

Message from the NABT Board of Directors

NABT: Teaching Biology in the Age of “Alternative Facts”

Welcome back to a new school year. The start of an academic term is always energizing for any teacher, but it is an especially exciting and important time to be a biology teacher. There are few jobs that are more crucial to the future safety, security, and vitality of the global population than that of a science teacher. We are called upon to prepare young people to meet the challenges of living in the 21st century so they can apply the knowledge and problem-solving skills necessary so that all citizens may thrive. This responsibility places us in a powerful position to shape that future world. We are, however, not the only ones who appreciate the important role educators play, and considerable resources are expended each year to influence what is taught and how it is taught.

In an age of “fake news” and “alternative facts,” our society is constantly bombarded with disinformation designed to undermine the principles under which scientific inquiry operates and cast doubt on conclusions derived through the scientific enterprise. A recent mailing of very professional and very deceiving ‘marketing’ tools to tens of thousands of science teachers across the country only exemplifies the lengths some groups will go to sow doubt and misunderstanding about the nature of science.

As biology teachers, we are no strangers to these attempts to undermine science education. The history of our own organization has found the National Association of Biology Teachers in constant defense of the teaching and practices of science. As an organization dedicated to the fidelity of biology education, NABT members come from diverse backgrounds and affiliations but are united around one common mission—to empower educators to provide the best possible biology and life science education for all students.

Our members understand that the recent efforts to cast doubt on the science of climate change or the process of evolution are no more valid than past campaigns that attempted to cast doubt on the deleterious health effects of tobacco use or the benefits of immunization for individuals and society. In fact, many of you are posting recommendations on how to use these “alternative science” materials as teachable moments, creating lesson plans or developing case studies that lead students to their own “Aha” moments of discovery. However, while we recognize these materials for the misinformation that it is, some less experienced or knowledgeable teachers may not.

As a result, we invite you to share your lessons countering “alternative science” with NABT at <https://nabt.org/Resources-Teaching-Bio-in-Age-of-Alt>. All submissions will be reviewed for appropriateness and innovation, and authors of novel submissions will be entered to win a complimentary registration to the 2018 Professional Development Conference in San Diego and a guaranteed session in the program so you can demonstrate how to use your lesson in the classroom.

While you counter science denialism in your classroom and learning communities, NABT—working with our members and partner

organizations—will continue to monitor and respond to the growing number of campaigns and legislative efforts that undermine the teaching of legitimate, evidence-based science. We will strive to keep you informed as we learn of these initiatives and look for announcements in your email, on social media, and on the NABT website. As you or your colleagues encounter materials or communication that promotes science denial, or when you learn of proposed anti-science legislation in your state, please share it with us by contacting the NABT Office at office@nabt.org.

When science denialism goes unchallenged, each instance not only impacts that specific area of science, but serves to undermine all of science, with dramatic and harmful effects. We will continue to empower educators to confront this challenge, and we will do it together as the National Association of Biology Teachers.

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