Published on *Gay-Straight Alliance Network* (http://www.gsanetwork.org)

California schools to get new history lessons

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Jul. 22, 2011
Hi-Desert Star
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SACRAMENTO — History lessons for California students are about to get more inclusive.

Gov. Jerry Brown signed Senate Bill 48 into law July 14, changing the language in the Education Code to include teaching about the contributions of Pacific Islanders, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered Americans, and people with disabilities.

Prior to the bill, those groups were not mentioned in the code's list of culturally and racially diverse groups students should be taught about.

School boards already were required to include educational materials that "accurately portray the role and contributions" of other groups, including American Indians and Americans of European, African, Mexican and Asian descent, the bill's language states.

The new law also prohibits schools from providing textbooks or teaching curriculum that promotes discrimination against any person or group.

Brown issued a statement from his office Thursday and thanked Senator Mark Leno from San Francisco, who introduced the bill.

"History should be honest. This bill revises existing laws that prohibit discrimination in education and ensures that the important contributions of Americans from all backgrounds and walks of life are included in our history books," Brown stated.

Carl Phillips, the principal at Yucca Valley High School, said textbooks will play a key role in the implementation of the revised education code.

“All textbooks and instruction materials should be all-inclusive and not biased toward any group,” he said. “We need to come to grips with ourselves as a society and make sure we’re not discriminating against anyone. I think they’ll come out with new textbooks and we’ll be OK. We need to hold those publishers accountable too.”

The state legislature intends for charter schools and alternative schools to take note of the new provisions.

Joshua Springs Christian School administrators were not available for comment.

According to Associated Press reports, one political action group is trying to overturn the bill. Capitol Resource Institute, based out of Sacramento, is taking measures to initiate a vote that would overturn SB 48.

Despite plans to oppose the bill, others say they are happy their children and students will be educated about the contributions of all factions of society.

“It’s important for young people to learn about the accomplishments of all types of people. For one thing, it gives kids who may fall into one of those categories some sense that they belong, and for the rest of the young people, it will teach them that it’s ignorant to marginalize anybody who they see as ‘different,’” local musician and parent Ted Quinn said.

Educators said they welcome the change too.

“I am glad that the state is moving in this progressive direction. To discount the importance of selected societal dynamics as they influenced history is foolish and borderline fascist,” assistant instructor Grant Palmer said.

Jennifer Jungwirth, a teacher at YVHS who also serves as adviser for the True Colors Gay-Straight Alliance, embraced the measure as well.

“I’m all for the change; I think it’s great. “I hope to see more positive changes in the future in that area,” Jungwirth said.

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