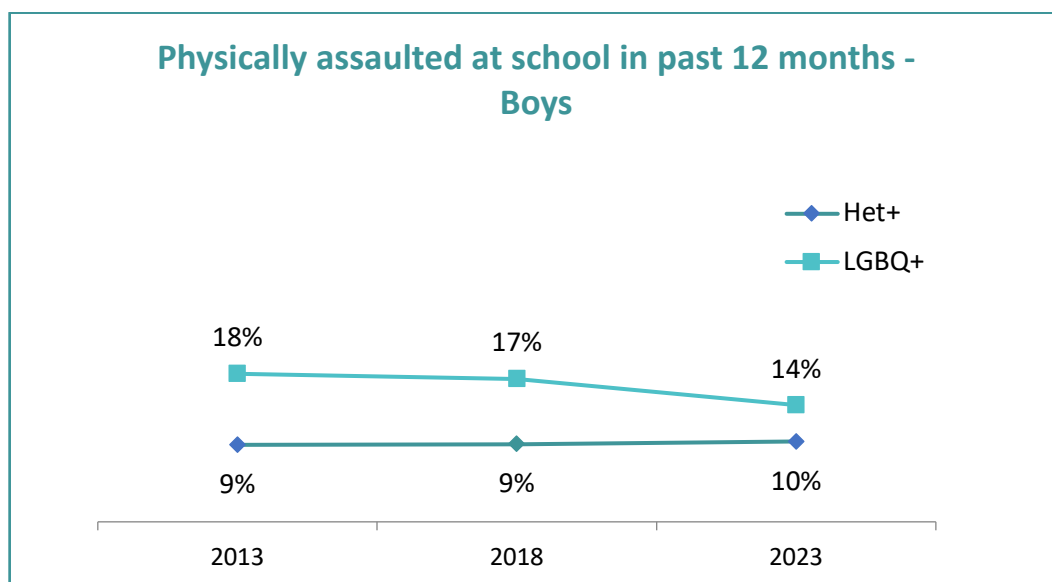
Trends in social exclusion at school

Social exclusion declined for LGBTQ+ boys, was unchanged for Het+ boys and LGBTQ+ girls, and increased slightly for Het+ girls. There was a significant gap between LGBTQ+ and Het+ boys, with around twice the age-adjusted odds of social exclusion among LGBTQ+ boys. In the gap trends, the age-adjusted gap narrowed slightly between 2013 and 2023 for boys. For girls, LGBTQ+ girls had more than twice the age-adjusted odds of being socially excluded than Het+ girls, and in the gap trends the age-adjusted gap remained unchanged over time.



