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California today became the first state to require that school districts include in their social studies lessons the contributions of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people.

"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," said a statement from Gov. Jerry Brown (D), who signed the bill after supporters and opponents endured more than a week of suspense.

The bill, S.B. 48, which passed in the legislature on a mostly party-line vote, drew sharp opposition from some religious groups, who raised concerns that schools were promoting what they call an immoral lifestyle and impinging on parental rights to teach their children about sexual issues.

But supporters hail the law as a breakthrough that will give children a more complete view of history and society and make California students safer.

"Studies have shown that when students report learning about LGBT people in the classroom, rates of bullying decrease by more than 50 percent," said Carolyn Laub, executive director of the Gay-Straight Alliance Network in San Francisco, in a conference call with reporters this afternoon.

Benji Delgadillo, a senior at San Juan Hills High School, spoke on the call about his experience as a 16-year-old transgender student. "After 3 years of feeling like my school treated me like something that shouldn't exist or something that should be covered up and not mentioned, I will finally be able to learn in an environment that recognizes the rights, history, and humanity of my community," he said.

California Sen. Mark Leno (D) of San Francisco, the sponsor of the bill, said teaching students about gay civil rights advocate Harvey Milk is similar to teaching students about Martin Luther King. Both men were assassinated for their advocacy work. "There's no good reason why we would teach the one and censor the other," he said.

Jul. 14, 2011

News Article

<http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Education/2011/0714/California-...> [1]

Christian Science Monitor

Stacy Teicher Khadaroo

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[1] <http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Education/2011/0714/California-becomes-first-state-to-mandate-gay-history-in-curriculum>