



Assembly Bill A1335 FACT SHEET

Senate bill S 1569, A1335 would require Boards of Education to include instruction, and adopt instructional materials, that accurately portray political, economic, and social contributions of persons with disabilities and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals.

Sponsors: : Asw Valerie Vanieri-Huttie

PURPOSE OF THE PROPOSED LAW

A1335/S1569 (companion bill which passed in the NJ Senate in June 2018), would ensure that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people and individuals with disabilities are included in instructional materials, which studies have shown is linked to greater student safety, lower rates of bullying, and reduced prejudice towards members and allies of these groups. This law would require that LGBT Americans, as well as Americans with disabilities, are included and recognized for their significant historic contributions to the economic, political, and social development of New Jersey and the United States. Specifically, this legislation would add LGBT people and individuals with disabilities to the existing list of underrepresented cultural and ethnic groups, which are covered by current law related to inclusion in textbooks and other instructional materials in schools. This law would bring classroom materials into alignment with Core Curriculum Content Standards by ensuring that students receive diverse instruction in history and the social sciences, which will cultivate respect towards minority groups, allow students to appreciate differences, and acquire the skills and knowledge needed to function effectively with people of various backgrounds.

BACKGROUND

Studies demonstrate that sharing accurate and inclusive information is a vital step to setting a climate of respect and keeping our schools safe. Schools that perpetuate silence or harmful stereotypes and hearsay about LGBT people or people with disabilities can be breeding grounds for the fear and ignorance that fuel bullying during the early grades and hate violence or even suicide by the time students reach high school. Currently, LGBT students and students with disabilities are deprived of a historical context for their lives due to the absence of positive representations of these individuals in classroom materials. This lack of positive role models contributes to harassment, intimidation and bullying that leads to negative educational outcomes and higher absenteeism. Accurate and positive portrayals of LGBT Americans and Americans with disabilities in classroom materials teaches all students to respect differences and to empathize with others' perspectives, thereby increasing students' sense of belonging and ability to learn in a world that values diversity.

Finally, questions pertaining to LGBT history are now being asked on national Advanced Placement College Board Tests. The lack of historically accurate information on the LGBT community leaves New Jersey students without the proper educational instruction and knowledge necessary to adequately answer these questions.

Existing Laws

Existing law requires social sciences instruction about men and women, African Americans, Italian Americans, American Indians, Arab Americans and other ethnic groups central to the economic, political, and social development of New Jersey and the United States with emphasis on materials that celebrate the cultures of these groups while combating negative and harmful stereotypes. New Jersey statute also requires all schools to have course of study in the Holocaust and other genocides.

In adopting Common Core State Standards, New Jersey requires that school districts include multicultural curricula and instructional content that provide opportunities for students to interact positively with others regardless of race, creed, color, national origin, ancestry, age, marital status, sexual orientation, gender, religion, disability, or socioeconomic status.

RESEARCH

The LGBT community represents a significant and indelible part of the history and social fabric of New Jersey. An analysis of the 2010 U.S. Census by the Williams Institute reveals that there are more than 16,000 LGBT households in New Jersey (not including LGBT people who do not cohabitate), and 20% of these households are raising children.¹

Despite the fact that LGBT people represent a sizable and important demographic in New Jersey, mention of the LGBT community's role in the state and country's history is virtually non-existent in textbooks and other school instructional materials. The absence of positive portrayals of LGBT individuals and their significant historic and social contributions to the United States and New Jersey perpetuates a culture of silence that allows stereotypes of LGBT people to flourish, making LGBT students targets of bullying and harassment. Findings from the GLSEN 2011 (and more recently, the 2017 National School Climate Survey) National School Climate Survey demonstrate that great majorities of LGBT students in New Jersey schools have felt unsafe. Nearly all 94% of students have heard the term "gay" used in a negative context, and 90% of students reported hearing homophobic slurs regularly during school. In addition, 87% of students also heard negative remarks regarding actual or perceived gender expression. These comments are not exclusive to just students, as 17% of youths reported hearing school staff make homophobic statements.

Given these findings, it is no wonder that the 2011 GLSEN Survey also found most LGBT students in New Jersey had been victimized at school with 77% experiencing verbal harassment, and 27% experiencing physical harassment based on their actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity.

The New Jersey Anti Bullying Task Force's 2014 Annual Report also recommends that schools integrate systemic practices that improve students' ability to collaborate and empathize with others' perspectives, rather than yearly or infrequent prevention programs that advocate tolerance and an appreciation for diversity. As a result, the New Jersey Coalition for Bullying Awareness and Prevention also recommends implementing an LGBT inclusive curriculum, similar to information already provided about the histories and cultures of various racial and ethnic groups, in order to reduce prejudice and bias in the school.

Including lessons that promote respect and appreciation for diversity will help to reverse current rates of bullying and harassment LGBT students face on a regular basis. GLSEN has found that students in schools with inclusive curriculums were more likely to report feelings of acceptance towards of LGBT students than their classmates in schools. These lessons have also been linked to reduced absenteeism, with 17% of students in schools with an inclusive curriculum missing school in the past month because of feeling unsafe compared to 33% of students who attend schools without an inclusive curriculum.

GLSEN (2012). Teaching Respect: LGBT-Inclusive Curriculum and School Climate, a GLSEN Research Brief. New York, GLSEN.

GLSEN (2013). School Climate in New Jersey (State Snapshot). New York, New York, GLSEN

NJ Coalition for Bullying Awareness and Prevention Expert Advisory Group (2012). Preventing and Addressing Bullying of LGBT Students

¹ Gates, G. and Cooke, A. (2010) *New Jersey Census Snapshot: 2010*. Los Angeles, CA: The Williams Institute, University of California-Los Angeles School of Law.