Trends in physical assault at school

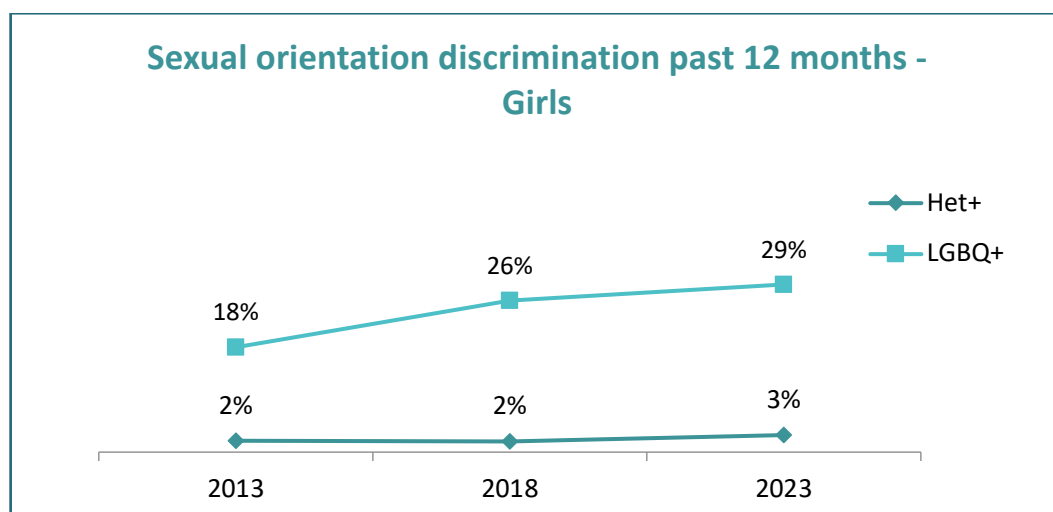
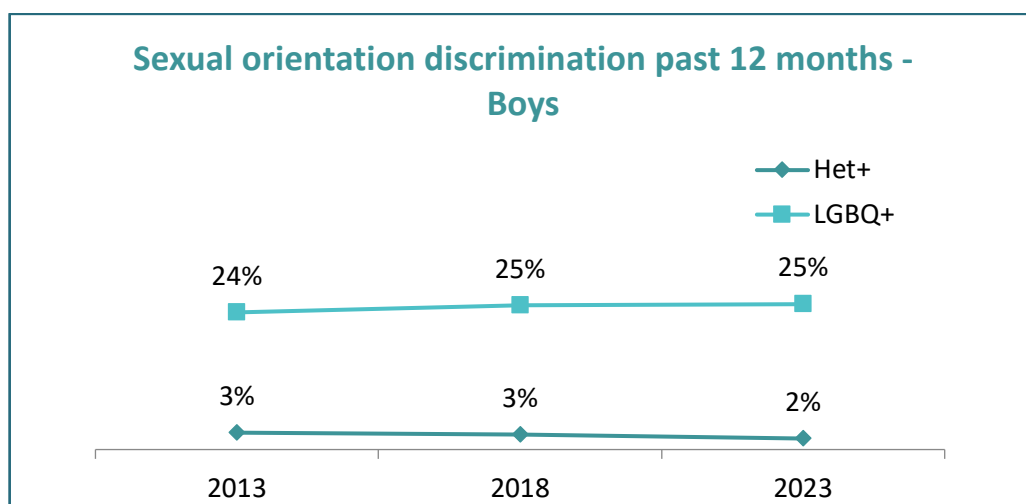
Physical assault at school declined for LGBTQ+ boys, but was unchanged for Het+ boys and LGBTQ+ girls, both around 10%. Het+ girls had the lowest rate of physical assault at school, but it increased (from 4% to 5%) between 2013 and 2018, and remained the same in 2023. The gap between LGBTQ+ and Het+ groups were significant across all years, with boys having about twice the age-adjusted odds over the years. LGBTQ+ girls had almost three times the age-adjusted odds (2.91) of being physically assaulted at school in 2013, and by 2023, that decreased to only twice the odds (2.04) of assault. In our gap trends we found significantly narrowing age-adjusted gaps for both groups over the years, but this is in part because LGBTQ+ boys saw a decrease, and Het+ girls saw an increase in physical assaults.



Trends in sexual orientation discrimination

Sexual orientation discrimination is much higher among LGBTQ+ youth than Het+ youth in each year, as expected. However, with the much larger population of Het+ youth, the small percent who reported discrimination because people thought they were LGBTQ+ can mean an equal or even larger number of them experience sexual orientation discrimination. For example, in 2013, 24% of LGBTQ+ boys reported discrimination, about 200 boys; 3% of Het+ boys reported discrimination, but that translates to 375 boys. Among girls, 2% of Het+ girls reported sexual orientation discrimination in 2018, which was almost 300 girls; but 28% of LGBTQ+ girls reported discrimination, or more than 800 girls.

Sexual orientation discrimination increased for both groups of girls over the years (but only slightly for Het+ girls), was unchanged for LGBTQ+ boys, and went down for Het+ boys. As a result, the age-adjusted gap between groups widened for both boys and girls.



SLEPHI Analyses: The impact of SOGI 123 and GSAs on bullying and discrimination

Our SLEPHI analyses were conducted separately for LGBTQ+ boys and girls, and Het+ boys and girls. We found **SOGI 123 reduced bullying and discrimination targeted toward LGBTQ+ youth above and beyond GSAs' impacts**, although not always for both LGBTQ+ boys and girls. **SOGI 123 also reduced bullying and discrimination among heterosexual students, with effects that were even stronger than GSAs' effects for some types of violence**. Each of these are reported below using standardized estimates of the effects.

