

# ACTIVIST TOOLKIT



This **Stand Up for Science Activist Toolkit** is a valuable resource for learning how you can help counter efforts to undermine sound science education in Texas public schools. Learn what's at stake and how you can help ensure that Texas students get a 21<sup>st</sup>-century science education in their public school classrooms.

# THE BACKGROUND:

## Censoring Science in Texas Public Schools

**Far-right pressure groups and their allies on the State Board of Education have worked repeatedly to change textbook content that conflicts with their political or religious beliefs. Key censorship targets have been science and health textbooks:**

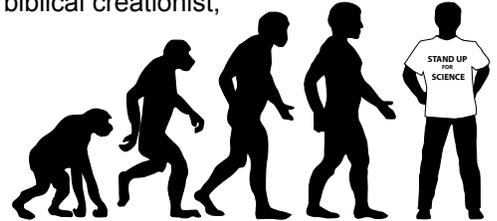
- ★ High school health textbooks have been stripped of medically accurate, common sense information on contraception and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases. Instead, student textbooks today are based on abstinence-only-until-marriage approaches that have been shown to be inaccurate, ineffective and even dangerous.
- ★ Discussions about global warming and pollution in high school environmental science textbooks have been attacked as “junk science,” “anti-American” and even “anti-Christian.”
- ★ Textbook references to events “millions of years ago” have been changed to read “in the distant past” so that they don’t conflict with Bible passages upon which creationists base their claims that Earth is just a few thousand years old.

# THE ISSUE:

## What Is at Stake in 2008?

**Censorship battles in past years have usually come after publishers submit their textbooks for approval by the State Board of Education.** This year, however, the State Board of Education is revising science curriculum standards – the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, or TEKS – on which the publishers actually base their textbooks. Alarming, the process to revise the science standards this year comes at a time when the influence of the religious right on the state board has never been greater. Today seven of the board’s 15 members comprise the far-right faction. Even worse, Gov. Rick Perry has appointed one of those seven members – a self-avowed biblical creationist, Don McLeroy, R-Bryan – as the state board’s new chairman.

McLeroy and his allies on the board have already insisted that the science curriculum standards require students to learn about so-called “weaknesses” of the theory of evolution. Yet scientists have repeatedly pointed out that those claimed “weaknesses” are phony, fabricated by anti-science pressure groups such as the Seattle-based Discovery Institute. The Discovery Institute promotes a religion-based concept called “intelligent design.” Supporters of that concept claim that life on Earth is too complex to have evolved through natural selection and therefore must be the product of an intelligent designer. The reality, of course, is that “intelligent design” is biblical creationism dressed up in a lab coat. In fact, a federal judge agreed with that assessment in a key Pennsylvania court case in late 2005.



# THE CALENDAR:

## Benchmarks in the Curriculum Revision Process

**The process for revising the state’s science curriculum standards has already begun. Following are key benchmarks in that process.**

- ★ **Winter and spring 2008:** Committees of teachers and other citizens nominated by the state board begin reviewing the current science standards and proposing revisions. TFN monitors this process and builds a broad Stand Up for Science coalition of pro-science groups and other supporters.
- ★ **Summer and Fall 2008:** The state board begins reviewing suggested revisions to the curriculum standards. Texans may offer opinions about the revisions at public hearings before the board. TFN notifies activists and offers information and other tools they need to testify at these hearings.
- ★ **Fall 2008 to Spring 2009:** The state board debates the new science standards. The board’s final decision must come by April 2009. TFN monitors this process and gives activists tools for contacting board members and building public support for sound science standards.
- ★ **Spring 2011:** Publishers submit new public school science textbooks for approval by the state board. TFN monitors the textbook adoption process and organizes opposition to censorship efforts by the religious right.

# TALKING POINTS:

## How to Talk about Evolution and Science Education in Texas

**T**he religious right has tried to frame the debate over evolution as a battle between science and faith. Yet many people of faith see no conflict between accepting the science of evolution and their belief in God.

The religious right also argues that teaching about “intelligent design”/creationism and the so-called “weaknesses” of the theory of evolution is only “fair.” “Teach both sides,” they say. “Teach the controversy.” Yet the real issue is whether our schoolchildren’s education will be based on sound science or, instead, on ideological agendas. Moreover, different religions and denominations within those religions have their own views about the origins of life. Public schools have no business deciding whose religious views about creation to teach in science classes.



### When you talk about this issue, remember the following points:

- ☆ **All parents want the best education for their kids. There is nothing fair about handicapping the future of our children with a 19<sup>th</sup>-century education in their 21<sup>st</sup>-century classrooms.**
- ☆ **Public schools should be making sure students are prepared to succeed in college and the jobs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, not deciding which religious beliefs to teach in science classes.**
- ☆ **We can do best for our kids and honor the faith of all Texans by teaching sound science in science classrooms and leaving personal religious views about creation to our families and churches.**
- ☆ **Cynical politicians should stop promoting a phony conflict between science and faith. This is just an attempt to divide people of faith for political gain. In truth, many people of faith see no conflict between accepting the science behind evolution and their faith in God.**

# JOIN TFN'S STAND UP FOR SCIENCE CAMPAIGN!

**The religious right has declared war on science.  
Sign this petition and help the Texas Freedom Network fight back!  
[www.standup4science.org](http://www.standup4science.org)**

Texas students deserve a 21<sup>st</sup>-century science education that prepares them for college and the jobs of tomorrow. I call on the Texas State Board of Education and the Commissioner of Education to adopt science curriculum standards that:

- are based on sound, peer-reviewed scholarship;
- do not undermine instruction on evolution, a concept that is critical to the understanding of all of the biological sciences; and
- leave instruction about religious beliefs to our families and congregations.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone (home/cell/work): \_\_\_\_\_

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## TFN ACTION PLEDGE:

- I will join the TFN Stand up for Science Rapid Response Team! (TFN will send e-mail updates about important events and information related to the SBOE and will notify you about when to take action.)

I would also like to:

- Testify in Austin at an SBOE hearing.
- Call and write my local officials.
- Become a postcard captain and distribute the petition above for sign-ups.
- Write a letter to the editor.
- Submit a blog post.
- Keep TFN informed on local media coverage.
- Speak to local progressive groups.



Do you have any special qualifications we should know about? (*teacher, science educator, etc.*)

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Do you have any relationships with State Board of Education members or other elected officials?

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**Please send this form back to Texas Freedom Network, P.O. Box 1624, Austin, Texas 78767.  
You may also fax it to: 512-322-0550, or you can sign-up online at [www.standup4science.org](http://www.standup4science.org).**