

Ouachita Parish Science Curriculum Policy

Adopted November 29, 2006

RESOLUTION ON TEACHER ACADEMIC FREEDOM TO TEACH SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE REGARDING CONTROVERSIAL SCIENTIFIC SUBJECTS:

WHEREAS, the Louisiana Constitution declares that among the legitimate ends of government is "to promote the ...education ... of the people...." (1), and;

WHEREAS, Congress in 2001 declared that "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." (2), and;

WHEREAS, the U.S. Supreme Court has declared that it is possible for "scientific critiques of prevailing scientific theories [to] be taught" (3), and;

WHEREAS, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals has found that it is legitimate for school districts to pass curricular policies for such purposes as advancing critical thinking, fostering informed freedom of belief, and to disclaim any intent to impose an orthodoxy of belief on students (4), and;

WHEREAS, diverse organizations including Americans United for Separation of Church and State and American Civil Liberties Union have acknowledged that "any genuinely scientific evidence for or against any explanation of life may be taught" (5), and;

WHEREAS, the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education has promulgated certain Science Framework, and;

WHEREAS, the Louisiana Science Framework at page 11 holds that, "scientific information is continuously open to review and modification" (6), and;

WHEREAS, the Louisiana Science Framework at page 11 further states that, "for scientific ideas to become widely accepted, peers must review, analyze, and critique results" (7), and;

WHEREAS, the Louisiana Science Framework at page 19 declares that, "the process of scientific inquiry involves 'thinking critically and logically about the relationships between evidence and explanations, constructing and analyzing alternative explanations, and communicating scientific arguments'" (8), and;

WHEREAS, the Louisiana Science Framework at page 12 indicates that science should be "presented as a... continuing process for extending understanding of the ultimate, unalterable truth" (9), and;

WHEREAS, it has come to the attention of this Board that some science teachers in the parish school system are uncertain of what can be taught about particular scientific theories;

THEREFORE, the Board of Education of Ouachita Parish School District adopts the following policy and directs that it be inserted in the District's listing of curriculum and instruction policies which is posted online at www.opsb.net.

TEACHER ACADEMIC FREEDOM IN SCIENCE EDUCATION WHEN COVERING CONTROVERSIAL SCIENTIFIC SUBJECTS:

The Ouachita School District understands that the purpose of science education is to inform students about the scientific evidence and to help them develop critical thinking skills they need in order to become scientifically minded citizens. The District also understands that the teaching of some scientific subjects, such as biological evolution, the chemical origins of life, global warming, and human cloning, can cause controversy, and that some teachers may be unsure of the District's expectations concerning how they should present information on such subjects.

The District shall endeavor to create an environment within the schools that encourages students to explore scientific questions, learn about scientific evidence, develop critical thinking skills, and respond appropriately to differences of opinion about controversial issues. The District shall also endeavor to assist teachers to find more effective ways to present the science curriculum where it addresses scientific controversies. Toward this end, teachers shall be permitted to help students understand, analyze, critique, and review in an objective manner the scientific strengths and weaknesses of existing scientific theories pertinent to the course being taught.

Footnotes:

(1) Louisiana Constitution, Preamble.

(2) H.R. 1 - "No Child Left Behind Act of 2001": Joint Explanatory Statement of the Committee of Conference, Title I, Part A, item 78, edworkforce.house.gov].

(3) *Edwards v. Aguillard*, 107 S.Ct. 2573, 2583 (1987).

(4) *Freiler v. Tangipahoa Parish Board of Education*, 185 F.3d 337, 344-46 (5th Cir. 1999).

(5) Joint Statement of Current Law on Religion in the Public Schools (4/12/1995) Religion In The Public Schools: A Joint Statement Of Current Law <http://www.aclu.org/religion/schools/16146leg19950412.html> (Accessed July 20, 2006).

(6) Louisiana Science Framework, page 11.

(7) *Ibid.*

(8) *Ibid.*, page 19.

(9) *Ibid.*, page 12.