

PROPOSAL

OBJECTIVE ORIGINS SCIENCE POLICY

BE IT RESOLVED THAT THE FOLLOWING POLICY IS HEREBY PROPOSED FOR USE WITHIN THE DARBY SCHOOL DISTRICT:

Proposal: Objective Origins Science Policy

Science is an inquiry process used to investigate natural phenomena, resulting in the formation of theories verified by direct observations. These theories are challengeable and changeable. Historically, there have been **new developments that demonstrate scientific knowledge is subject to change as new evidence becomes available.** Therefore, **the results of a scientific investigation are always open to revision by further experiments.** Teachers in the Darby School District are encouraged to help students **assess evidence for and against theories**, to analyze the scientific strengths and weaknesses of existing scientific theories, including the Theory of Evolution, **by giving examples of scientific innovation** or discovery **challenging commonly held perceptions.**

** Bold/italics indicates language from Montana Content and Performance Standards*

I would like to refer to five relevant documents that give clarity to these questions:

Darby Consolidated School Board of Trustees Policy Manual

Montana School Board Association Principles and Guidelines; Philosophy of Local Board Responsibility

Beliefs and policies of the National School Board Association

No Child Left Behind Act, Conference report 2001

Montana Content and Performance Standards I. Darby Consolidated Schools Board of Trustees Policy Manual (ref: Curriculum/Instruction-series 2000, Academic Freedom -2330)

““Academic freedom is essential to the fulfillment of the purposes of Darby Schools. Darby staff will be protected from censorship or restraint, which unreasonably interferes with their obligation to expose students to the controversial issues that arise in today’s society.

When controversial issues arise, a teacher’s responsibility is to remain objective. Presentations should include a variety of sides or opinions. Therefore a teacher should be well informed in the areas being studied. Personal views when utilized or expressed must be clearly identified as such, so students will not believe them as facts. Statements of opinion should also be identified in order to help eliminate bias.””

II. Montana School Board Principles and Guidelines (MTSBA): Philosophy of Local Board Responsibility

Local School Boards exemplify American principles of representative democracy. MTSBA supports the concept of strong local control of school districts as established by the Montana Constitution. Acting with primary concern for the education of the students and being accountable to the public, school boards are community decision-making agencies for the public schools.

III. Beliefs & Policies of the National School Boards Association (NSBA): (As amended April 4&7, 2003, San Francisco, California.)

The NSBA is a federation of state school boards associations, of which, the MTSBA is a member. These ““Beliefs & Policies”” are representative of the ““strategic vision”” of ““a powerful, united, energetic Federation.””

““Underlying this shared vision are certain bedrock convictions.....(2) the conviction that local governance of public education is a cornerstone of democracy.””

While there is an abundance of relevant instruction that has bearing on the issue at hand, I will focus only on those areas that have a direct impact. These areas include 1) NSBA’s Vision for Public Education 2) Responsibilities of Local School Boards 3) Implementation of Federal Laws 4) Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

NSBA’s Vision for Public Education:

The National School Boards Association believes local school boards are the nation’s preeminent expression of grass roots democracy and that this form of governance of the public schools is fundamental to the continued success of public education.””

Article II Responsibilities of Local School Boards:

1.1 Philosophy of Local Board Responsibility:

Local school boards are an essential and enduring part of the American institution of representative government. Directly accountable to the people, local school boards are the educational policy makers for the public schools in local communities.

1.5 Implementation of Federal Laws:

It is the responsibility of local school boards to provide leadership to meet the goals and objectives of new federal laws, and to ensure that school board members, administrators, principals, teachers and other staff are knowledgeable regarding implementation requirements.

Article IV, Section 3— Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment

3.1 Local Control:

NSBA believes that the primary responsibility for approving courses of study and instructional programs of public schools should remain with local school boards with public input. NSBA believes that academic standards enacted by state governments should not adversely affect local control of curriculum.

3.2 Challenging and Appropriate Curriculum Materials:

Local school boards should take an active role in the development, approval, and maintenance of their district's curriculum. Boards are encouraged to adopt policies that take into account research findings when making decisions on curriculum and instructional practice.

3.3 Controversial Issues:

NSBA urges local school districts to present a balance of factual materials relating to any controversial issue.

