

EDITORIAL

Enough experimenting with the science curriculum

EDITORIAL BOARD

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When scientists and science educators speak about what students need to learn to be prepared for college and careers in the medical or technology professions, state leaders should listen.

That only makes sense. We would not want scientists flying commercial airplanes or teaching students how to fly planes. That job is for pilots and flight instructors — the experts on flying.

So who better than scientists and science educators to develop curriculum standards in science for public schools?

That is why the State Board of Education should defer to scientists and its own advisory committee when it comes to determining what should be taught in biology classes. The six-member advisory committee, which includes science teachers and curriculum experts, recommended eliminating ideas "based upon purported forces outside of nature" from high school biology courses. In other words, get rid of creationism and intelligent design, which teach that the universe was created by God or some other higher power.

That recommendation won a big endorsement from scientists last week but a cool reception from State Board of Education Chairman Don McLeroy, a Republican from Bryan. McLeroy wants to keep the requirement directing science educators to point out the weaknesses of evolution or other scientific theories. That requirement has been used to justify the teaching of creationism or intelligent design alongside evolution. That rub to science grabbed the attention of scientists.

The 21st Century Science Coalition, which represents more than 800 Texas scientists, brought scientific journals to the Texas Education Agency last week to underscore the message that the weaknesses McLeroy references "don't exist."

"Texas public schools should be preparing our kids to succeed in the 21st century, not promoting political and ideological agendas that are hostile to a sound science curriculum," said David Hillis, a University of Texas integrative biology professor.

We've said before that religious-based ideas or those that aren't substantiated by scientific research don't

belong in science classes.

Inserting supernatural ideas in the science curriculum damages its integrity. McLeroy and other board members should be strengthening science standards to accommodate a big push to attract world-class biomedical researchers, companies and grants to Texas. Those are growth industries that have not looked favorably on communities that water down science studies with vague and unproven ideas.

In the past, a majority of the board has bullied publishers into editing textbooks to reflect its socially conservative ideals. And McLeroy again is trying to force those views on all Texas schoolchildren as the education board rewrites academic standards for biology courses.

We applaud scientists for speaking up as the education board develops new science standards for Texas public schools.

We urge the board to listen to the experts.

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