

Dover Area School District News

February 2005

Biology Curriculum Update

This newsletter has been produced to help explain the changes in the biology curriculum. Unfortunately a great deal of misinformation has been spread regarding this policy. We hope this publication will help those interested better understand the substance of the policy, while eliminating any misconceptions some may have about the curriculum change. We sincerely appreciate your understanding on this matter.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is all the fuss about?

A small minority of parents have objected to the recent curriculum change by arguing that the Board has acted to impose its own religious beliefs on students. This is not true. The approved statement read to students was adopted to present a balanced science curriculum and forbids any presentation of religious belief.

Students are told of the theory of Intelligent Design (ID). Isn't ID simply religion in disguise?

No. The theory of intelligent design involves science vs. science, where scientists looking at the same data come to different conclusions. The theory does not mention or discuss God, Christianity or the Bible in any way.

What is the theory of evolution?

The word evolution has several meanings, and those supporting Darwin's theory of evolution use that confusion in definition to their advantage. Evolution can mean something as simple as change over time, which is not controversial, and is supported by most people.

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Sen. Santorum Applauds Dover District

By Sen. Rick Santorum

The following editorial appeared in the 12/25/04 edition of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

A recent [Pittsburgh] Post-Gazette editorial was completely inaccurate in describing the York County district's decision regarding the teaching of evolution and indulges in rhetoric instead of engaging in a reasoned debate on the issues. The fact is that the Dover Area School District will

continue to teach evolution and prohibit the teaching of intelligent design, creationism or the presentation of any religious beliefs. The school board simply has presented a balanced curriculum that makes students aware of the controversies surrounding evolution.

Let me be clear: I firmly believe that creationism should not be taught in public schools. Proponents of intelligent design theory believe that our public schools should teach our children more about evolution, including a candid assessment of the theory's unresolved difficulties. Evolution should be taught as a

scientific theory that is open to scrutiny, not as sacred dogma that cannot be questioned.

But is there a real scientific dispute? Absolutely. Recently, over 300 scientists, including scholars from Yale, Princeton, MIT and the Smithsonian, signed a public statement declaring that they were "skeptical of claims for the ability of random mutation and natural selection to account for the complexity of life" and encouraging "careful examination of the evidence for Darwinian theory."

"The school board simply has presented a balanced curriculum that makes students aware of the controversies surrounding evolution."

Because there is a real scientific dispute, federal education policy calls on schools to "teach the controversy." In 2001, I offered report language ultimately attached to the No Child Left Behind Act that states, "Where topics are taught that may generate controversy (such as biological evolution), the curriculum should help students to understand the full range of scientific views that exist, why such topics may generate controversy and how scientific discoveries can profoundly affect society."

Constitutional law also allows the teaching of

alternative scientific theories in the classroom. In 1987, the U.S. Supreme Court made clear in *Edwards v. Aguillard* that "we do not imply that a legislature could never require that scientific critiques of prevailing scientific theories be taught."

A 2001 Zogby poll shows that 71 percent of Americans believe that "biology teachers should teach Darwin's theory of evolution, but also the scientific evidence against it." Even more overwhelming is a 2004 Steinberg Poll showing 73 percent of California voters believe that biology teachers in public schools should teach the scientific evidence for and against Darwin's theory of evolution.

Ultimately, academic freedom is at stake. Students should learn both the strengths of Darwinian evolution, as well as the theory's scientific weaknesses. It is beneficial for our students to discuss the exciting unanswered questions surrounding evolution. If we want our students to become educated citizens, we should all support an open, engaging and broad discussion of evolution theory in our public schools.

I commend the Dover Area School District for taking a stand and refusing to ignore the controversy.

Text of Statement Read to Students

"The Pennsylvania Academic Standards require students to learn about Darwin's Theory of Evolution and eventually to take a standardized test of which evolution is a part.

Because Darwin's Theory is a theory, it continues to be tested as new evidence is discovered. The Theory is not a fact. Gaps in the Theory exist for which there is no evidence. A theory is defined as a well-tested ex-

planation that unifies a broad range of observations.

*Intelligent Design is an explanation of the origin of life that differs from Darwin's view. The reference book, *Of Pandas and People*, is available for students who might be interested in gaining an understanding of what Intelligent Design actually involves.*

*With respect to any theory, students are encouraged to keep an open mind. The school leaves the discussion of the *Origins of Life to individual students and their families. As a Standards-driven district, class instruction focuses upon preparing students to achieve proficiency on Standards-based assessments.*"*

Frequently Asked Questions *Continued*

However, evolution in its biological sense means a process whereby life arose from non-living matter and subsequently developed by natural means, namely, natural selection, acting on random variations.

