



A Michigan Science Teachers Association Position Statement

July 2008

“The Academic Freedom Law”

Michigan House of Representatives Bill #6027 & Senate Bill #1361

Identical bills from the Michigan House of Representatives (#6027) & the Senate (#1361) would require an amendment to “The Revised School Code” (1976 PA 451 (MCL 380.1-380.1852) to include section 1292 which states “...*that the teaching of some scientific theories, such as biological evolution, the chemical origins of life, human impact of climate change & human cloning, can cause controversy & that some teachers may be unsure of the expectations concerning how they should present information on such subjects*”. The proposed amendment would “...*allow teachers to help pupils understand, analyze, critique, & review in an objective manner the scientific strengths & scientific weaknesses of existing scientific theories*” as well as to “...*help students develop critical thinking skills...*”.

While the stated objectives of these bills appear meritorious, the Michigan Department of Education’s (MDE) “K-12 Science Content Expectations (SCE)” already require that students “*develop an understanding that claims & evidence for their scientific merit should be analyzed*” (K-7 Science Standard S.RS) & that students “*evaluate the strengths & weaknesses of claims, arguments, & data*” (SCE C.RS.07.11) & that students be able to “*evaluate scientific explanations based on current evidence & scientific principles*” (SCE C.RS.07.14), & to “*use empirical evidence to explain & critique the reasoning used to draw a scientific conclusion or explanation*” (HSSCE B1.1g).

As the goals of the proposed legislation are clearly included in the 2006-7 High School Science Content Expectations and the 2007-08 K-7 Science Content Expectations, the Michigan Science Teachers Association (MSTA) can identify no legitimate reason for legislative intervention that would modify the existing Content Expectations. The K-12 Science Content Expectations were developed & adopted by the MDE working in collaboration with Michigan’s academic & professional science education communities. Additionally, these documents were available for public, legislative & national review & subsequently approved by the MDE.

Furthermore, there is no reason for teachers to be “...*unsure of the expectations concerning how they should present information*” as the Science Content Expectations describe, in great detail, the “**what**” of the curriculum that is to be

taught for all grade levels. The SCE “Companion Documents” have been developed to provide strategies for “**how**” the curriculum can be presented to students.

Whereas evolution, climate change and cloning are the only “controversial topics” cited in these bills while “controversial topics” in non-scientific fields are noticeably omitted and whereas the Curriculum Expectations already address the pedagogical & educational goals of these bills, the legislative intent of these bills is called into question. It is also important to note that while evolution theory and global warming/climate change may be controversial from a socio-political perspective, they are **not** controversial from a scientific perspective.

HB 6027 & SB 1361 are very similar to “academic freedom” legislation introduced into other states. This type of legislation may enable the introduction of non-scientific ideologies, such as “intelligent design (ID) creationism”, into the public science classroom. HB 6027 & SB 1361 also include language that may facilitate such events in Michigan science classrooms. In 2005, a Federal court ruled in the Dover School Board (PA) case that “...*the goal of the ID movement is not to encourage critical thought, but to foment a revolution that would supplant evolutionary theory with ID*”.

In recognition of the aforementioned, it is the position of the Michigan Science Teachers Association that HB 6027 & SB 1361 be removed from any further consideration by the Michigan House & Senate.

HB 6027 Sponsors: John Moolenaar (Primary Sponsor), Stahl, Sheen, Walker, Agema, Emmons, Pearce, Casperson, Sheltroun

SB 1361 Sponsors: Bill Hardiman (Primary Sponsor), Garcia, Jansen, Cropsey, Kuipers

Approved: MSTA Board, July 14, 2008