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The Louisiana Science Education Act opened the door for creationism to be taught in the state's public schools, and now the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education is propping the door open, the Louisiana Coalition for Science [charges](#) [4]. In a September 28, 2009, press release, the LCS noted, "On September 16, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) ignored the recommendations of science education professionals in the Louisiana Department of Education (DOE) and allowed the Louisiana Family Forum (LFF), a Religious Right lobbying group, to dictate the procedure concerning complaints about creationist supplementary materials used in public school science classes under the 2008 Louisiana Science Education Act (LSEA)."

Enacted in June 2008 over the protests of scientists and educators across the state and around the country, the LSEA (enacted as Louisiana Revised Statutes 17:285.1) [provides](#) [5] that "A teacher shall teach the material presented in the standard textbook supplied by the school system and thereafter may use supplemental textbooks and other instructional materials to help students understand, analyze, critique, and review scientific theories in an objective manner, as permitted by the city, parish, or other local public school board unless otherwise prohibited by the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education."

Subsequently, in January 2009, BESE adopted a policy about what types of supplementary classroom materials will, and will not, be allowable under the LSEA. While the policy echoes the LSEA's requirement that such materials "not promote any religious doctrine, promote discrimination for or against a particular set of religious beliefs, or promote discrimination for or against religion or nonreligion," a provision that "materials that teach creationism or intelligent design or that advance the religious belief that a supernatural being created humankind shall be prohibited for use in science class" was deleted, according to a report from the Associated Press (January 15, 2009).

Unaddressed by the policy, however, was the question of how to handle complaints about inappropriate supplementary materials. The Baton Rouge *Advocate* (September 17, 2009) [reported](#) [6], "The department [of education] recommended that any complaints undergo an initial review by a three-member panel named by the agency, then go to the state board for a final decision." But a BESE committee revised the procedure so that "two reviewers will be named by the department to review the science materials in question as well as one reviewer each named by the challenger, the school and the publisher" of the challenged materials.

Thus, the *Advocate* summarized, "people bothered by materials in a science classroom could file a complaint with the state Department of Education. A hearing would then be set where each side could tell its story. Reviewers, who are supposed to be experts, can ask questions. The five reviewers would file reports on whether the materials violate the rules. The department can also make a recommendation. The state board would then make a final decision." There are conflicting reports about whether the policy was adopted by BESE at its September meeting or whether it will be considered for adoption by the BESE at its October meeting.

In any case, the policy is seriously flawed, according to the Louisiana Coalition for Science: "There is no guarantee that the three non-DOE reviewers, especially the school district's and the publisher's appointees, will have the requisite expertise to evaluate contested materials. A school district that permits the use of creationist materials is likely to choose a creationist reviewer. The publisher of creationist materials is virtually certain to choose a creationist. ... In short, as BESE's complaint procedure is now drafted, DOE's expert reviewers will be in the minority, and DOE staff will not be allowed to independently assess the reviewers' reports but must instead transfer the reports directly to BESE for evaluation."

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