Verbal Harassment at school in past 12 months

- SOGI 123 significantly decreased verbal harassment at school for LGBTQ+ boys, but not for LGBTQ+ girls, HET+ girls, or HET+ boys.
- GSAs decreased verbal harassment at school for all sexual orientation and gender groups.
- **The longer SOGI 123 were in schools, the more verbal harassment at school decreased for LGBTQ+ boys; the longer GSAs were in schools, the more verbal harassment at school decreased for all the groups.**

Verbal harassment, LGBTQ+

		Std. est.	<i>p</i>
Boys	SOGI 123	-0.442	<.001
	GSA	-0.709	<.001
Girls	SOGI 123	-0.002	0.954
	GSA	-0.977	<.001

Std. est.= standardized estimate. Significant results in **bold**

Verbal harassment, Het+

		Std. est	<i>p</i>
Boys	SOGI 123	0.312	.133
	GSA	-0.801	<.001
Girls	SOGI 123	-0.147	.592
	GSA	-0.900	<.001

Std. est.= standardized estimate. Significant results in **bold**

Social Exclusion at school in the past 12 months

- SOGI 123 decreased social exclusion at school for LGBTQ+ boys and HET+ girls, but had no separate effect for LGBTQ+ girls or Het+ boys above and beyond GSAs. The standardized estimates for both these groups were in the right direction, but they were not statistically significant.
- GSAs decreased social exclusion at school for both LGBTQ+ boys and girls, and Het+ boys and girls; however, SOGI 123 had stronger effects than GSAs for Het+ girls.
- **The longer SOGI 123 and/or GSAs were in a school, the greater the decrease in social exclusion at school for groups**

Social Exclusion, LGBTQ+

		Std. est.	<i>p</i>
Boys	SOGI 123	-0.220	<.001
	GSA	-0.851	<.001
Girls	SOGI 123	-0.192	0.208
	GSA	-0.876	<.001

Std. est.= standardized estimate. Significant results in **bold**

Social Exclusion, Het+

		Std. est	<i>p</i>
Boys	SOGI 123	-0.309	0.078
	GSA	-0.767	<.001
Girls	SOGI 123	-0.608	.021
	GSA	-0.552	<.001

Std. est.= standardized estimate. Significant results in **bold**

Physically Assaulted at School in the past 12 months

- SOGI 123 reduced physical assault in school for both HET+ boys and girls, and GSAs decreased physical assault in school for LGBQ+ girls. SOGI 123 did not have an additional separate effect for LGBQ+ students after accounting for GSAs.
- The effects of SOGI 123 on reducing physical assaults were even stronger than those of GSAs for Het+ boys and Het+ girls.
- **The longer SOGI 123 or GSAs were in schools, the greater the decrease in physical assaults at school for Het+ boys and girls, and LGBQ+ girls.**

Physical assaulted, LGBQ+

		Std. est.	<i>p</i>
Boys	SOGI 123	-0.574	0.407
	GSA	-0.349	0.412
Girls	SOGI 123	0.053	0.849
	GSA	-1.012	<.001

Std. est.= standardized estimate. Significant results in **bold**

Physically assaulted, Het+

		Std. est	<i>p</i>
Boys	SOGI 123	-0.809	<.001
	GSA	-0.312	<.001
Girls	SOGI 123	-0.746	<.001
	GSA	-0.393	<.001

Std. est.= standardized estimate. Significant results in **bold**

Sexual orientation discrimination in the past 12 months

Although rates of sexual orientation discrimination increased in schools overall between 2013 and 2023 among both LGBTQ+ and Het+ girls, we saw positive impacts of SOGI 123 and GSAs on discrimination in schools that had adopted one or both:

- SOGI 123 decreased sexual orientation discrimination for both LGBTQ+ boys and LGBTQ+ girls, and for HET+ boys, but not HET+ girls. For Het+ girls, the standardized estimates were in the right direction, but not statistically significant.
- GSAs also had an independent effect in reducing sexual orientation discrimination for all but Het+ girls.
- **The longer SOGI 123 and/or GSAs were in a school, the greater the impact on reducing sexual orientation discrimination.** These are some of the strongest standardized estimates we've seen with SLEPHI analyses, and the analyses show no signs of peaking in their effects, i.e., **continued implementation of SOGI 123 and GSAs over time should improve results further.**

It's important to remember that sexual orientation discrimination was increasing province-wide for both LGBTQ+ and Het+ girls, but we see strong decreases in schools with longer involvement with SOGI 123 and with GSAs for everyone (except Het+ girls). This suggests that in schools where SOGI 123 is not being implemented robustly, rates of sexual orientation discrimination are likely getting worse.

