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Thankfully, I've forgotten most of what school was like. But I remember one thing all too well: no one other than me in the United States ever had been queer, and if they were, they must have been some sick puppies.

Why did I feel that way? Because I didn't see anyone like me in my history books. There were no queer politicians, inventors or civil rights heroes. It's no wonder that kids were scared of boys who liked boys or girls who liked girls. Or that schoolyard bullies picked on queer classmates.

Unfortunately, even now when same-sex couples can marry in six states, some kids, queer and straight, come away from school with the same stereotypes and ignorance, and bullies still target LGBT students.

Legislation recently passed by the California State Senate – the Fair, Accurate, Inclusive and Respectful Education (FAIR) Act – (if it becomes law) will do much to combat this ignorance and fear. If the bill is enacted, California will become the first state in the country to require teaching of LGBT history in schools.

The proposed law would require the contributions of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people to the economic, political and social development in California and the United States to be included in social science textbooks. No specific curricula or examples of instruction would be mandated and schools wouldn't be required to revise or purchase new textbooks.

Sen. Mark Leno (D-San Francisco) the first openly gay man to be elected to the California State Senate, is the author of the FAIR Education Act (which is sponsored by Equality California and the Gay-Straight Alliance Network). His passion for the legislation grew out of "the epidemic of bullying and suicide," Leno said in a telephone interview (referring to LGBT students nationwide who had been bullied and/or committed suicide), "knowing about LGBT history will make schools safer."

"It will help LGBT kids, and straight kids, too," Leno added, "to learn about the gay civil rights movement. We're censoring history. Kids learn that there was an African American named Martin Luther King, Jr. But they don't know about Harvey Milk."

Teaching LGBT history would "promote an atmosphere of respect for students of all sexual orientations and gender orientations," wrote Carolyn Laub, executive director of the Gay-Straight Alliance Network, in an e-mail.

"Research by the California Safe Schools Coalition shows that students are less than half as likely to be bullied based on sexual orientation or gender identity," Laub added, "in schools where the majority of students report that LGBT people are included in classroom discussion."

Glendora High School, testified at a State Senate committee hearing in support of the Fair Education Act (SB48). "As a gay young man, I struggled with accepting my sexual identity for years. In school I never learned that people like me had achieved great things like leading a civil rights movement," Baiseri said at the hearing. "Instead, I had only learned stereotypes. I'm thankful the Senate passed SB48 so that someday other students like me can learn our history. Learning that you're a part of a group with a cultural and political history can be life saving to a young person questioning his or her sexuality. Isaiah Baiseri, a senior at

Opponents are convinced that the law would perpetuate a "homosexual agenda" and encourage "immorality" in the schools. The California Catholic Conference of Bishops calls the bill "unnecessary and overly intrusive."

The issue of "homosexuality is far from settled," a conservative activist and school board member from Sacramento told the New York Times. "It is all part of the same agenda."

LGBT history in schools isn't about teaching a "gay agenda" or sex, Leno said. "Though some of the opponents seem fixated on body parts," Leno added.

The FAIR Education Act is expected to reach the California General Assembly by the end of summer. Leno is "hopeful" that the Assembly will pass the bill and that Gov. Jerry Brown will sign it.

I hope the bill passes and that other states follow California's lead. If we are taught our history, more LGBT students will think of schools as safe places of learning instead of as breeding grounds for bullies.

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News Article

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