

Separation of Religion and State: State Board of Education

The National Council of Jewish Women believes that religious liberty and the separation of religion and state are constitutional principles that must be protected and preserved in order to maintain our democratic society. NCJW also works to ensure and advance individual and civil rights. We endorse and resolve to work for the following:

The prevention and elimination of censorship of educational resources and the promotion of scientifically sound public information.

- **NCJW SUPPORTS Senate Bill 513 (Ellis)/House Bill 710(Rose).** Relating to placing the State Board of Education under periodic review by the Sunset Advisory Commission. Both state that the State Board of Education is subject to review under chapter 325, Government Code (Texas Sunset Act) but is not abolished under that chapter. Section 2 states that this Act takes effect immediately if it received 2/3 vote of the members elected to each house.
- **NCJW SUPPORTS Senate Bill 440 (Ellis).** Relating to transferring statutorily assigned powers and functions and activities of the State Board of Education to the Texas Education Agency. This includes control over setting curriculum standards and adopting textbooks.
- **NCJW SUPPORTS House Bill 420(Howard).** Relating to the Non Partisan Election of Members to the State Board of Education.
- **NCJW SUPPORTS House Bill 772 (Howard).** Relating to the Texas Education Agency providing live video webcasts of all State Board of Education Meetings.

Eliminating Censorship in Science:

The Texas State Board of Education is in the process of adopting proposed new science curriculum standards for the public schools. This process of reviewing textbooks occurs every ten years, so the curriculum adopted will affect an entire generation of Texas public school children. The Texas State Board of Education will make a decision on whether public school science classes will teach scientific concepts (evolution) or religious non-scientific beliefs known as intelligent design/creationism.

Why is this so important?

- Intelligent design or creationism undermines religious freedom in Texas by teaching one particular religious viewpoint as fact. The separation between church and state is never more important than in our public institutions especially the public classrooms.
- The State Board of Education has the responsibility to ensure that students throughout Texas are given the best possible opportunities to succeed. It is irresponsible to teach

religious ideology in place of proven, universally accepted science, and it jeopardizes our students' ability to learn key scientific concepts.

There is no controversy in the scientific community regarding evolution. The National Academy of Sciences calls evolution “the only tested, comprehensive, scientific explanation for the nature of the biological world today that is supported by overwhelming evidence and widely accepted in the scientific community.” The decisions of the Texas State Board of Education have far reaching impact since Texas is so large, and many publishers will change their textbooks to meet Texas standards.

The State Board of Education held public hearings in November 2008 after which the final standard draft was revised to include scientifically sound language about students analyzing explanations. The draft standards also include new language explaining that science involves the study of “testable explanation and predictions of natural phenomena.” This new standard proposal deleted a provision that requires teachers to instruct students in “weaknesses and strengths of evolution theory.” This new language would make it clear that supernatural explanations like intelligent design/creationism have no place in science classrooms.

However, after public hearings were held January 21, 2009, the board again looked at the issues and decided students should have to evaluate a variety of fossil types and assess the arguments against universal common descent, which serves as a main principle of evolution – that all organisms have a common ancestor. Science experts have stated this is unscientific and promotes creationism. In addition, another amendment to the standards directs science teachers and students to “describe the sufficiency or insufficiency of common ancestry to explain the sudden appearance, stasis, and sequential nature of groups in the fossil record.” Again, science experts claim that this new language is “absurd” and is asking students to explain something that does not exist.

A final vote on adoption of the standards will take place in March 2009.

Eliminating Censorship in Social Studies:

Although not as contentious, the standards for Social Studies text books are also being reviewed.

- Inclusion of gender stereotypes have been subject to debate.
- The far-right has questioned women's role in the work force and economy.

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