In addition, the NASB posts an article on ““School Governance””: Why School Boards? Five Reasons for Local Control of Public Education. The article states, ““school boards, elected or appointed by their communities, represent the community's beliefs and values. Who better than these community representatives to shoulder the responsibility for preparing children to live productive and satisfying lives? The article continues with ““five reasons that the local school board should be the decision maker in today's schools:

- 1. Your school board looks out for children-first and foremost. Education is not a line item in your school board's budget-it is the only item.*
- 2. Your school board is the advocate for your community when decisions are made about your children's education. The school board represents the public's voice in public education, providing citizen governance for what the public schools need and what the community wants.*
- 3. Your school board sets the standard for achievement in your school district, incorporating the community's view of what students should know and be able to do at each grade level.*

IV. The No Child Left Behind Act (2001), Conference Report:

““Santorum Language””:

The conferees recognize that a quality science education should prepare students to distinguish the data and testable theories of science from religious or philosophical claims that are made in the name of science. Where topics are taught that may generate controversy (such as biological evolution), the curriculum should help students to understand the full range of scientific views that exist, why such topics may generate controversy, and how scientific discoveries can profoundly affect society.

I have attached a letter from the Congress of the United States addressed to Bruce Chapman of the Seattle based Discovery Institute. The letter is signed by Rep. John A. Boehner (R-OH), Chairman, No Child Left Behind Act Conference Committee; Sen. Judd Gregg (R-NH), member, No Child Left Behind Act Conference Committee; and Sen. Rick Santorum (R-PA), Author and sponsor of the Santorum Language. The letter gives clarity to the meaning and specific intent of the Act and the significance of the Conference report itself.

In short, claims that the original language was revised and subsequently ““watered down”” are unfounded. In fact, the revision ““made explicit Congress’s rejection of the idea that students only need to learn about the dominant scientific view of controversial topics.”” Thus confirming that ““public school students are entitled to learn that there are differing scientific views on issues such as biological evolution.””

Thus, the Darby school board should consider the No Child Left Behind Act in light of Article II, Section 1.5, Responsibility of the Local School Board as written in the Beliefs & Policies of the National School Boards Association (NSBA):

1.5 Implementation of Federal Laws:

It is the responsibility of local school boards to provide leadership to meet the goals and objectives of new federal laws, and to ensure that school board members, administrators, principals, teachers and other staff are knowledgeable regarding implementation requirements.

V. The Montana Science Content and Performance Standards: While in agreement with Montana School Board Association and the National School Board Association with regards to ““local school boards exemplifying the American principles of representative democracy””, as well as, the establishment of ““the concept of strong local control of school districts”” by the Montana Constitution, we believe the proposed policy change is congruent with the recommended Montana Science Content and Performance Standards, while enhancing the effectiveness of science education, promoting academic freedom and objectivity without religious, naturalistic or philosophic bias or assumption.

Science Content and Performance Standards:

Science is an inquiry process used to investigate natural phenomena, resulting in the formation of theories verified by directed observations. These theories are challengeable and changeable.

10.54.5062 BENCHMARK FOR SCIENCE CONTENT STANDARD 6 FOR END OF GRADE 8 (1) The benchmark for science content standard 6 at the end of grade 8 is the ability to: (a) *trace developments that demonstrate scientific knowledge is subject to change as new evidence becomes available*

10.54.5053 BENCHMARK FOR SCIENCE CONTENT STANDARD 5 UPON GRADUATION (1) The benchmark for science content standard 5 upon graduation is the ability to: (b) model the ongoing, collaborative scientific process of gathering and evaluating information (e.g., *assess evidence for and against theories*, look for patterns, devise and retest different models); (d) *give examples of scientific innovation challenging commonly held perceptions.*

10.54.5013 BENCHMARK FOR SCIENCE CONTENT STANDARD 1 UPON GRADUATION (1) The benchmark for science content standard 1 upon graduation is the ability to (c) question conclusions with insufficient supporting evidence, and recognize that *the results of a scientific investigation are always open to revision by further experiments.*

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* ***Bold/italics*** indicates language from Montana Content and Performance Standards

It is the intent of this proposal to enhance the effectiveness of science education and to promote academic freedom and the neutrality of state government with respect to teachings that touch religious and nonreligious beliefs. It is necessary and desirable that science which seeks to explain the origins of life and its diversity (origins science), be conducted and taught objectively and without religious, naturalistic, or philosophic bias or assumption. To further this intent, the Darby Consolidated Schools Board of Trustees is asked to adopt this policy in accordance with the afore mentioned documents, principles and guidelines, because honest science education requires it, constitutional law permits “teaching the controversy” about scientific theories of origins, federal education policy calls for this kind of approach, voters overwhelmingly favor this approach and good education policy commends this approach. Thank you for your time and faithful service to this community, our children and this “essential and enduring part of the American institution of representative government”, this 5th day of January, 2004.