

Science Standards and Intelligent Design HFA Strategy White Paper

Overview:

State

The state of Florida is reviewing its curricula standards. The science standards are included in this review, and will be addressed in 2007. The state of Florida has received an "F" grade for our science standards, which need to be improved. Additionally, the new Commissioner of Education is a Creationist and there is a possibility that she may try to inject Intelligent Design (ID) into the standards.

Local

Local counties are in the process of purchasing textbooks for the next three years. There is a great discrepancy in the quality of the books. Additionally, because of pressure from the ID crowd, a few science books even contain a nod to ID. Although they also offer non-ID versions of these books, the books that come from publishers that are willing to offer ID versions are of poor quality. There are currently at least two counties (Pinellas and Broward) that are considering the purchase of one of these books (Glencoe's *Biology: The Dynamics of Life*). Finally, Marion County's approach actually includes language that suggests "teaching the controversy" between scientific theory and creationist dogma, which also needs to be addressed.

Strategy:

HFA will position itself to suggest positive changes to improve the quality of science education in the state, while also preparing to combat attempts to introduce ID into the curricula or otherwise degrade educational standards in science.

State

HFA has established communication with the individual who will be leading the science standards review. We have the opportunity to submit suggested improvements to the standards throughout 2006. HFA should be prepared to create a list of suggested improvements that can be provided to the state, but also create grassroots support for our suggested improvements.

In 2007, the state will be convening a committee to review the science standards. HFA should work to ensure that at least science individuals friendly to our viewpoint are seated on that committee. Once the committee has put together a draft of recommended revisions to the standards, the Department of Education will post the draft on its website for public review and input before the revisions are sent to the state board. It will be imperative that we mobilize a grassroots

movement to support any changes we would like to see in the standards at that point. This will require publicity, public speaking, trips to Tallahassee, etc.

Local

We need to be seen as not only opposing ID but actively working to improve things. At the local level, we need to become involved in the textbook adoption process to ensure that quality books are purchased and not books like the following:

“Biology: The Dynamics of Life reminds us of some depressing facts: Because so many of the people who pretend to teach biology in our high schools are ignorant dolts, a publisher can produce a “biology” textbook without bothering to hire any writers or editors who know about biology. If the book is loaded with glitz, with colorful pictures, and with stupid activities that ignoramuses will mistake for science, the publisher can realistically hope that the book will be a commercial success.” **from *The Textbook Letter*, November-December 1991**

“I have seen some shabby biology texts during the past few years, and *Biology: The Dynamics of Life* is one of the shabbiest. Some other books may rival it for ignorance, foolishness and sheer phoniness, but none surpasses it. Nor does any other book surpass it for gaudiness and glitz.” **Review by William J. Bennetta**

HFA needs to create a textbook review committee so that we can officially endorse good quality books and reject poor quality books. Once we have done this, we can then address this issue with the local school boards and try to positively influence their purchases. Additionally, this activity will provide us with an opportunity to speak directly to the press about these matters.

For school boards that are contemplating the introduction of ID or “teaching the controversy,” the best defense is a good offense: We need to recruit volunteers who will monitor the local school board. If a board starts to discuss ID or any variant of ID, then we need to mobilize our local members and coalition partners to reject such an action. Again, such action will require us to create media awareness of the problem and to pitch such stories to the media.

Finally, for the one county that already embraces “teaching the controversy,” we need to do a resource assessment in that county to discover what tools we have to work with (individuals, funding, media, etc) in order to develop a strategy to change its standards and what it would take to do so.

Building a Coalition

HFA is obviously not the only group concerned about these issues. We are committed to working with others to achieve our goals and this issue will be no exception. Our Executive Director is already involved with the Florida Citizens for Science and is working with them on a strategy. We will keep them informed of our actions and work to coordinate our efforts. Additionally, we will work with our partners in the faith communities (such as Christian Alliance for Progress, the Interfaith Alliance, etc.) to build a multi-faith approach to improving science standards in the state. We also plan to reach out to science teachers to get them involved with this issue (this might best be done through Florida Citizens for Science).

Estimated Project Costs

Year 1: Start up

What	Amount
Textbook Committee	\$1,000
Travel	\$1,000
Media/PR	\$3,000
Staff	\$4,500
Office/Supplies	\$500
Total	\$10,000

Year 2: Standards Review

What	Amount
Travel (Includes volunteers to Tallahassee)	\$2,000
Media/PR	\$3,000
Staff	\$4,500
Office/Supplies	\$500
Total	\$10,000

Year 3: Maintenance

What	Amount
Travel	\$500
Media/PR	\$1,500
Staff	\$2,000
Office/Supplies	\$200
Total	\$4,200