What is the theory of Intelligent Design?

The theory of intelligent design (ID) is a scientific theory that differs from Darwin's view, and is endorsed by a growing number of credible scientists. ID attempts to explain the complexity of the world by interpreting the scientific data now available to modern biologists. Its principle argument is that certain features of the universe are best explained by an intelligent cause, rather than undirected causes such as Darwin's theory of natural selection.

In simple terms, on a molecular level, scientists have discovered a purposeful arrangement of parts, which cannot be explained by Darwin's theory. In fact, since the 1950's, advances in molecular biology and chemistry have shown us that living cells, the fundamental units of life processes, cannot be explained by chance.

Even Bill Gates, computer software genius and founder of Microsoft, has said, "DNA is like a computer program but far, far, more advanced than any software we

have ever created."

Are Dover students taught the theory of intelligent design?

No. Perhaps the most widely misreported fact is that Dover school district requires the "teaching" of intelligent design.

Students are only made aware of the theory of ID during the one minute statement read prior to the ninth grade biology course (see front page). Students interested in learning more are able to do so by viewing books and materials available in the library.

Are there religious implications to the theory of ID?

Not any more so than the religious implications of Darwinism. Some have said that before Darwin, "we thought a benevolent God had created us. Biology took away our status as made in the image of God"... or "Man is the result of a purposeless process that did not have him in mind. He was not planned."... or "Darwinism made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist."

Is the DASD policy constitutional?

The last Supreme Court case dealing with the theory of evolution was the 1987 case of *Edwards v. Aguillard*.

Although that case held unconstitutional the teaching of creationism alongside Darwin's theory of evolution, it specifically held that schools can teach alternatives to Darwin's approach to origins. The court stated that teaching a variety of scientific theories regarding the origins of life might be validly done with the clear secular intent of enhancing the effectiveness of science education which is the goal of the Dover Area School District.

What about the lawsuit filed by the ACLU?

In December the district was served with a federal lawsuit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union on behalf of several parents of Dover students.

The Thomas More Law Center, a non-profit law firm based in Ann Arbor, MI has agreed to defend the district without charge.

Knowing there were complicated legal questions involved in the curriculum change, the statement was adopted to comply with the requirements of the law, while also providing students with the best possible science education. As the elected representatives of the citizens of Dover, the board was determined to act in the best interest of students, despite threats from the ACLU. The lawsuit is being fought vigorously.

Administration: No Problems With Curriculum Implementation

On January 18 & 19, the curriculum change adopted by the Dover Area School Board on October 18 went into effect. Ninth grade students enrolled in biology were read a four paragraph, one minute statement approved by the Board. A copy of the statement read to students appears on the front of this publication.

Contrary to rumor and misleading news reports, after the statement was read, students were instructed on the theory of evolution no

differently than in years past. No teacher was instructed to teach the theory of intelligent design or present his or her religious beliefs.

As previously explained, the purpose of the curriculum change was to provide students with a fair and balanced science curriculum. On that basis, the school board voted to make students aware of the scientific controversy surrounding the theory of evolution in a manner which they believed to be objective and neutral.

Parents of students with concerns about the one-minute statement were permitted to excuse their children from that portion of the class. Of the 175 students who are enrolled in the course, parents of 15 students requested their students be opted out of hearing the statement.

We are pleased that the curriculum change occurred without incident, and appreciate the cooperation and tremendous support of both parents and students.

2001 National Zogby Poll

14% - Neither/ Not sure

15% - Teach only Darwin's theory

71% - Teach Darwin's theory, but also teach scientific evidence against it

Source: *Zogby International*, 1750 Genesee Street, Utica, NY 13502. Nationwide poll of 1202 American adults was taken in August 2001. Margin of error is +/- 3% points.

Quotables

"The Dover Area School District has taken a step in the right direction by attempting to teach the controversy of evolution." - **Sen. Rick Santorum**

"[DNA] has shown, by the almost unbelievable complexity of the arrangements which are needed to produce (life), that intelligence must have been involved... My whole life has been guided by the principle of Plato's Socrates: Follow the evidence, wherever it leads."

-Anthony Flew (world famous atheist who now admits the universe appears to have an intelligent design)

"Where topics are taught that may generate controversy (such as biological evolution), the curriculum should help students to understand the full range of scientific views that exist." (**Conference Report from the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001**)

For more information on this topic, please visit our libraries and/or our website at www.dover.k12.pa.us