

2022

Kansas Communities That Care (KCTC) Student Survey:

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) Item Selection



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Item Selection

The Learning Tree Institute

On behalf of Kansas Department of Aging and Disability Services

May 2022



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Introduction

In an effort to provide an inclusive and accurate representation of all Kansas youth, the Kansas Communities That Care (KCTC) Student Survey team committed to offering two optional modules starting in the 2021-2022 school year administration: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) demographic questions. After the first year piloting the questions, the researchers at the Learning Tree Institute (LTI) at Greenbush reviewed data and facilitated opportunities for feedback from the community through student focus groups (Pelkey & Phillips, 2022b), expert roundtables (Chaney et al., 2022), client satisfaction surveys, and conversations with other organizations (Pelkey & Phillips, 2022a) throughout the state. The information gleaned from these opportunities led LTI to analyze current questions and create new, revised questions for the 2022-2023 school year administration.

The researchers reviewed literature examining three main research questions:

- Which SOGI questions should be asked?
- In which format should the SOGI questions be asked?
- At what age is it developmentally appropriate to ask SOGI questions?

The LTI Team review revealed SOGI survey question development is still evolving. The team concluded that these questions do have some consistently developing themes, and the team took these into account during the revision process. However, most literature states that application of these themes, outside of using the correct terminology, should be determined by the purpose or intent of the survey and the intended participants of the survey (DeChants et al., 2021). For example, many studies pointed toward asking students about sexual behavior. This is not pertinent to the purpose of the KCTC Student Survey, so questions regarding sexual behavior are omitted from the survey. The main objective of the KCTC Student Survey is to monitor and report on several social domains and provide an objective profile of overall risk factors, which are associated with problem behaviors and protective factors, which act as buffers against risk. The four domains are community, school, family, and peer / individual.

In addition to the aligned research on SOGI demographic questions, the team addressed readability for youth as young as 11 or in 6th grade. The approximate reading level for the newly revised questions is 6th grade.



At least two prominent limitations exist for this review of literature: research in the area of SOGI demographic questions for youth is in early, dynamic stages and the SOGI “terminology [itself] is fluid and continues to evolve over time” (Morgan et al., 2020).



Definitions

The LTI team uses the following definitions copied and cited from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Centers for Disease Control of Adolescent and School Health, 2019).

- **Straight:** A man who is primarily attracted to women, or a woman who is primarily attracted to men.
- **Gay:** A person who is attracted primarily to members of the same gender. Gay is most frequently used to describe men who are attracted primarily to other men, although it can be used for men and women.
- **Lesbian:** A woman who is primarily attracted to other women.
- **Bisexual:** A person who is attracted to both people of their own gender and other genders.
- **Cisgender:** Individuals whose current gender identity is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth.
- **Transgender:** Individuals whose current gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth.
- **Nonbinary:** Individuals who do not identify their gender as man or woman. Other terms to describe this identity may include genderqueer, agender, bigender, gender creative, etc.

