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Chris Comer, the director of science curriculum for the Texas Education Agency, was forced to resign after forwarding a short e-mail message announcing a presentation in Austin by Barbara Forrest. The *Austin American-Statesman* (November 29, 2007) [reported](#) [4] **[Link broken]**, "Comer sent the e-mail to several individuals and a few online communities, saying, 'FYI.'" Less than two hours later, Lizzette Reynolds, the TEA's senior adviser on statewide initiatives, complained to Comer's supervisors, writing, "This is highly inappropriate ... I believe this is an offense that calls for termination or, at the very least, reassignment of responsibilities ... it assumes this is a subject that the agency supports."

The e-mail was then cited in a [memorandum](#) [5] (PDF) recommending Comer's termination, the *American-Statesman* noted: "They said forwarding the e-mail not only violated a directive for her not to communicate in writing or otherwise with anyone outside the agency regarding an upcoming science curriculum review, 'it directly conflicts with her responsibilities as the Director of Science.' The memo adds, 'Ms. Comer's e-mail implies endorsement of the speaker and implies that TEA endorses the speaker's position on a subject on which the agency must remain neutral.'" Other reasons for recommending her termination were listed in addition.

But Comer told the newspaper that she thought that the long-standing political controversy over evolution education in Texas was responsible: "None of the other reasons they gave are, in and of themselves, firing offenses," she said. NCSE's executive director Eugenie C. Scott suggested that Comer's termination seemed to be a warning to TEA employees. "This just underscores the politicization of science education in Texas," Scott said. "In most states, the department of education takes a leadership role in fostering sound science education. Apparently TEA employees are supposed to be kept in the closet and only let out to do the bidding of the board."

Kathy Miller of the [Texas Freedom Network](#) [6], which advances a mainstream agenda of religious freedom and individual liberties to counter the religious right, also expressed her concern. "It's important to know whether politics and ideology are standing in the way of Texas kids getting a 21st century science education," Miller told the *American-Statesman*. Alluding to previous battles over the place of evolution in Texas science standards and textbooks, she added, "We've already seen a faction of the State Board of Education try to politicize and censor what our schoolchildren learn. It would be even more alarming if the same thing is now happening inside TEA itself."

In a [report](#) [7] dated November 29, 2007, Steven Schafersman of Texas Citizens for Science contended that the real reason that Comer was forced to resign was her defense of the integrity of science education during her long tenure at TEA. Describing Comer as a martyr of science, he added, "But she will not be a victim," predicting that scientists and science teachers in Texas will be "outraged by her treatment by a state agency that is now publicly and officially forgoing accurate and reliable science to serve the ideological and religious biases of a small minority of state public education officials."

Barbara Forrest herself was aghast at the news, telling NCSE, "In my talk, I simply told the truth -- about the history of the 'intelligent design' movement, about the complete rejection of its claims by the scientific community, and about the *Kitzmiller* trial and my involvement in it. Maybe the TEA can't afford to take a position on what constitutes good science education -- maybe it must remain neutral on whether or not to lie to students about evolution -- but if so, that's just sad." A professor of philosophy at Southeastern Louisiana University and a member of NCSE's board of directors, Forrest is the coauthor (with Paul R. Gross) of [Creationism's Trojan Horse](#) [8].

Comer's resignation comes a few months before the Texas board of education is expected to review the science portion of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, the state science standards that determine both what is taught in Texas's public school science classrooms and the content of the biology textbooks approved for use in the state. In 2003, there were concerted if ultimately unsuccessful attempts to wield the TEKS to compromise the treatment of evolution in the textbooks then under consideration, and it is expected that such attempts will recur -- especially since the new president of the board is himself a vocal [creationist](#) [9].

The e-mail at issue was sent by NCSE deputy director Glenn Branch on October 23, 2007.

To: Glenn Branch
From: Glenn Branch
Subject: Barbara Forrest in Austin 11/2
Cc:
Bcc: [redacted]
Attached:

Dear Austin-area friends of NCSE,

I thought that you might like to know that Barbara Forrest will be speaking on "Inside Creationism's Trojan Horse" in Austin on November 2, 2007. Her talk, sponsored by the Center for Inquiry Austin, begins at 7:00 p.m. in the Monarch Event Center, Suite 3100, 6406 North IH-35 in Austin. The cost is \$6; free to friends of the Center.

In her talk, Forrest will provide a detailed report on her expert testimony in the Kitzmiller v. Dover School Board trial as well as an overview of the history of the "intelligent design" movement. Forrest is a Professor of Philosophy in the Department of History and Political Science at Southeastern Louisiana University; she is also a member of NCSE's board of directors.

For further details, visit:

http://www.centerforinquiry.net/austin/events/barbara_forrest_inside_creationisms_trojan_horse_lecture/

Sincerely,

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Not in Our Classrooms: Why Intelligent Design Is Wrong for Our Schools
<http://www.ncseweb.org/nioc>

Eugenie C. Scott's Evolution vs. Creationism
<http://www.ncseweb.org/evc>

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[4] <http://www.statesman.com/news/content/news/stories/local/11/29/1129science.html>

[5] http://www.ncseweb.org/resources/articles/Comer_firing_memo.pdf

[6] <http://www.tfn.org>

[7] <http://www.texscience.org/reviews/tea-science-director-resigns.htm>

[8] <http://www.creationismstrojanhorse.com>

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