

TEXAS FREEDOM NETWORK PRESS RELEASE

ADVOCATES CALL ON TEXAS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION TO ADDRESS SEX EDUCATION, CLIMATE CHANGE IN NEW CURRICULUM STANDARDS

State Board to Debate Major Revisions to Health, Science Standards This Week

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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In back-to-back, marathon public hearings at the State Board of Education today, advocates are calling for new curriculum standards that provide comprehensive and inclusive information on sex education in health classrooms and reflect the overwhelming scientific evidence on climate change in science classes.

New health curriculum standards should require that students learn that everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and respect, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, said Jules Mandel, outreach and advocacy coordinator at the Texas Freedom Network.

“Including standards on sexual orientation and gender identity is good for every student in the classroom,” said Mandel, who is also a member of the LGBTQ community. “Whether a young person is trying to understand themselves like I was or trying to understand their friends and others who might be different from them, every student benefits. Including these standards will absolutely help to reduce bullying, discrimination, and harassment.”

Board members also must make human-caused climate change a key topic in core science courses, said Carisa Lopez, political director of the Texas Freedom Network.

“The board should do what it failed to do 11 years ago and treat human-caused climate change as the global emergency that scientists and the scientific evidence overwhelmingly say it is,” Lopez said. “All students should learn about the science of climate change so that they become informed voters and can participate in responsible public debate about how to address the challenge they are inheriting.”

The state board will debate draft standards for health and science on Wednesday and take a vote on first reading Friday. Teams of educators, specialists and others have been working on new health standards for more than a year. But the board is also rushing forward with a revision of standards for the core high school science courses of biology, physics, chemistry and integrated physics and chemistry between now and November.

“This is too much, too fast for a board that has a history of getting it wrong,” Lopez said. “The board twice in recent years has had to go back and fix problems they created with botched, politized revisions of curriculum standards. Our fear is the board is setting itself and students up for failure once again.”

The sections of the draft health standards that address sex and relationships emphasize abstinence but also include information on contraception as well as informed consent and sexual violence prevention. This would represent an important step forward in a state in which more than 80 percent of school districts teach abstinence-only or nothing at all on sex education even though more than 60 percent of

high school seniors say they have already been sexually active by that age. But the proposed drafts do not address sexual orientation or gender identity at all.

Similarly, the draft science standards don't even mention climate change even though scientists say overwhelming evidence and increasingly destructive storms, droughts, raging wildfires and other extreme weather events show our planet faces a climate emergency.

Nearly 400 Texans registered to testify during the two hearings today. It is unclear whether all will be able to speak because the board plans to limit testimony to five hours for each hearing.

The board is scheduled to take final votes on the adoption of health and science standards in November. The standards, which guide instruction and textbook content, could be in place for a decade or longer.

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