Sexual orientation discrimination, LGBTQ+

		Std. est.	<i>p</i>
Boys	SOGI 123	-0.190	<.001
	GSA	-0.891	<.001
Girls	SOGI 123	-1.421	<.001
	GSA	-1.662	<.001

Std. est.= standardized estimate. Significant results in **bold**

Sexual orientation discrimination, Het+

		Std. est	<i>p</i>
Boys	SOGI 123	-0.290	<.001
	GSA	-0.816	.009
Girls	SOGI 123	-0.468	.495
	GSA	-0.677	.285

Std. est.= standardized estimate. Significant results in **bold**

Conclusions of the quantitative evaluation

The training and support for school staff that is provided by SOGI 123, as well as support for LGBTQ+ and other students through policies, teaching materials, and strategies such as inclusive signage and GSAs, helps reduce bullying and discrimination in schools, *even for heterosexual students*.

Why might this initiative also have impacts for heterosexual students? While we cannot say for sure, research has shown that homophobic and transphobic bullying are also used as a way of policing masculinity among boys of all sexual orientations, and of enforcing feminine norms among girls. Teaching materials and programming that offer inclusive views about ways to express gender, provide teachers and staff with the skills to address anti-2SLGBTQ+ bullying, and foster inclusion among students can help create a safer environment for all, including heterosexual boys and girls who do not fit gender stereotypes.

SOGI 123 appears to be effective for reducing violence and creating more inclusive environments in BC schools. The longer it has been implemented, the greater the improvement. GSAs also have an impact, but SOGI 123 has impacts above and beyond GSAs, including for heterosexual students.

Qualitative analyses: Insights about barriers and facilitators for implementing SOGI 123: What is needed to implement it well? What other impacts are observed?

Methods

For this portion of the evaluation, we purposively selected 6 different school districts across the province from both rural and urban school districts. We chose districts that were more experienced and active in implementing SOGI 123, and districts where involvement was more limited, or where SOGI District Leads and SOGI School Leads (resource teachers) were newer to SOGI 123. From October 2022 to May 2023, we interviewed 6 SOGI District Leads and 15 SOGI School Leads from these school districts across BC. They ranged in experience from within the year to 6+ years in the role; among the SOGI School Leads, an even number of Leads were from elementary, middle, and secondary school levels.

We asked about any impacts of SOGI 123 they had observed in their school(s) on students, staff, and school environments. We asked what they saw as the key strengths of SOGI 123, and what they thought could be improved. Finally, we asked what they felt was needed to facilitate SOGI 123 effectively, and what barriers existed. We have included example quotes from SOGI District and School Leads in our findings below.

Findings

Perceived Impacts

When asked about the impact that SOGI 123 has had on students, staff, and school environments, participants primarily gave positive responses. Many participants identified the positive impact that inclusive signage and GSAs have had on students, and on increasing the school's inclusivity and acceptance of 2SLGBTQ+ students. Some participants were unsure whether perceived changes in students and schools was solely due to SOGI 123, or a cumulative effect from the program, community, and broader societal progress. However, there were no negative impacts identified by participants.

"I think the presence of SOGI 123 and the fact that there's Ministry endorsement, I think has been a positive thing. I think it has empowered senior management to sort of invest. I think it's been something that has created a bit of visibility." (SOGI District Lead)

Participants noticed a positive shift in staff's comfort with using SOGI materials in classrooms and in schools, and believed this willingness to learn and diversify resources was helping to make school environments more inclusive.

“I think that people are really starting to see that there are connections within the curriculum, even at very young ages. ‘Cause I know that people are using videos that I’ve created, resources that I’ve created for kindergarten, grade one, grade two classrooms. And that’s a real shift...So I would say that’s probably the most positive shift.” (SOGI District Lead)

Many Leads also spoke about the positive impact that SOGI 123 has had on school environments, and making schools more inclusive and affirming for 2SLGBTQ+ youth.

