

STATE OF OKLAHOMA

1st Session of the 53rd Legislature (2011)

HOUSE BILL 1551

By: Kern

AS INTRODUCED

<StartFT>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; 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. <EndFT>

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:

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

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

A. The Oklahoma Legislature finds that an important purpose of science education is to inform students about scientific evidence and to help students develop critical thinking skills they need in order to become intelligent, productive, and scientifically informed citizens. The Legislature further finds that the teaching of some scientific subjects, such as biological evolution, the chemical origins of life, global warming, and human cloning, can cause controversy, and that some teachers may be unsure of the expectations concerning how they should present information on such subjects.

B. The State Board of Education, district boards of education, district superintendents and administrators, and public school principals and administrators shall endeavor to create an environment within public elementary and secondary schools that encourages students to explore scientific questions, learn about scientific evidence, develop critical thinking skills, and respond appropriately and respectfully to differences of opinion about controversial issues. Educational authorities in this state shall also endeavor to assist teachers to find more effective ways to present the science curriculum

where it addresses scientific controversies. Toward this end, teachers shall be permitted to help students understand, analyze, critique, and review in an objective manner the scientific strengths and scientific weaknesses of existing scientific theories pertinent to the course being taught.

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

D. Students may be evaluated based upon their understanding of course materials, but no student in any public school or institution shall be penalized in any way because the student may subscribe to a particular position on scientific theories.

E. The provisions of the Scientific Education and Academic Freedom Act shall only protect the teaching of scientific information, and shall not be construed to promote any religious or nonreligious doctrine, promote discrimination for or against a particular set of religious beliefs or nonbeliefs, or promote discrimination for or against religion or nonreligion. The intent of the provisions of the act is to create an environment in which both the teacher and students

can openly and objectively discuss the facts and observations of science, and the assumptions that underlie their interpretation.

F. By no later than the start of the 2011-2012 school year, the State Department Education shall notify all district superintendents of the provisions of the Scientific Education and Academic Freedom Act. Each superintendent shall then disseminate to all employees within the district a copy of the provisions of the act.

SECTION 3. This act shall become effective July 1, 2011.

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

53-1-5462 <KB> <12/29/10>