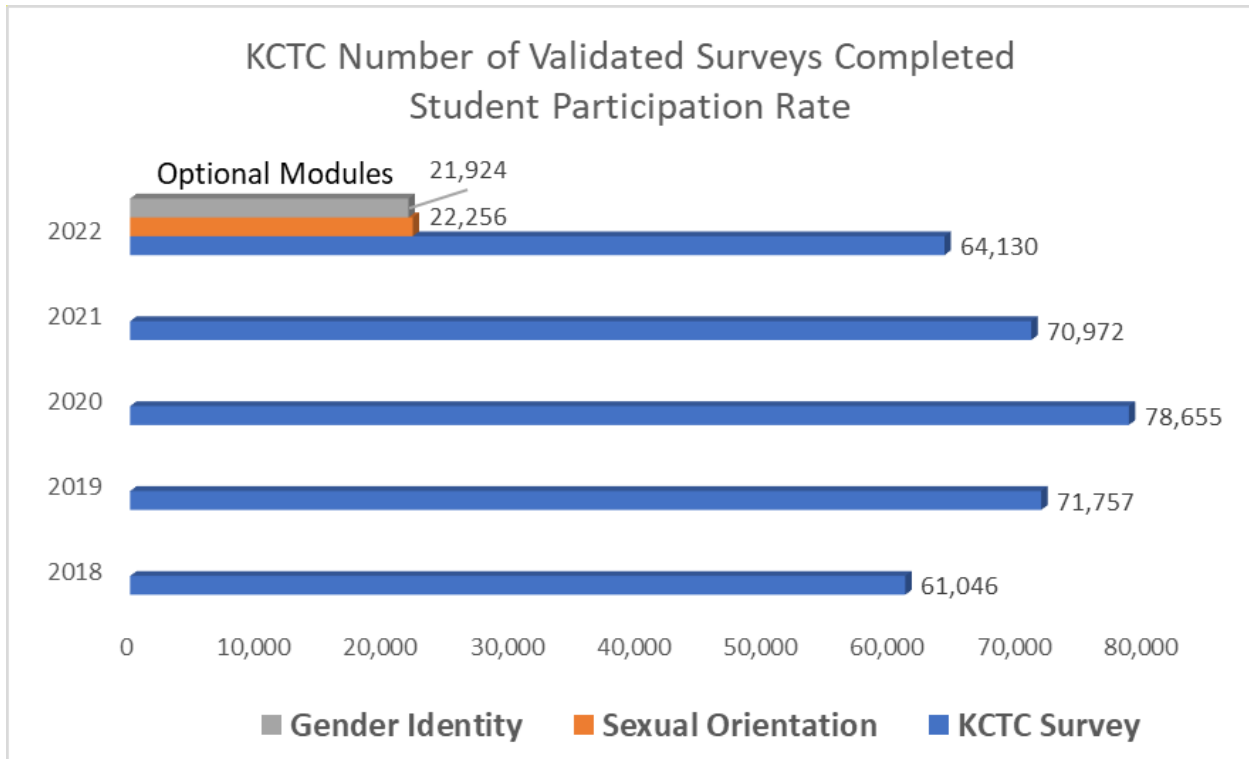
Participants

The KCTC Student Survey is administered annually on behalf of Kansas Department of Aging and Disability Services (KDADS) to 6th, 8th, 10th, and 12th grade students in Kansas. School districts, mental health organizations, community coalitions, and other institutions use the data to prioritize prevention efforts, understand student needs, and monitor changes following intervention strategies. The administration is conducted in schools; ideally, this occurs with one of the students' teachers. During the 2020 and 2021 administrations, this may have occurred virtually due to COVID-19 restrictions.

For students to participate in SOGI optional modules, the modules must first be approved by district administrators. Second, the modules must be approved by student guardians through a formal informed consent process. Lastly, the student must consent to take the survey. At this point, the student will see the optional module questions, but the student still has the ability to skip any questions within the modules.

Table 1

Five-year participation rate of the KCTC.



Proposed Changes

In 2022, the KCTC Research Team in regards to sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) demographic questions for use with youth in 6th-12th grades conducted four focus groups, an expert roundtable, and an independent analysis of current peer-reviewed research. The findings from these prompted the team to recommend changes to the SOGI demographic questions on the KCTC Student Survey. These changes are aligned with research conducted by the team, and a rationale with citations are provided for each item.

Developmental Age To Begin Asking SOGI Demographic Questions

Often, the question arises, “when is it appropriate to ask youth about sexual orientation or gender identity?” Some may think these topics are taboo or that younger youth cannot yet understand gender and sexuality. Rightfully, younger youth typically do have difficulty

understanding the semantics of sexual orientation and gender identity. However, related research suggests that it is still developmentally appropriate to ask.

Research shows that by age 12, youth are beginning to experience emerging sexual and romantic attractions (McDermott, 2010). Puberty is a driving factor in this emergence, and while the puberty process varies, for some, it begins as early as ten years old (Savin-Williams, 2005). According to evidence presented by Savin-Williams (2005), some youth even begin questioning their sexual orientation as early as age eight. Research additionally reported that today's youth are identifying at younger ages than in previous generations. Because individual development and understanding of sexual orientation and gender identity occur at various ages, research recommends that it is, indeed, essential to include younger youth in research sampling. Beginning to ask SOGI demographic questions at a minimum age of 11 allows researchers to better understand the developing sexual and gender identity of younger age groups and the complexities that may accompany them (McDermott, 2010).