“People just feel more open about expressing themselves and being who they are and coming out as well...also people are more comfortable, like, yeah, just being who they are and not having to hide as much because we’re so open about SOGI and we have--we talk about it in announcements. We have a SOGI board in the hallway so it’s very visible for everybody to see. We have a lot of students who come to Diversity Club and it’s grown so much from just the last year. Yeah, I think we’ve created a safe space for students who identify as being part of the LGBTQ2S+ community. Yeah. I like to think the students feel safer here and more included.” (Secondary School SOGI Lead)

Participants also mentioned the positive impact on the parents and their appreciation for the SOGI program in school:

“Parents have been coming forward. For example, when we did our gender inclusive sexual health talks...a lot of parents came forward and said, ‘thank you. This was really important and our family feels seen. My child feels seen, and we appreciate the effort that you’ve put in here’. So I think that is showing success.” (SOGI District Lead)

Strengths of SOGI 123: School level tools and resources

The strength most frequently discussed by participants was school-level tools and resources, which primarily included the SOGI 123 GSA supports, teaching resources, and lesson plans. For example, some helpful resources spoken about by Leads were: a wide variety of teaching tools, like lesson plans for math, physical education, etc.; the SOGI 123 website; GSAs and inclusive signage like flags and safe space stickers; Microsoft Teams and other online platforms to interact with other SOGI Leads.

“The teaching resources are super helpful. Everything’s broken down for you. And I like how it includes the grade levels that you can see clearly what’s more for primary and what’s more for intermediate or the older grades. And, yeah, just the whole thing. All the teaching resources, they’re just super helpful. Yeah, that’s what I draw on the most.” (Secondary School SOGI Lead)

Some participants identified they wanted updated SOGI resource materials, either more advanced content, or content that is more diverse, to reflect the diversity within their schools.

“Having a focus that is secondary, that would be a request, definitely. It’s exceptionally easy to find elementary school resources...They’re everywhere. So to find the secondary resources, though, it is much more difficult. And that’s where I think turning to the students is sometimes a wealth of knowledge right there.” (Secondary School SOGI Lead)

“I recognize that the [SOGI 123] website, if you hit some of the links, it does have translation into different languages, like Spanish and French or Chinese or whatever. And I tried to email and say, hey, why don’t we have an ASL translation there? Again, the Vancouver Pride does translate parts of their website into ASL, and I thought that would be great and really inclusive.” (Secondary School SOGI Lead)

"I think one of the things that we’ve often asked for is sort of the advocacy piece...that sort of thing where rather than individual districts having to respond to parent opposition or political momentum, anti-SOGI momentum, it would have been really nice to have that sort of coming from a centralized place...Where there was some contradiction of misinformation and malinformation out there. That’s one thing that I think would be really helpful moving forward." (SOGI District Lead)

What is needed to implement SOGI 123 well? Facilitators

Participants also spoke about factors that facilitated their use and implementation of SOGI 123 content into their schools or their school districts. The facilitator most frequently discussed by Leads was having supportive school staff and leaders, which included classroom teachers, administrators, principals, and other support and learning staff. For example, many participants identified the positive impact that supportive administrators had on their ability to implement SOGI 123 content. The presence of supportive administrators and other staff resulted in Leads being more at ease with using SOGI 123 resources and content, and feeling more supported if faced with resistance from parents.

“But if you have a community within your school, and I meant community as in teacher community or administration community, that makes a huge difference to the amount of work you can do as a SOGI lead.” (Secondary School SOGI Lead)

“I’ve worked with a number of principals and just worked on things like awareness and language in terms of responding to ignorance. And when we have people-- when we have admin who buy in and step up and are assertive with the response, it’s interesting how quickly that response gets extinguished versus the admin who are, like, yeah, I’m not sure how to respond to this.” (SOGI District Lead)

Barriers to implementing SOGI 123 well

Lack of system resources

A lack of funding for SOGI-related initiatives and lack of time (either in the form of FTE or release time) for School Leads to spend on SOGI-related initiatives. Both District and School Leads expressed the challenges posed by the lack of time and funding for SOGI-related work, which was often a result of limited investment in SOGI initiatives by provincial and district departments.

