

STATE OF OKLAHOMA

1st Session of the 54th Legislature (2013)

HOUSE BILL 1674

By: Blackwell

AS INTRODUCED

An Act relating to schools; creating the Scientific Education and Academic Freedom Act; providing short title; stating legislative findings; directing State Board of Education, district boards of education, and certain administrators to create certain environment within schools; permitting teachers to help students understand certain information about scientific theories; disallowing State Board of Education, district boards of education, and certain administrators from prohibiting teachers from helping students understand certain information about scientific theories; providing for evaluation of students based on understanding of course materials; prohibiting penalizing of students for holding certain position on scientific theories; prohibiting certain construction; stating intent; directing State Department of Education to provide certain notification; directing superintendents to disseminate certain information; providing for codification; providing an effective date; and declaring an emergency.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF OKLAHOMA:

SECTION 1. NEW LAW A new section of law to be codified in the Oklahoma Statutes as Section 11-121 of Title 70, unless there is created a duplication in numbering, reads as follows:

1        This act shall be known and may be cited as the "Scientific  
2 Education and Academic Freedom Act".

3        SECTION 2.        NEW LAW        A new section of law to be codified  
4 in the Oklahoma Statutes as Section 11-122 of Title 70, unless there  
5 is created a duplication in numbering, reads as follows:

6        A.    The Oklahoma Legislature finds that an important purpose of  
7 science education is to inform students about scientific evidence  
8 and to help students develop critical thinking skills they need in  
9 order to become intelligent, productive, and scientifically informed  
10 citizens.    The Legislature further finds that the teaching of some  
11 scientific concepts including but not limited to premises in the  
12 areas of biology, chemistry, meteorology, bioethics and physics can  
13 cause controversy, and that some teachers may be unsure of the  
14 expectations concerning how they should present information on some  
15 subjects such as, but not limited to, biological evolution, the  
16 chemical origins of life, global warming, and human cloning.

17        B.    The State Board of Education, district boards of education,  
18 district superintendents and administrators, and public school  
19 principals and administrators shall endeavor to create an  
20 environment within public elementary and secondary schools that  
21 encourages students to explore scientific questions, learn about  
22 scientific evidence, develop critical thinking skills, and respond  
23 appropriately and respectfully to differences of opinion about  
24 controversial issues.    Educational authorities in this state shall

1 also endeavor to assist teachers to find more effective ways to  
2 present the science curriculum where it addresses scientific  
3 controversies. Toward this end, teachers shall be permitted to help  
4 students understand, analyze, critique, and review in an objective  
5 manner the scientific strengths and scientific weaknesses of  
6 existing scientific theories pertinent to the course being taught.

7 C. The State Board of Education, a district board of education,  
8 district superintendent or administrator, or public school principal  
9 or administrator shall not prohibit any teacher in a school district  
10 in this state from helping students understand, analyze, critique,  
11 and review in an objective manner the scientific strengths and  
12 scientific weaknesses of existing scientific theories pertinent to  
13 the course being taught.

14 D. Students may be evaluated based upon their understanding of  
15 course materials, but no student in any public school or institution  
16 shall be penalized in any way because the student may subscribe to a  
17 particular position on scientific theories. Nothing in this  
18 subsection shall be construed to exempt students from learning,  
19 understanding and being tested on curriculum as prescribed by state  
20 and local education standards.

21 E. The provisions of the Scientific Education and Academic  
22 Freedom Act shall only protect the teaching of scientific  
23 information, and shall not be construed to promote any religious or  
24 nonreligious doctrine, promote discrimination for or against a

1 particular set of religious beliefs or nonbeliefs, or promote  
2 discrimination for or against religion or nonreligion. The intent  
3 of the provisions of this act is to create an environment in which  
4 both the teacher and students can openly and objectively discuss the  
5 facts and observations of science, and the assumptions that underlie  
6 their interpretation.

7 F. By no later than the start of the 2013-2014 school year, the  
8 State Department of Education shall notify all district  
9 superintendents of the provisions of the Scientific Education and  
10 Academic Freedom Act. Each superintendent shall then disseminate to  
11 all employees within the district a copy of the provisions of this  
12 act.

13 SECTION 3. This act shall become effective July 1, 2013.

14 SECTION 4. It being immediately necessary for the preservation  
15 of the public peace, health and safety, an emergency is hereby  
16 declared to exist, by reason whereof this act shall take effect and  
17 be in full force from and after its passage and approval.

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