

# FAQ's & Answers

(Compiled as a synthesis of all questions)

## **1. What is the safe school work of the District?**

Every district is required to ensure that all students, staff and families feel welcome and safe in school. This includes all students regardless of their sexual orientation.

Our primary goals are to create safe schools for all children, i.e., free from teasing and name calling to create inclusive, welcoming environments that reflect the identity of all students and their families.

## **2. Why is LGBT curriculum necessary?**

Education is needed to support students who are teased, bullied or harassed because of their sexual orientation identity. Students will learn that the words “gay” and “lesbian” as respectful adjectives to describe people in their community, not words used in a negative way to hurt or insult. Creating inclusive curriculum and establishing accepting classroom and school climates improves the educational experience for all students, families and teachers.

## **3. Is there specific language in the law/legislation requiring LGBT curriculum in addition to the Caring Schools Community adoption?**

The law provides us with the foundation for ensuring our schools are safe for all students, families, and staff, the approach to get there is a local district decision. The elementary committee reviewed the feedback from the October 2007 staff training and from there decided to add “supplemental” curriculum to the *Caring Schools Community* adoption. Like any other adopted curriculum, it goes through a process for Board of Education approval. Our committee’s decision to add curriculum was to provide instructional tools for teachers to address diversity, inclusiveness, and anti-bullying/slurs.

## **4. Are elementary school children too young to be introduced to this topic?**

Name-calling, bullying and using anti-gay slurs exists in our schools. Slurs are hurtful and unacceptable and they affect the lives of people in every school and community. By teaching an anti bullying curriculum, teachers will create inclusive school communities that prevent name-calling, teasing, bullying and provide safe learning environments for all children.

## **5. How do we comply with anti-discrimination laws and still respect the religious and cultural diversity of our students and their families?**

Some might claim that efforts to prevent discrimination and harassment on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity are inconsistent with students’ and parents’ religious views about homosexuality and gender roles. Addressing issues of violence, name-calling and other harassment, and ensuring all students are treated equally, does not denigrate any student’s cultural background. Students may hold any beliefs they choose about homosexuality and gender.

## **6. May parents “opt out” of their children’s participation in school programs that discuss sexual orientation and gender identity?**

Parents have a limited and clearly delineated right to require parental notification, parental consent, or have their children opt out of school programs. State law requires parental notice concerning instruction on HIV/AIDS prevention, venereal disease, sexually transmitted diseases, sexuality, or family life and provides that parents be given the opportunity to keep their child from receiving such instruction. In this context, “family life” and “sex education” are interchangeable terms. In addition, state law prohibits mandatory student participation in surveys or evaluations that concern sex, family life, morality, or religion.

As the California Safe Schools Coalition stated in “School Safety & Violence Prevention for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Students: A Question and Answer Guide for California School Officials and Administrators”:

*“Where issues of sexual orientation or gender identity are raised in school programs other than health, family life or sex education instruction, including programs designed to encourage respect and tolerance for diversity, parents cannot demand their child be exempted from such programs; discussions about LGBT people are not a form of ‘sex education.’ California does not have a requirement for notifying parents and guardians for lessons about respect and diversity. The focus of this curriculum is to create respectful and welcoming learning environments for all students by communicating that LGBT people are part of our communities and anti-LGBT discrimination is harmful to everyone.”*

The curriculum, which focuses on inclusion and respect, does not fall within the guidelines for opting out.

## **7. Schools aren’t supposed to teach sex education without parental approval. Why are we teaching sex/sex education without getting parent permission?**

As stated in the Alameda County Public Health Department 2004 report *A Call to Action*, “there is a common misperception that a conversation about sexual orientation in schools involves a discussion about sex. A discussion about equity and respect for differences is not a conversation about human sexuality. For example, a discussion about heterosexual families is not a human biology lesson; a discussion about sexually diverse families is not about sexual acts.” Senate Bill 71 states that instruction and materials that discuss gender, sexual orientation, or family life and do not discuss human reproductive organs and their functions are not “sex education.”

Therefore, parent permission is not required. The focus of our work around safe schools is creating learning environments in which all students feel safe including our gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender students, staff, and families. It is not about sex education.

### **7a. Is Talking about gay issues the same as sex education?**

Talking about gay and lesbian people as well as addressing bias-based bullying is not the same as talking about sex or human reproduction. Talking about LGBT issues is a discussion about people and families present in our communities, and addressing bullying and name calling. By incorporating LGBT issues in the context of lessons about families and literature, we can help prevent the stereotypes and misunderstandings that often develop.

**8. Does AUSD have a zero tolerance for harassment policy?**

Alameda Unified has a policy that prohibits harassment of any kind. This includes slurs, name calling and bullying

**9. Does AUSD have a safe option for students to report bullying anonymously?**

No, not as an entire District. However, each school may develop their own. This is future work for our Safe School Committee.

**10. How was the original Caring School Community curriculum chosen?**

As part of the State of California Safe Schools policy, Alameda Unified chose Caring School Community as a State approved, scientifically researched curriculum for K – 5 students.

**11. Does the curriculum include an inherent bias toward LGBT identity?**

The curriculum encourages respectful behavior toward all members of the school community. It focuses on combating bullying and intolerance of any kind for all of the protected classes so that all students may have access to a safe learning environment.

