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"Classroom Clashes" — a two-part series by Carrie Madren posted on the American Association for the Advancement of Science's STEM.edu blog — "talks with middle and high school teachers across the country to find out what it's like to be on the frontlines of two often-controversial science topics — evolution and climate change — and how they deal with the pushback." Since NCSE provides advice, support, and resources to teachers facing challenges to evolution education — and, starting in 2012, to teachers facing challenges to climate science education — it's not surprising to find NCSE staff represented throughout!

The [first part](#) [4] (May 29, 2012) focuses on evolution. "Evolution debates have simmered since Darwin's time, and even now, many states and school districts have varied ideas on how evolution should be presented," Madren writes. "In addition, parents or communities with a range of views can make it difficult for science teachers to do their jobs. The controversy has made evolution a hot-button topic that's either lightly touched on or avoided altogether. Oftentimes, that means students don't get the scientific education they need to become well-rounded citizens." Making the point vivid, Jeremy Mohn, a biology teacher in Overland Park, Kansas, suggests, "Teaching biology without evolution is like teaching American history without the Civil War."

"Each year, many states revisit the teaching of evolution," Madren explains, with Louisiana and Tennessee enacting antievolution legislation in 2008 and 2012, and with Texas constantly experiencing battles over the place of evolution in the state science standards. The advent of the Next Generation Science Standards, which emphasize evolution as a central idea of the life sciences, may help to defuse controversy at the state level, NCSE's Steven Newton commented. Individual teachers have developed ways of defusing controversy in their own classrooms: by discussing the creation/evolution continuum,

for example, or by starting the biology course with a discussion of the nature of science.

The [second part](#) [5] (June 4, 2012) focuses on climate change. Madren observes, "climate change has become the latest topic to spark classroom disagreements. Despite near-consensus in the scientific community, questions about the validity of climate change science and global warming continue to circulate in mainstream media, news, blogs, and publications," adding, "As long as individuals continue to debate climate change validity on news stations, radio shows, and online, students will bring these biases into the classroom. That means science teachers across the country must defend science to preserve the truth about climate change — as well as the way the next generation views it. Even though climate scientists and thousands of studies back them up, teachers still face pushback."

Moreover, there are teachers who have acceded to the idea that climate change is scientifically controversial. NCSE's Mark McCaffrey explained, "Some teachers teach both sides of what is really a phony debate. In their minds it's fair and balanced but in fact it leads to confusion rather than clarity." As AAAS's chief executive officer Alan I. Leshner recently admonished the governor of Tennessee when he was presented with a bill undermining the teaching of evolution and of climate change in the state's public schools, "Implying that there are significant scientific controversies about the overall nature of these concepts when there are not will only confuse students, not enlighten them."

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