

Bill would ensure gays get just due in history books

By Diana Lambert, Sacramento Bee

For decades, California educators have wrestled with how to teach history in the public schools.

Given the diversity of race, ethnicity and religion in California's classrooms, whose story do you tell? Who are the leading characters? And how are they portrayed?

Existing state law requires social studies lessons to incorporate the storylines of American Indians, African Americans, Mexican Americans, Asian Americans and European Americans. In the 1970s, textbooks were amended to highlight the contributions of women. In recent years, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu and Sikh representatives have lobbied for their place.

Now, state lawmakers are considering a bill that would add another thread to that complex tale: requiring public schools to incorporate the achievements of gays and lesbians into the history and social studies curriculum.

The bill, dubbed the Fair Education Act, also would add bisexual and transgender people, Pacific Islanders and people with disabilities to the list of groups whose stories must be highlighted. The legislation would prohibit school districts from adopting materials that reflect negatively on a person's religion or sexual orientation.

The bill was authored by state Sen. Mark Leno, a San Francisco Democrat and one of the first openly gay men to serve in the Legislature. He argues the legislation simply adds gays, lesbians and transgender people to the list of minority and gender groups already represented in public school lessons.

“It is apparent that we are censoring the history lessons of our students by denying them the facts of the struggle for equal civil rights for the LGBT community,” Leno said.

Read the whole story