

Monday, February 7, 2005 - Montana 59th Legislative Session
Rachel Roberts - Government Affairs Lobbyist - Montana Family Foundation
SJ No. 8 - (S) Education & Cultural Resources

Good Afternoon Chairman Ryan and Members of the Committee

I'm Rachel Roberts representing the Montana Family Foundation

Senate Joint Resolution No. 8 addresses the Kansas State Board of Education into removing evolution theory from the science curriculum.

In defense of the State of Kansas, the 1999 decision was that the board decided that it would not test students at the state level on what they know about evolution. The adopted new Science Education Standards in 1999 did not remove or ban evolution from these standards. Evolution remained in the state-approved curriculum. There is no mention of Creationism, Creation Science, or Intelligent Design in the standards.

The state board of Kansas also decided that it will not mandate the teaching of the origins of the universe, but that instructors have the academic freedom to teach macroevolution if they chose. Clearly, allowing local schools freedom to teach their own science curriculum. Senate Joint Resolution No. 8 appears to restrict academic freedom.

In defense of Intelligent Design, a 1987 U.S. Supreme Court ruling says that competing theories of origins can be taught in public schools as long as no particular religion was being established. The intelligent Design of Genesis teaches the origins of all things created from the creation of man, mankind (the fall of man, the flood of Noah, the origin of races, marriage... Thus, Intelligent Design would conform to the Supreme Courts ruling because it is based on no particular religion and can be introduced in public schools.

Kansas State Dept. Of Education
<http://www.ksbe.state.ks.us>

ATTN RACHAEL ROBERTS

Resolution No. 8 is nothing more than propaganda and a misrepresentation of the facts. In Kansas, curriculum is selected and approved by local school districts not the State Board to Education. In 1999 the majority of the Kansas State Board of Education members were unwilling to approve proposed state science standards that accepted Darwinism and Naturalistic Evolution as the only scientific explanation for the origin of life, something that is still a mystery even to scientists. We received a tremendous amount of pressure from national science organizations to force adoption of science standards that failed to allow students to examine existing scientific evidence that may be critical to the evolutionary theory that one species can evolve into another species. From the State Board's perspective, when teaching the subject of the origin of life, we left it up to local schools boards to address the subject in anyway agreeable with their local communities, including teaching Darwinism to 1st graders all day long if they chose to do so.

John W. Bacon
Kansas State Board of Education

DATE

To: Kansas Educators

Setting high standards of achievement for all Kansas students continues to be of primary importance to the State Board of Education. The science standards contained in this document reflect the State Board's efforts to strengthen state standards and assessments by providing greater clarity and specificity as to what students should know and be able to do.

Even while expressing the hope that these standards provide a framework for local curriculum development efforts, we cannot ignore the significant amount of contention and speculation that has surrounded the science standards since their adoption by the State Board. For clarification purposes, it should be noted that the science standards contained in this document still include the evolutionary concepts of variation within a species and natural selection. However, the standards do not include the evolutionary theory that one species can evolve into another species, references to geologic time or the Big Bang theory of the origin of the Universe.

The absence of those items in the standards does not prevent schools from providing instruction in those areas. While it is the hope and intent of the State Board that all schools will teach up to the standards, each school also has the ability to teach beyond the standards.

We remain grateful to all the educational stakeholders who provided input on how to strengthen these curricular standards. Your continued efforts to improve student learning in Kansas are appreciated.

Sincerely,

The Kansas State Board of Education

ATTN: RACHEL ROBERTS

In August 1999 the Kansas State Board of Education approved new statewide standards in science. The action came at the end of a regular review of state assessment standards, which by law must occur every three years.

In Kansas, statewide curricular standards are developed to give local school districts a guide as to what students should know and be able to do at certain grade levels. They are not intended to mandate curriculum. Local school districts retain authority over curriculum decisions.

The statewide standards are used in the development of state assessments. Assessments are given in core curriculum areas, such as reading, writing, mathematics and science. The assessments are given every year or two years, depending on the subject matter.

State assessments are used to gauge school improvement – to determine if schools are in fact helping students learn. Assessment scores are just one measure used in determining school accreditation.

When the regular review of the standards began in 1997, the state board determined that the standards would be more useful to school districts if they were revised to be more specific as to the items that would be assessed. To accomplish that, the board approved the formation of writing committees in each of the assessment subject areas. The writing committees were charged with rewriting the existing state standards to meet the objective of greater specificity.

In most cases, the standards writing committees were composed of Kansas educators in the field, parents and other interested parties. In the case of the 27-member science standards writing committee, representation included educators in science, privately employed science experts, parents and individuals appointed by various members of the state board.

The science standards writing committee began work in 1998. In drafting the Kansas standards, the writing committee borrowed from the National Science Education Standards, Benchmarks for Science Literacy and Pathways to the Science Standards. Numerous public hearings were conducted by the science standards writing committee during the course of developing the new statewide science standards. In addition to the public hearings, several drafts of the standards were brought before the state board for input and direction.

At one point in this process, some members of the board expressed concern with the treatment of evolution in the standards being presented by the writing committee. The concern was that evolution was being given too great an emphasis and that macro evolution, the theory that one species can evolve into another species, was being presented as fact rather than theory. The writing committee was asked to address those concerns.

The writing committee made some attempts to address the concerns voiced by some members of the board, but a resolution that was acceptable to both the writing committee members and the board members in question was not forthcoming. So, in the summer of 1999, three members of the board met with a KSDE staff representative to revise portions of the writing committee's document in a manner that would increase the likelihood that the document would be accepted by a majority of the board.

The revisions sought to place evolution in a context those board members thought to be more appropriate. Specifically, references to macro evolution were removed. Micro evolution – those changes that take place within a species – was retained, as was natural selection. In addition, references to the geologic timetable were removed, as were references to the age of the Earth and the Big Bang theory. Added to the standards was the statement that "Studies of data regarding fossils, geologic tables, cosmological information are encouraged. But standards regarding origins are not mandated."

Additional changes included the revision of the definitions for science and theory and a statement that "No evidence or analysis of evidence that contradicts a current science theory should be censored."

The modified version of the standards, along with the writing committee's version, was brought before the board in August 1999. The modified version of the standards was approved on a 6-4 vote.

What the decision means to local school boards is that questions regarding macro evolution, geologic time and formation of the universe will not be included on the state science assessment. It does not mean that those things cannot be taught in the classroom. Again, the decision is left to local school boards.

The first state assessment to be given based on the new science standards is scheduled to for spring 2001.