In alignment with the research above, several past and present research studies have also sampled youth in a younger age range:

- Patterns of sexual orientation in a large, random, representative sample of 12-18-year-old students were explored. Students completed a self-administered adolescent health survey embedded with five items on sexual attractions, thoughts, behaviors, and affiliations (Remafedi et al., 1992).
- A study surveyed 11-18-year-old students over three years to investigate the hypothesis that historically typical sexual identity labels were outdated (Russell et al., 2009).
- Findings were derived from SOGI questions that were asked as a part of a novel longitudinal Adolescent Behavioral Cognitive Development study. This multisite study, funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and 15 additional federal partnerships, is designed to recruit more than 10,000 children aged 9 to 10 and follow them over 10 years (Calzo & Blashill, 2018).
- A biennial National School Climate Survey supported by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network, surveyed a representative national sample of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth in grades 6-12. The survey documents the prevalence of indicators of a hostile school climate for LGBTQ

students and explores the effects that a hostile school climate may have on their educational outcomes and well-being. It also examines the availability and the utility of LGBTQ-related school resources and supports that can offset the adverse effects of a hostile school climate and promote a positive learning experience (Kosciw et al., 2020).

Along with the research supporting the early emergence of thoughts, questions, and potential understanding regarding one’s gender and sexuality, the longevity and robustness documented by the past and present studies present a solid precedent for the inclusion of SOGI demographic items on the KCTC Student Survey.

Gender Identity Question Placement

Related research recommends placing SOGI items near the beginning of the survey to minimize survey fatigue for the survey participants. It also recommends placement in a demographic section to allow youth to express this part of their identity in the same way as they would age, race, ethnicity, or location (DeChants et al., 2021). This placement is expected to reduce the nonresponse rate of the items compared to placing them closer to the end of the survey (Temkin et al., 2017).

Additionally, when measuring youths’ gender identity, it is important to incorporate a two-step question process. These questions should ask about their “sex assigned at birth” followed by their “current gender identity” (Bauer et al., 2017; Eliason et al., 2016; Reisner et al., 2015; Frohard-Dourlent, et al., 2016; Suen et al., 2020; Temkin et al., 2017).

This two-step process is used to determine how the questions are presented within the survey. Because younger students are already prone to confusion regarding their gender identity (Calzo & Blashill, 2018), it is paramount that both steps of the gender identity questions appear sequentially and displayed on the same page of the survey with no page or section breaks (Bauer et al., 2017; Suen et al., 2020). Youth in lower grade-levels, if confused by the terms, may use the paired questions as contextual cues to assist with comprehension.

Item 1: Gender Identity Part I

Table 2

Comparison of item descriptions for “sex at birth.”

2021-2022 Item	Revised 2022-2023 Item
<p>What gender were you assigned at birth, even if you are not that gender today (that is, what is the gender on your birth certificate)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male • Female 	<p>What sex were you assigned at birth?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male • Female

Item 2: Gender Identity Part II

Table 3

Comparison of item descriptions for “gender identity.”

2021-2022 Item	Revised 2022-2023 Item
<p>What is your current gender identity, even if it is different than the gender you were assigned at birth?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male • Female • I do not identify as either male or female • I’m not sure yet 	<p>What is your current gender identity?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boy or Man • Girl or Woman • Nonbinary • Questioning or Not sure • Other (Optional write-in)

Rationale for Revised Items 1 and 2:

In the 2021-2022 KCTC administration year, the expert roundtable (Chaney et al., 2022) stated changes needed to be made to the gender identity demographic items. The recommended changes for item one included the revision to change the term “gender” to the term “sex,” as this is the correct term for the biological identification of a person. The LTI Team did find research to support this change.