**12. How will lesson instruction be affected if a teacher has a viewpoint on homosexuality and gender identity that differs from the curriculum?**

The CSC lessons focus on creating a safe environment in which all students can learn. Education professionals will use the CSC Support Guide to set up a welcoming classroom regardless of personal beliefs.

**13. Is fidelity to the CSC lessons being ensured through work with the developers?**

The addition of Lesson #9 does not change the fidelity of the CSC lessons.

**14. Will there be an enhanced anti-bullying portion with the CSC curriculum?**

Yes. In each lesson, the Caring School Community Support Guide is set up to ask teacher to look at: Strategies to Think About, Classroom Arrangement and Management, Awareness and Support for Protected Classes, and providing Additional Teacher Resources. This will enhance teacher awareness and support for anti-bullying situations and dialogue.

In addition, through the use of multiple classroom meetings, the Caring School Community curriculum aims to teach students how to identify and curb bullying behaviors. It helps foster a sense of community by giving students the tools to be “fair, helpful, caring, respectful and responsible.

**15. How does the Caring School Community Support Guide prepare teachers to respond when actual slurs are heard or reported?**

The CSC Support guide provides instructional strategies and tools for creating a safe and welcoming classroom for all students. Through the use of lesson tips and common intervention language, teachers will be prepared to respond to actual slurs heard or reported.

**16. Will the training on the Instructional Support Guide encourage teachers to value *all* beliefs? (Including the belief that God wants marriage to be between a man and a woman?)**

The Caring School Community curriculum and training encourages respectful behavior toward all members of the school community. The teacher’s job will not be to advocate any particular belief. Rather, the training will focus on combating bullying and intolerance of any kind.

**17. Who will conduct the training on the Instructional Support Guide? Will administrators also be trained?**

The Interim Assistant Superintendent conducted the training of the K – 5 Safe Schools teacher Committee that was formed this summer. They developed the Caring School Community Support Guide and were trained as Trainers for K – 5 teachers in all of the elementary schools. They will train the K – 5 teachers in September, 2009. Site administrators will participate in this training, as well as participate in one during the all Management workshops in late August.

**18. Why are the words gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender used as descriptive words in the upper grades but not the younger grades?**

The decision was made, per Board of Education approval, to not use the descriptive words until the upper grades.

**19. Is there a matrix showing how the protected classes are addressed at each grade level?**

There is not a specific matrix showing how the protected classes are addressed at each grade level, but there are awareness and suggested hints with each lesson to assist teachers in providing the necessary support and awareness.

**20. Are parents allowed to attend class when Lesson 9 is being taught?**

With Principal approval, parents are always welcome in classes. However, the parents should keep in mind two things: The teacher may teach Lesson 9 on a “need to” basis. In other words, a situation may come up on the playground which would then fit in perfectly to call a class meeting and begin the approved lesson. Also, parents should be mindful that they not disturb the student to student, and student to teacher dialogue if they are in the classroom.

**21. Where can the community access the developing CSC information?**

The new Caring School Community Support Guide as well as the FAQ’s and answers will be available on the District website by late August.

**22. How can the PTA help AUSD to make this a smooth transition and help ease the fears of parents?**

The PTA’s can provide small group discussions at monthly meetings with District representatives to address any fears.

**23. How can parents reinforce the lessons at home?**

The Caring School Community Curriculum provides “Home Activities”. These activities could be made available to PTA’s and other site based parent groups.

## Possible Student Generated Questions

**24. How can two men or two women have a baby?**

There are many ways to make a family. Some children are adopted. You can talk to your parents about how families originate.

**25. How can a person have two moms or two dads?**

Families are comprised of many different combinations of people: one child or many children; no children; one parent or grandparents; two moms or two dads.

**26. What is a partner?**

A partnership is formed when two adults decide to share their lives together. It can be a man and a woman, two women or two men.

**27. Can two men or two women get married? If two people can't get married how can they be a family?**

In some States it is legal for two men or two women to marry. A family is made up of many different combinations of people. It may be that a grandparent, an aunt or uncle are included or head up a family. Marriage is not always part of the make up of a family. A family is all of the members of a household who share a domestic home.

**28. Should two men or two women get married?**

This question should be discussed with your own family.

**29. In the story And Tango Makes Three, are the penguins gay?**

I don't know. Gay is a word that refers to a man who loves a man or a woman who loves a woman. The penguins are definitely partners in hatching the egg and parenting Tango.

**Did the zookeeper make it up?**

The author says it is a true story. I like the story whether it is true or not.

**30. What is gay/lesbian?**

Gay means that a man is in a romantic relationship with another man, or a woman is in one with another woman. A lesbian is only a woman who is in a romantic relationship with another woman.

**31. Can adopted children go back to their "real families"?**

Children who might go back to their birth families are called foster children. When children are adopted, the adoptive parent or parents become their family.

**32. Is it a sin to be gay?**

Some people believe that it is wrong to be gay. Some people believe it is just how some people are.

**33. What if my parents tells me to leave the classroom if my teacher reads this book or has the class watch the video or maybe talks about families?**

The Board of Education voted on the teaching of the lessons to all children in grades K – 5. They want to make sure that all children are safe and free from any sort of bullying or name calling. This lesson is teaching respect for all.

**34. My parents say \_\_\_\_\_ is wrong or not true.**

Some people believe \_\_\_\_\_ and some people believe \_\_\_\_\_.

No matter what we believe we need to treat everyone with respect.