

Overcome intolerance with education

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On Aug. 10, Illinois joined California, New Jersey and Colorado as the only states with a law mandating the inclusion of LGBT history in public school curriculum. Gov. J.B. Pritzker signed legislation ensuring that state schools teach the roles and contributions of LGBT figures in American history.

It is absolutely necessary to implement the teaching of LGBT history in K-12 curriculum. It is not uncommon to study the history and contributions of other marginalized groups, such as black Americans, indigenous people, Hispanic people and women. In school, we cover the history of straight people every day. However, LGBT people are largely erased from our history lessons.

We live in a heteronormative society which influences some people to believe that LGBT people are taboo and vulgar. Some people fail to realize that LGBT people are still people at the end of the day. Kids have LGBT parents, family members and friends. Many kids are a part of the LGBT community themselves. This alone is a crucial reason to integrate LGBT history into lessons. Cis heterosexual children have so much representation. They see others like them portrayed in history and have several positive role models to look up to. LGBT children deserve no different.

The adolescent years are crucial to development. Children are discovering their own identities and figuring out where they fit in society, which can be extremely difficult, even more so for LGBT children. Being taught positive LGBT figures in school gives these children a chance to see people like themselves reflected in history, enabling them to feel more comfortable with their sexuality and gender identity. When children see people similar to them who have achieved greatness, it makes them passionate. It increases their drive to learn and helps them realize that they can do great things as well.

Teaching LGBT history in schools will also help to increase tolerance among students. The history of marginalized groups in this country must be taught and discussed to promote empathy and understanding. LGBT students are targeted and harassed by bullies, usually being referred to with homophobic slurs and sometimes even being physically assaulted. Studies show that LGBT youths are nearly three times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers.

"Suicide is not caused because of their LGBT identity, but rather how the world reacts to their identity," John Ayers, a researcher at the University of California said.

Ignorance fosters intolerance. As a result, the best way to overcome intolerance is through education and mutual understanding. Children must be exposed to different viewpoints in order to develop empathy. If heterosexual children are taught about the struggles and contributions of LGBT people in society, it is likely to lead to a significant decrease in the bullying and ostracization of LGBT children.

Chunks of history are being left untaught purely because they relate to LGBT people. Society needs to realize that LGBT history is history.