It was also recommended by the expert roundtable (Chaney et al., 2022) to include a response option of “intersex” for item one. After further analysis, the LTI Team determined the inclusion of the response option was not appropriate for this survey at this time due to the potential confusion of adding the response item. It has been reported that the biological identification of “intersex” is applicable to less than two percent of the population, with some arguing that given the more precise definition, estimates are about 0.018% (Sax, 2002), and may or may not be identifiable at birth. In fact, many people will never know they have intersex variations (Jones, 2018). Research also shows that youth may confuse the term “intersex” with SOGI terms (Hegerty & Smith, 2021) as the term “intersex” is not widely used. The LTI Team also determined it was unlikely students would see a birth certificate until sixteen years of age when they register for a driver’s license, and when they do see a birth certificate from Kansas, it will either state “male,” “female,” or “not yet determined.” The LTI Team confirmed this with Kansas Vital Statistics (Baldry, 2022) and two practicing medical physicians in the state. Additionally, this is true in most other states in the United States (Bauer et al., 2017). Therefore, the LTI Team does not support the addition of the term “intersex” at this time.

The recommended changes for item two were to revise the response options to be aligned with the Center for Disease Center’s definitions of gender (Centers for Disease Control, 2019). Research supported the change in response options. In addition, the LTI Team decided to include an “other” with a “write-in” option to allow space for students to self-identify. It is noted that “adolescents who are gender non-conforming or questioning find survey response options inadequate” (Bauer et al., 2017, p.3) and in limiting the number of terms, researchers run the risk of excluding SOGI minority participants altogether (Porta et al., 2020). One study (Suen et al., 2020) found that a write-in option increased engagement and reduced the possibility of miscategorization. In a focus group, youth stated that many of their peers did not want to be put in a box and some of the potential responses were not listed (Pelkey & Phillips, 2022b). As new gender identity terms are created, this “write-in” option allows the survey to stay progressive, as well as to add or change terms in response to student data collection (Suen et al, 2020). Researchers in the field have suggested using open-ended response options, in spite of the additional work involved in analysis of multiple responses (Porta & Brown, 2020).

Research supporting the gender identity questions on the KCTC Student Survey:

- Government and research organizations are focusing on developing valid SOGI items with culturally responsive and statistically reliable measures. Researchers indicated that adolescents themselves report non-categorical identities when they find the opportunity to do so (Eliot, 2015; Russell et al., 2009; Wagaman, 2016).
- For gender identity, recent research includes a transgender category, and a few recent surveys allow respondents to express their gender as part of a non-binary spectrum, including non-traditional labels such as genderqueer or gender fluid (Goldberg et al., 2020; Morandini et al., 2017; Kosciw et al., 2019).
- Age, sex assigned at birth, and educational attainment play important roles to determine gender identity terminology (Morgan et al., 2020).
- To measure the gender identity of the respondent, a two-step set of items should be included on sex assigned at birth and the current gender identity (Bauer et al., 2017; Temkin et al., 2017).
- Because youth are still exploring their identity, it is important for SOGI questions to reflect this growth by offering identity options outside of the traditional binary. Youth should be allowed space to describe their identity in addition to categorical descriptors. This can be achieved using open-ended questions or longer lists of identity options (DeChants et al., 2021).
- Incorporating non-binary genders allows us to begin to understand the factors that create vulnerability and can contribute to building stronger foundations for ethical best practices (Frohard-Dourlent et al., 2016).
- “Understanding what terms SOGI minority adolescents use to describe themselves - and why - is expected to improve future research with this population and inform program providers, health care professionals and others working with these youth” (Porta, et al., 2020, p.2).

Item 3: Sexual Orientation

Table 4

Comparison of item descriptions for “sexual orientation.”

2021-2022 Item	Revised 2022-2023 Item
<p>Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Straight, that is, not gay • Gay or lesbian • Bisexual • I’m not sure yet • Something else 	<p>Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Straight • Gay or Lesbian • Bisexual • Questioning or Not sure • Other (Optional Write-In) • I don't know what this question is asking.

Rationale for Revised Item 3:

In the 2021-2022 KCTC administration year, the expert roundtable (Chaney et al., 2022) and the youth focus groups (Pelkey & Phillips, 2022b) indicated that changes might be necessary regarding the sexual orientation demographic question response options. On the 2022 KCTC Student Survey, 4.4% of students in 6th, 8th, 10th, and 12th grade that responded to the sexual orientation optional module indicated that their identity was “something else,” meaning it was not included on the response options provided. An “other” with a “write in” option would include and clarify their response. In addition, youth strongly voiced disdain for the term “something else.” The LTI Team made changes as recommended by research and as voiced by youth.

