

Texas Ed Board compromises on evolution materials

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Joe Zamecki protests outside a building where the Texas Board of Education was holding a meeting, Thursday, July 21, 2011, in Austin, Texas. The debate over teaching evolution in public schools is resurfacing at the Texas State Board of Education. (AP Photo/Eric Gay)

(AP) -- The Texas State Board of Education gave final approval to supplemental high school science materials on Friday, delivering a blow to the board's social conservatives after a brief flare-up over some lessons teaching the principles of evolution.

The lessons in question included a lab comparison on chimpanzee and [human skulls](#), the [fossil record](#) and cell complexity.

A board-appointed reviewer had called the lessons errors and recommended changes, but a group of scientists objected on Friday, threatening to re-ignite a fierce debate over teaching [evolution](#) in Texas public schools.

The board's social conservatives compromised when it appeared they would lose a vote to reject the reviewer's changes in favor of the original lessons.

Instead of a showdown vote on evolution, the panel agreed to approve the material and have Education Commissioner Robert Scott continue working on the lessons in question with publisher Holt McDougal.

"Today we saw Texas kids and sound science finally win a vote on the State Board of Education," said Kathy Miller, president of the Texas Freedom Network, a group that supports mainstream scientists in the [teaching of evolution](#) and has repeatedly sparred with board conservatives over education standards.

"We saw the far right's stranglehold over the [state board](#) is finally loosening," Miller said.

The conservative wing in 2009 had pushed through controversial standards that called for schools to scrutinize "all sides" of scientific theory.

Several of the conservative board members disputed the notion of defeat on Friday.

Chairwoman Barbara Cargill, R-The Woodlands, said she was pleased

with the compromise because Scott will continue working with Holt McDougal to find language that is factually correct and fits the standards adopted in 2009.

"I feel very comfortable turning it over to him," Cargill said.

The 15-member board is dominated by Republicans but the ultra-conservative wing lost a key vote in 2010 when former chairman Don McLeroy was defeated by Thomas Ratliff, R-Mount Pleasant.

Ratliff said he would have voted to support the findings of the scientists and throw out the changes recommended by the board reviewer.

"There's no question had some seats not changed, it would have been different," Ratliff said.

David Bradley, R-Beaumont, one of the board's most conservative members, said that without the compromise, he would have sought to kill the entire submission.

This week's meeting had been expected to re-ignite the fiery debate over evolution that put the board in the national spotlight two years ago.

One conservative group had put a call out to pack Thursday's public hearing with witnesses urging the board to adopt [materials](#) that question evolution. But they were outnumbered by witnesses supporting evolution.

The board avoided a contentious debate on the theory of intelligent design when an electronic textbook supporting the theory did not make Scott's list of recommended materials and was not eligible for consideration.

The new online teaching materials are necessary because the state could not afford to buy new textbooks this year, leaving students to use some that are several years old.

Supplemental materials that are approved have the advantage of being on the state's recommended list, but school districts can still buy other materials they chose.

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