

US state headed for another debate over evolution

June 6 2012, by JOHN HANNA

(AP) — The central state of Kansas, which has attracted international attention and some ridicule for its debate over how evolution is taught in its public schools, is headed toward another showdown on the subject.

A State Board of Education member says that [science standards](#) under development are "very problematic" for describing the theory as a well-established, core scientific concept.

From 1999 to 2007, the state had five different sets of science standards for its schools as conservative Republicans gained and lost majorities on the board, which sets the guidelines. The latest standards, which reflect mainstream scientific views about evolution, were adopted five years ago.

Past debates in Kansas have pertained to key evolutionary concepts, such as a common origin for all life on Earth and how changes in species can create new ones.

The now-discarded 2005 standards included language from supporters of "intelligent design," which says an intelligent cause is the best way to explain some complex and orderly features of the universe.

Kansas is now among 26 states helping to draft new science standards alongside the National Research Council, with the goal of creating standard, nationwide guidelines. A first draft became public last month, and the Kansas board is scheduled to hear an update on Tuesday.

Education Commissioner Diane DeBacker said a final draft could be ready by the end of the year, and the board would then decide whether to make those standards the state's standards.

But the decision may not be made until after the November election — in which five of the 10 board seats will be on the ballot.

Republican board member Ken Willard said he's troubled by the first draft of the proposed standards. In the past, Willard has supported standards for Kansas with material that questions evolution; guidelines that he and other conservatives approved in 2005 were supplanted by the current ones.

Willard said the draft embraces naturalism and secular humanism, which precludes God or another supreme being in considering how the universe works. He said he intends to raise the issue Tuesday.

"That's going to be very problematic," Willard told The Associated Press in an interview. "They are preferring one religious position over another."

Kansas law requires the board to review its academic standards at least once every seven years, meaning science standards must be considered again by 2014. The state uses these standards in developing annual student-achievement tests, which, in turn, influences what's taught in classrooms.

Board member Sally Cauble, a moderate Republican, said she's comfortable with the language in the draft standards. Cauble, elected in 2006 after ousting an evolution skeptic in the Republican primary, voted for the 2007 standards.

Cauble said Kansas is participating in the multi-state effort to draft

common science standards because it wants to ensure that its students can compete in a global job market. She said the board should defer to scientists, science educators and business leaders when considering changes.

The first draft of the multi-state standards declares that evolution and its underlying mechanisms are "key to understanding both the unity and the diversity of life on Earth." The standards also say [evolution](#) is among a few core concepts in life sciences that "have a long history and solid foundation based on the research evidence established by many scientists working across multiple fields."

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