“Most of our barriers become financial based. Like, we’re looking at expanding our gender neutral washroom. So now we’re looking at how are we going to fund this? We want-- we’re trying to create a full gender neutral inclusive space in our school. But again, we have to fund it. So financial barriers tend to be our biggest hurdle.” (Secondary School SOGI Lead)

“But in an ideal world we would have collaboration time. We would have...time to get together and talk about these things. But that time currently does not exist within our schedule, as in full staff. It does not exist. And as a result, I think we’re doing the best we can with what we have. But for me any kind of end goal or ideal would include time not only about SOGI, but time—more collaboration time as a staff, as a full staff, to talk about what matters to us. Because I know this is a shared value.” (Elementary School SOGI Lead)

Unsupportive school leadership

Another barrier frequently discussed by participants was unsupportive leadership and school staff (unsupportive can range from ignorance of SOGI topics to actual resistance to implementing SOGI content). For example, many participants expressed that having unsupportive administrative staff made their job much more challenging. Several Leads also expressed that there was little knowledge among staff of SOGI policies, causing staff to be unsure how to deal with instances of bullying of 2SLGBTQ+ students.

“But I tend to find that understanding of the policies tends to still be a big sticking point. Teachers not understanding-- I had a long conversation at our last staff meeting...I think there’s a disconnect still between the policies and where we’re at.”
(Secondary School SOGI Lead)

Resistance from parents or community

The last barrier spoken about by participants was resistance or backlash from the community and/or parents. This posed a challenge more often to the School Leads, since they have more direct contact with students, parents, and the broader community. However, they also felt this barrier could be reduced by support from school administrators and the district in general. For example, when one school experienced community pushback, the issue was helped by the district having a firm stance on inclusion and diversity.

“Some of the biggest barriers are still misunderstandings. People-- recently it’s been a lot of discussions on what gender reaffirming care means. We’re in a community that’s relatively religious, and so a lot of parental backlash happens at the district level, which puts some fears into the kids themselves.” (Secondary School SOGI Lead)

“But there are still barriers...There’s quite a bit of pushback. And just recently our district office had received word that there was going to be protests for SOGI related...So it was put out there as a veiled threat that they would show up. Which school? I don’t know. And so then all the principals and vice-principals they were having their meetings and so emails were disseminated to all staff to just say, like, we’re not going to engage. We are an inclusive district and we are inclusive schools and we believe in human rights and people have rights. And so I think that will just be an ongoing battle for a while unfortunately.” (Secondary School SOGI Lead)

Conclusions of the qualitative evaluation

Overall, the District and School SOGI Leads affirmed some of the same observations about SOGI 123's impact that were also seen among students in our SLEPHI analyses. They offered additional insights into its benefits for creating safer and more inclusive schools, and identified specific resources or activities that contributed to these impacts.

While most participants noted some barriers to implementing SOGI 123 well, including the need for school and district leadership to support the work, and pushback from parents or community members in some regions, they were enthusiastic about the impacts they had seen, and the variety of supports provided to help develop school policy, to teach, and to support students in GSAs and other activities. We note that many of the barriers or challenges they identified—limited financial resources, lack of supportive leadership, staff shortages, community pushback—are not really under the control of ARC Foundation or SOGI 123 as a program. Therefore, these fall outside our specific recommendations as part of this evaluation. That said, there may be opportunity for ARC Foundation and SOGI District and School Leads to advocate for further resources within the system to help support the initiative.

Final Thoughts

We saw a clear impact on violence and discrimination for both LGBTQ+ and heterosexual students that were documented in our SLEPHI analyses. At the same time, there has been increasing anti-SOGI rhetoric and political protests across BC, and indeed, across Canada.

Our findings offer robust evidence that SOGI 123 is beneficial for inclusion and support of all students, not just LGBTQ+ students. Given this impact and the noted barriers, additional supports from government and communities to enhance, expand, and sustain SOGI 123 resources in schools appears warranted.

Human rights law specifically prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. However, with significant increases in reports of sexual orientation discrimination among students in BC schools, schools may be at risk of human rights complaints. SOGI 123 is one initiative that effectively addresses this risk among all students..