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A recently expanded law says California schools must teach about the contributions of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in history. Yet local school officials say it will take some time to fulfill the requirement, mostly because they can't afford new textbooks or supplemental material.

They also have not yet received any guidelines from the state about exactly what to teach.

Critics claim the law promotes homosexuality, but Bill Dabbs, an assistant superintendent in the Oxnard Union High School District, sees it as a matter of equity.

"There's been a movement to make sure minority groups are portrayed for their positive contributions to society," Dabbs said. "This law is to make sure we're doing the same thing for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people — that we're not ignoring this group.

"We're not promoting it. We're just trying to give a fair historic perspective."

The requirement, which goes into effect in January, expands an existing law that says schools must teach about how minorities — including Mexican-Americans, Asian-Americans, European-Americans, African-Americans and Native Americans — have contributed to history. The new requirement also says schools must teach about the contributions of disabled people.

Schools must include those groups' contributions "when adopting instructional materials," the requirement says. Yet the state has halted textbook adoption until at least 2015 because of budget cuts.

"It's hard to say what the expectation is. ... The legislation does not stipulate a minimum level of content that must be included," said Veronica Aguila, administrator of the instructional services office at the California Department of Education.

Locally, the Conejo Valley Unified School District has decided not to implement the new requirement yet.

"We're not doing anything; that's the bottom line," said Janet Cosaro, deputy superintendent. "Our curriculum and textbooks are staying the same."

Cosaro said she has received "a few" phone calls from parents concerned about the requirement.

Other districts, including the Hueneme School District in Oxnard, are waiting to get guidelines from the state. Those guidelines could be a supplement to the existing curriculum or part of an update, said Superintendent Jerry Dannenberg.

"The law doesn't say what to teach, where to teach it, or when to teach it," Dannenberg said. "They could say, 'Here are the grade levels, and here are the people and contributions we'd like noted.' "

Dannenberg said the shooting of Larry King, 15, by a classmate at E.O. Green Middle School in 2008 would not affect how the district handles the new law. King had told students he was gay.

"This is an issue every school district is facing," Dannenberg said.

Oxnard Union is reviewing its curriculum to be sure nothing denigrates people covered under the new requirement. In addition, Dabbs said the district could start implementing the law by giving students the option to read novels involving characters who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or disabled.

Giuliana "G!" Pe Benito, 16, a senior at Westlake High School, advocated for the requirement in Sacramento this summer. Last year, she studied Advanced Placement U.S. history and did not learn anything about the contributions of gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender people, she said.

"Being part of the queer community, I feel this is something I have the right to know about," said Pe Benito, who also is a member of the Gay Straight Alliance Network. "We still don't have equal representation with other minorities. ... With education comes understanding and a greater acceptance of people."

The law gets mixed reviews from local school board members, who must approve the textbooks school districts buy.

Mike Dunn, a member of the Conejo board, said in an email that he thinks parents will take their children out of public schools because of the new requirement.

"I believe the community is opposed to promoting homosexuality in the public schools," Dunn said. "Parents want their children educated, not indoctrinated."

But Kathi Smith, a member of the board for the Ojai Unified School District, says the law will let children see that all kinds of people make valuable contributions to society. Schools will incorporate the law into their curriculum as funds allow, she said.

"I don't envision this at all as crowding out the contributions of straight people," Smith said. "Students will still be expected to learn George Washington to George Bush — and anyone who might have been gay in between. ... This isn't about politics; it's about education."

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