



National Center for Science Education

Annual Report | 2017



Our Mission

NCSE defends the integrity of science education against ideological interference. We work with teachers, parents, scientists, and concerned citizens at the local, state, and national levels to ensure that topics including evolution and climate change are taught accurately, honestly, and confidently.



Letter from the Executive Director

In 2017 there was an unprecedented flood of negative stories on politics, extreme weather, tragedies, and scandals. Every day I opened my newspaper and turned on the radio with a certain sense of dread anticipating what calamity had happened overnight. It was easy to feel overwhelmed.

Throughout the tumultuous year, I was inspired by the thought of thousands of science teachers across the country introducing students to the language and practice of science, giving them access to tools that will serve them well as they navigate a complicated world.

Science teachers help their students wrestle with critically important questions: What counts as evidence? What is fake and what is real? As we struggle as a society with the implications of unlimited access to information of uncertain provenance and unequal accuracy, the kind of critical thinking that a good science education provides has never been more important.

The daily barrage of disturbing news served as a reminder of the critical importance of our mission to ensure all students receive a high-quality science education free from ideological interference. In 2017 we continued to help teachers navigate the challenges of teaching evolution and climate change – topics that may be contentious in their communities and about which many of their students likely hold deep misconceptions. We helped teachers directly by pointing them towards the best resources for teaching evolution and climate change. We helped teachers indirectly by providing fun and accurate climate change and evolution activities in their communities through science booster clubs. Finally, in 2017 we continued to organize opposition to state legislation that would dilute state science standards or allow teachers to cast doubt on the reality of evolution or climate change.

Throughout the year we held firm to our bedrock principles: when students are in science class, they should not be confused by misleading debate but instead must be provided with guidance on how to think and question like scientists. They must not be met with vague claims of uncertainty, but with the richness and depth of evidence that undergirds our understanding of evolution and climate change. They deserve nothing less, and our society requires that they gain these essential skills.

Thank you for continuing to help NCSE achieve that for all students. We cannot do it without you.

Sincerely,



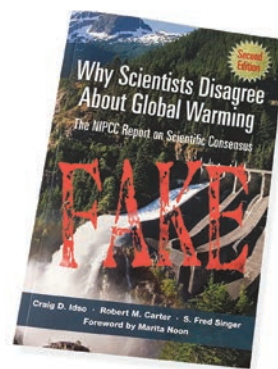
Mobilize Science Champions

A central focus of NCSE's work is helping people facing ideologically motivated challenges to the integrity of science education—particularly evolution and climate change education—in their schools, communities, and states.

Thanks to NCSE's efforts, legislative attempts in 2017 to make it easier to miseducate public school students about science mostly failed. The main exception was a bill—now law—in Florida that allows any county resident (not just a parent as before) to file a complaint about instructional materials used in the county's public schools. Climate change and evolution were clearly among the targets of the bill's supporters. Elsewhere, anti-science bills came close to passing in Oklahoma and South Dakota. NCSE also monitored legislation in Arkansas, Idaho, Iowa, Texas, and Wisconsin.

During 2017, NCSE helped rally support for scientifically accurate and pedagogically appropriate state science education standards in eight states.

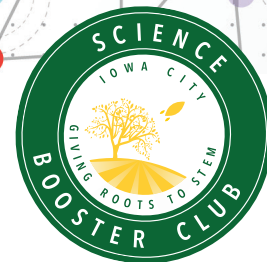
Especially contentious were Idaho, where the state legislature previously deleted material about climate change; New Mexico, where the state's Public Education Department edited a set of proposed standards to weaken the teaching of evolution and climate change; and Texas, where a proposal to remove creationist language from the standards previously inserted by the state board of education was resisted.



In reaction to a national mailing of materials from a climate change denial think tank, the Heartland Institute, to science teachers across the country in the spring of 2017, NCSE was widely consulted, both by the media (including PBS's Frontline and NewsHour) and by

teachers and their professional organizations. NCSE released three flyers aimed at teachers, briefly explaining why using the Heartland Institute's material in the classroom would be a mistake and debunking its central claim—that there is not a robust scientific consensus on anthropogenic climate change—while explaining the significance of the scientific consensus.

Additionally, NCSE was active in dozens of local incidents across the country, providing advice, resources, and connections to students, parents, teachers, administrators, and concerned citizens to support the integrity of science education.



Engage Communities

Science literacy got a boost in 2017, thanks to the national rollout of NCSE's Science Booster Club program in January. The program's unique no-conflict approach has paid off, especially in conservative "red" states such as Texas, Tennessee, and Kentucky, where thousands of people have been exposed to the scientific method via friendly, accessible, and fun hands-on experiments. The payoff: in some communities, a significant jump in science literacy.



We also ran two summer camps in Iowa and Maryland (50 children each) that focused on evolutionary science experiments and activities.

