

February 10, 2025

RE: Opposition to SB 2355

Dear Legislators:

I am writing as a 7-12 principal in rural southwest North Dakota to express my opposition to SB 2355, mandating the inclusion of intelligent design in the state science content standards. While I respect the diversity of perspectives on the origins of life, this bill raises significant concerns regarding its implications for science education and the preparation of our students for future academic and career opportunities.

1. Intelligent design is not a scientific theory. Intelligent design does not meet the criteria of a scientific theory as defined by the scientific community. It lacks empirical evidence, is not testable through the scientific method, and is not subject to peer review in the same manner as established scientific theories like evolution. Mandating its inclusion in science standards undermines the integrity of science education by conflating science with non-scientific beliefs.

2. The bill jeopardizes students' competitiveness. Science education should equip students with the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in higher education and STEM careers. By including intelligent design in the curriculum, we risk confusing students about the nature of scientific inquiry and critical thinking. This could disadvantage North Dakota students as they compete with peers from states adhering to rigorous, evidence-based science standards.

3. The bill conflicts with legal precedents. Federal courts, including the landmark *Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School District* case, have ruled that teaching intelligent design in public school science classes violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. By mandating intelligent design in the curriculum, this bill exposes North Dakota schools to potential legal challenges, which could result in costly litigation and negative publicity.

4. The bill imposes undue burdens on educators. This bill would require the Superintendent of Public Instruction to develop instructional materials and provide in-service training for teachers on intelligent design. This diverts valuable time and resources away from evidence-based science education and professional development opportunities that align with widely accepted standards. Additionally, many science teachers may feel unqualified or uncomfortable teaching a topic that falls outside the realm of mainstream science.

5. The bill undermines local control of education. North Dakota's schools benefit from local decision-making that reflects the needs and values of individual communities. Mandating the inclusion of intelligent design at the state level removes local control over curriculum decisions and imposes a one-size-fits-all approach that may not align with community priorities or expectations.

6. The bill risks diminishing public trust in education. Public education relies on the trust of parents and communities to provide a high-quality, unbiased education. Including intelligent design in the science curriculum may erode that trust, leading to polarization and controversy that distracts from the primary mission of educating students.

In conclusion, while discussions about the origins of life are important, they are best suited for philosophy or comparative religion courses, not science classrooms. I urge the legislature to reject this bill and instead support initiatives that strengthen evidence-based science education, ensuring that North Dakota's students are well-prepared for the challenges of the modern world.

Thank you for considering my perspective. Please feel free to contact me if you would like further input or clarification.

Sincerely,
Shannon Meier