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Erika C. Shugart

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Dear Delegates Hanshaw, Ellington, and Fast,

On behalf of the National Science Teaching Association, a professional community of 35,000 science educators across the country, including more than 100 in West Virginia, I write to urge you not to take up Senate Bill 280, the retooled “intelligent design” bill now with the House Education Committee, for consideration.

As passed by the Senate, SB 280 provides that “[n]o public school board, school superintendent, or school principal shall prohibit a public school classroom teacher from discussing or answering questions from students about scientific theories of how the universe and/or life came to exist.” On its face, the bill is simply unnecessary: West Virginia’s public school teachers already discuss a wide range of scientific theories with students, and there is no evidence of any prohibitions to the contrary.

But the bill’s history points to a deeper problem. As introduced, SB 280 would have allowed public school teachers to teach “intelligent design” as a “theory of how the universe and/or humanity came to exist.” The House Education Committee prudently decided not to advance a similar bill in 2023, SB 619. Even though the reference to “intelligent design” was removed from SB 280 in committee, its sponsor, Senator Amy Grady, acknowledged during floor debate that in her view, it would still permit the teaching of “intelligent design.”

NSTA strongly opposes attempts to include “intelligent design” and “creation science” in the science classroom. To quote NSTA’s [position statement on the teaching of evolution](#), “Claims by proponents of these views have been evaluated and discredited based on scientific evidence. These claims have no empirical power to explain the natural world and its diverse phenomena. As such, creationist perspectives cannot be considered science, and have no place in science classrooms.”

Enacting SB 280 would engender significant confusion about what West Virginia’s public school teachers are allowed to teach, potentially leading to litigation if misguided teachers elect to teach “intelligent design” under the shield of the law. In 2004, a Pennsylvania school board adopted a policy on teaching “intelligent design” that resulted in 11 local parents filing a lawsuit in a federal court (*Kitzmiller v. Dover* 400 Supp. 2d. 707 [M.D. Pa. 2005]). The board lost, costing the district more than \$1 million.

Amending SB 280 to make it clear that the scientific theories in question do not include “creation science,” “intelligent design,” or any other form of creationism would reduce the threat posed by the bill, but given the legislative history, it would not eliminate it. Neither teachers nor students would benefit from the passage of this bill.

Sincerely,



Erika Shugart, Ph.D.
Executive Director and CEO