There has been a lack of consistent terminology used in sexual orientation research which creates challenges in identifying appropriate standard measures and language (Eliaon et al., 2015). “Researchers have used up to 100 different ways of measuring sexual and gender identities” (Elisaon et al., 2015 p. 571). Because of these challenges, comprehension is a primary concern, especially for cisgender (straight) respondents. For example, Bauer et al. (2017) reported that about 30% of Americans were unfamiliar with the term ‘transgender’ or unsure of its meaning. Additionally, the LTI Team focus groups (Pelkey & Phillips, 2022b) had participants with similar concerns. Since the majority of respondents in census-based research

will be cisgender (straight), misclassification is a concern based on a lack of understanding of the question due to lack of exposure or due to not understanding the terminology. Therefore, a response item was included at the end of the choices which allows students to choose the option “I do not know what this question is asking.”

The review of literature did indicate questions regarding identity, attraction, and/or behavior might be asked of this age group. The LTI Team determined these questions to be beyond the scope of the KCTC Student Survey. These types of questions will continue to be excluded from this survey.

Research supporting the sexual orientation question asked on the KCTC Student Survey:

- Measures of sexual orientation almost always rely on traditional terms such as gay, lesbian, bisexual, homosexual, and heterosexual/straight, with few examples of non-traditional labels, such as queer or pansexual (Goldberg et al., 2020; Morandini et al., 2017; Kosciw et al., 2019).
- Sometimes sexual orientation questions can be difficult for youth to answer, and they prefer survey questions with “other” or intermediate options such as “mostly heterosexual” (Austin et al., 2007; Morgan et al., 2020).
- The option “other,” might be preferred to “something else,” and it becomes most informative when a write-in option is available with it (Morgan et al., 2020; Russell et al., 2009).
- For adolescents, and particularly for youth in middle school, understanding of their sexual identity is in development, and sexual orientation may require the measurement of multiple dimensions such as identity, attraction, and/or behavior (Morgan et al., 2020; Temkin et al., 2017).
- Providing “I am not sure yet” and “something else” as response options for sexual orientation items offers more in-depth findings with greater insights (Morgan et al., 2020).
- Younger adolescents, specifically ages 10-15, are most often unsure about their sexual orientation due to their developmental stage. They are more likely to select a questioning, not sure, or write-in option. As age increases, the understanding and clarity of their own sexual orientation solidify as well (McDermott, 2010; Russell et al., 2009; Remafedi et al., 1992).

- A study reported that students suggested adding a neutral category including a “write in” option. They also suggested that “queer” and “questioning” be added as distinct sexual orientation categories in addition to those provided (Russell et al., 2009).
- At least 10 percent of students from research studies identified as queer, questioning, or self-described in the write-in category (Russell et al., 2009; Remafedi et al., 1992).
- If lesbian, gay, bisexual, or straight are the only response options offered, it forces students to choose a category that doesn’t wholly describe them or skip the question altogether. This misrepresents the large portion of students ages 10-15 who may be unsure, who do not want to, or do not feel able to, define themselves in a specific sexual orientation (McDermott E., 2010).

Data Analysis

All KCTC Student Survey procedures are designed to protect guardian/parent and student rights and privacy, allowing for self-administered, anonymous, and voluntary participation. No personally identifiable information will be asked on the survey, and the data will be saved in a password protected secured server managed by firewall protection. Privacy is ensured through a sound technology infrastructure along with clear protocols and practices restricting access to key personnel. In addition, aggregations with fewer than 20 students in any specific demographic group will not be included in the report.

The LTI Research Team will analyze the aggregated data according to the SOGI response options. Descriptive statistics will be reported for the SOGI questions by response option categories. Self-reported gender identity will be analyzed individually with reported sex assigned at birth. Students with a one-to-one match between gender identity and the sex assigned at birth will be reported as cisgender. Students that do not have a one-to-one match with current gender identity of “male” or “female” and the sex assigned at birth will be reported as transgender.

Risk ratios will be used to emphasize areas of greatest disparity. Additionally, in order to help identify disparities, the LTI Research Team will compare sexual orientations individually

and in varying aggregations to specific risk and protective factors. This will allow schools and communities to focus prevention efforts based on the data.



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