

Most Texas profs support no limits on evolution teaching

98% in survey against politics in science education

By **GARY SCHARRER**
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AUSTIN — The verdict from Texas scientists is nearly unanimous: 98 percent favor the unadulterated teaching of evolution in public school classrooms, according to a report released Monday as the State Board of Education prepares to weigh in on the controversy.

A vast majority of the scientists say students would be harmed if the state requires the teaching of the "weaknesses" of evolution, according to the survey conducted for the Texas Freedom Network Education Fund, an organization that works on issues involving religious freedom, civil liberties and public education.

"With 94 percent of Texas faculty ... telling me it (teaching the weaknesses) shouldn't be there, I tend to believe them," said Raymond Eve, a sociologist at the University of Texas at Arlington who did the study.

More than 450 biology or biological anthropology professors at 50 Texas colleges and universities

participated in a 59-question survey. Many of those faculty members help determine admission of students into Texas' colleges and universities, Eve said.

"Their responses should send parents a clear message that those who want to play politics with science education are putting our kids at risk," he said.

The handling of evolution is the most contentious part in the state's rewrite of the science curriculum standards for public schools. The State Board will have a public hearing on Wednesday and vote on the new science standards early next year. The new guidelines are formally known as the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, or TEKS.

Social conservatives on the 15-member State Board of Education are likely to push for those standards to include a requirement that high school science teachers teach the weaknesses of evolution.

"There's no one on this board that is trying to inject intelligent design or creationism," said board member David Bradley, R-Beaumont. "They are trying to whip up into a frenzy over something that is not going to happen. But by trying to remove strengths and weaknesses, yes, they will get a fight."

The "intelligent design" concept holds that the universe and living organisms are so complicated that their origins are best explained by an intelligent cause. That idea also is intended to circumvent court rulings that prohibit the

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teaching of creationism as science.

The requirement that teachers teach the "strengths and weaknesses" of evolutionary theory is the result of a compromise offered by a Democratic board member 20 years ago, Bradley said.

The State Board of Education is in charge of setting curriculum standards and preparing children for college and jobs in the modern economy and that requires "sound science, not watered down, politicized science," said Kathy Miller, president of the Austin-based Texas Freedom Network.

"Teach evolution and don't water it down with creationism, intelligent design or phony weaknesses," Miller said.

Public school students should be exposed to all sides of the evolution debate, said Casey Luskin, a spokesman for the Seattle-based Discovery Institute, a conservative think tank that advocates the teaching of evidence for and against evolution in public schools.

"It's a facade to pretend that there are no scientific weaknesses of evolution, and not teaching the scientific weaknesses to students will prevent them from learning about the facts of biology, and it will harm their critical thinking skills," Luskin said.

He downplayed the survey of Texas scientists.

"This self-selecting survey shows just how ideological the Darwinists have become because

they are now resorting to scientific votes to reinforce a climate of intimidation that shuts down scientific criticism of evolution," Luskin said.

gscharrer@express-news.net

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