The response to the summer camps, from children and parents, was overwhelmingly positive. Children rubbed elbows with real working scientists, toured biotech labs, extracted strawberry DNA, took nature walks to hone their observational skills, and more.

How many people have been served—and how well—by the clubs? By the end of 2017, we had 13 clubs up and running, reaching people at county fairs, farmers' markets, school events, and other venues. Via memorable and inexpensive experiments designed by NCSE, people learned about ocean acidification and evolutionary theory. In 2017, 126,000 people participated in booster club events, a whopping 130 percent increase from the previous year.

In addition we awarded 10 micro-grants in six states to fund basic science supplies, such as thermometers and scales.

“My mom is really proud of you for teaching us about the scientific method and how to think like a scientist.”

4th grade student in Maryland

Adds Emily Schoerning, NCSE's Director of Community Organizing and Research: “There are a lot of people who want to learn about evolution and climate change, but aren't sure it is socially safe to do so. The Science Booster Club program lets us create a space where everyone can experience the excitement and joy of science.”

Support Teachers

In 2017, NCSEteach continued to build on the success of past initiatives while transitioning into a bold future.

This past year our Scientist in the Classroom program matched 60 teachers with scientists in 21 states. Scientists visited classrooms to share their experiences and lead hands-on lessons.

Also, more than 6,000 teachers benefited from the news, resources, and professional development opportunities found in our popular teacher-focused newsletter.

By creating a new Director of Teacher Support position and hiring Brad Hoge, NCSEteach began planning new initiatives to bring professional development and curricular resources directly to teachers. We are working with partners from academia, government agencies, and advocacy groups, as well as directly with teachers, to develop a Teacher Ambassador Program.



We are excited about the future impact this new initiative and the entire NCSEteach program will have in supporting teachers to teach evolution and climate change topics accurately and confidently.

CLIMATE SCIENCE BROUGHT TO LIFE

Through NCSE's Scientist in the Classroom program, we introduced sixth-grade teacher Rebecca Musso of Fredericksburg, Virginia to Matt Vrazo, a post-doc at the Smithsonian Institution. Vrazo, a paleontologist, brought a collection of fossil arthropods on his classroom visit to give a different spin on climate change, explaining how fossils can help us infer past climate conditions.



"There is a growing gap between the research that scientists carry out and the public's understanding of that research," said Vrazo. "I think we have an obligation as scientists to take the time to explain what we do to the public."

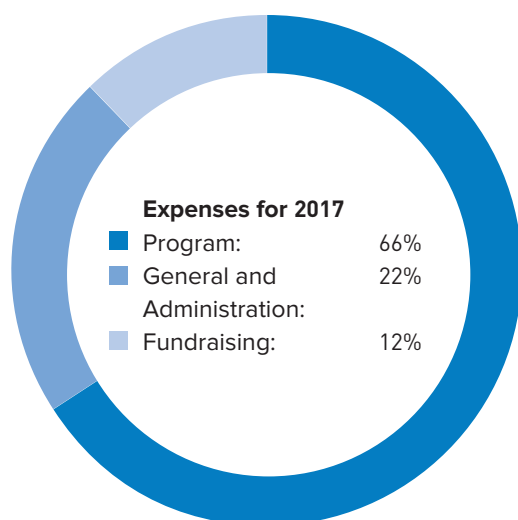
According to Musso, the lesson was a huge hit. She said the best part of the memorable visit was the students' enthusiasm and the questions that enthusiasm engendered—including many about dinosaurs. "When they hear 'paleontologist' they automatically think dinosaurs, so

they asked him a lot about that. He showed them dinosaur poop and they loved it," Musso said.

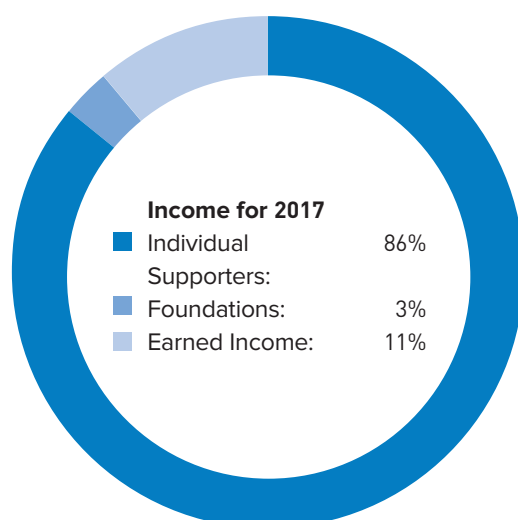
Hearing directly from a research scientist how he or she uses and practices science is incredibly valuable to students. Musso said a significant challenge is addressing misconceptions about the nature of science, especially the idea that science is done in a formulaic way. Breaking that misconception, and by hearing about the twists and turns a project can take is a lesson worth its weight in gold... or fossilized poop.

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We are grateful for the ongoing support and dedication of the individual supporters and foundations who make our work possible.



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