

Climate change skepticism seeps into classrooms

By Neela Banerjee, Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON – A flash point has emerged in American science education that echoes the battle over evolution, as scientists and educators report mounting resistance to the study of man-made climate change in middle and high schools.

Although scientific evidence increasingly shows that fossil fuel consumption has caused the climate to change rapidly, the issue has grown so politicized that skepticism of the broad scientific consensus has seeped into classrooms.

Texas and Louisiana have introduced education standards that require educators to teach climate change denial as a valid scientific position. South Dakota and Utah passed resolutions denying climate change. Tennessee and Oklahoma also have introduced legislation to give climate change skeptics a place in the classroom.

In May, a school board in Los Alamitos passed a measure, later rescinded, identifying climate science as a controversial topic that required special instructional oversight.

“Any time we have a meeting of 100 teachers, if you ask whether they’re running into pushback on teaching climate change, 50 will raise their hands,” said Frank Niepold, climate education coordinator for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, who meets with hundreds of teachers annually. “We ask questions about how sizable it is, and they tell us it is [sizable] and pretty persistent, from many places: your administration, parents, students, even your own family.”

Against this backdrop, the National Center for Science

Education, an Oakland-based watchdog group that supports the teaching of evolution through advocacy and educational materials, plans to announce on Monday that it will begin an initiative to monitor the teaching of climate science and evaluate the sources of resistance to it.

NCSE, a small, nonpartisan group of scientists, teachers, clergy and concerned individuals, rose to prominence in the last decade defending evolution in the curriculum.

The controversy around “climate change education is where evolution was 20 years ago,” said Eugenie Scott, executive director of NCSE.

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