

1980

Science-Related Social Issues Survey

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Recommended Citation

Cooney, Timothy M. and Blaga, Jeffrey (1980) "Science-Related Social Issues Survey," *Iowa Science Teachers Journal*: Vol. 17: No. 2, Article 11.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/istj/vol17/iss2/11>

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Science-Related Social Issues Survey

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During the past several years, many science-related social issues have been of concern to the people of Iowa. Abortion has been an issue. Protests have been made against the Duane Arnold Energy Center nuclear generating plant. Evolution and creationism were debated in the state legislature. In addition, arsenic and nitrates have been found in some municipal water supplies. Other technological issues, such as soil conservation and gasohol, have been making headlines. These societal concerns are often of interest to students in our schools. Important and, as of yet, unanswered questions have been posed about how educators will deal with these important topics in their classrooms.

We would like to share the results of a survey we made in the fall of 1979. To determine the needs of science and social studies educators, and the extent to which controversial issues were handled or taught, we surveyed the science and social studies leadership in the state.

We wanted to know:

1. Do the majority of science and social studies teachers instruct students in science-related social issues?
2. What is the quality of this instruction?
3. Do teachers need more information about the facts and complexities of the issues?
4. Do classroom teachers need assistance in developing ways to teach these issues?
5. What are the most important science related social issues as viewed by Iowa educators?

We sent the survey to 55 science and social studies leadership personnel in Iowa, including consultants and the network of area education agencies, and the state education department consultants in science, environmental sciences and social studies.

A response of 85% was received. The responses to our questions were tabulated and appear below. Not all respondents answered all of the questions.

1. Do most teachers who you work with instruct students in science-related social issues?
46% Yes 54% No

2. In your estimation, what is the quality of this instruction?

32% Non-existent 59% Fair 9% Good
0% Excellent

3. Is there a need to assist teachers in learning the scope and complexities of the major science-related social issues? For example, is there a need to examine issues from more technical and factual viewpoint?

95% Yes 5% No

4. Is there a need to assist teachers in developing ways to teach these issues in their classroom?

95% Yes 5% No

5. What do you consider to be the most important science-related social issues?

Science Leadership

1. Alternate Energy Sources
2. Politics of Energy
3. Nuclear Power
4. Soil Conservation
5. Pesticides
6. Politics of Food
7. Bioethics
8. Air Pollution Standards
9. Nitrates and Nitrites
10. Genetic Counseling

Social Studies Leadership

1. Politics of Energy
2. Nuclear Power
3. Alternate Energy Sources
4. Politics of Food
5. Air Pollution Standards
6. Pesticides
7. Human Medical Experimentation
8. Soil Conservation
9. Drugs/Narcotics
10. Abortion

The participants in this survey clearly feel that the quality of instruction in science-related social issues is fair, at best. They also feel there is a need to confront controversial issues in order to prepare teachers and, ultimately, students to make decisions in a future which is certain to be different than the world as we now know it.

* * *

Loss of Farmlands

Every day, 12 more square miles of American farmland is converted to non-agricultural purposes, according to *Disappearing Farmlands*, published by the Agricultural Lands Project, National Association of Counties Research Foundation, 1735 New York Avenue NW, Washington, D.C. 20006. Individual copies are free, with a modest charge for bulk shipments.