

**ACLU**

FOUNDATION

AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION
of PENNSYLVANIA**Frequently Asked Questions:
Intelligent Design and Evolution
*Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School Board*****What is the concept of "intelligent design?"**

Intelligent design purports to be a scientific hypothesis that "life owes its origins to a master intellect"—an intelligent, supernatural designer. In reality, it is an inherently religious argument made in opposition to the scientific theory of evolution. It is a variant of so-called "creation science," which maintains that species originated through abrupt appearance in complex form. Like creation science, the concept of intelligent design was advanced to provide support for the religious view known as creationism—that man and other species were specially created by God and did not evolve from lower life forms.

How is intelligent design like and unlike traditional creationism?

Like creationism, intelligent design consists of both scientifically unwarranted criticisms of evolution and assertions that it is necessary to invoke the actions of a supernatural being to explain the origin and history of life. Unlike traditional creationism, intelligent design is not committed to a literal reading of the Bible, although it is intentionally non-committal about the age of the earth and other scientific issues in order not to alienate traditional creationists.

Where did intelligent design come from?

The term intelligent design was popularized in *Of Pandas and People*, the very textbook that was adopted for use in the Dover Area schools. Intelligent design and *Of Pandas* emerged in the wake of the Supreme Court's 1987 decision in *Edwards v. Aguillard*, which ruled that it was unconstitutional to teach so-called "creation science" in the public schools.

Is intelligent design a credible scientific theory?

No. There has been no original research published in scientific journals providing evidence for intelligent design, nor does intelligent design provide testable explanations. The American Association for the Advancement of Science and the National Academy of Sciences have both described intelligent design as scientifically unwarranted.

Is evolution anti-religious?

No. Many mainstream religions and denominations - including the Catholic Church and the Presbyterian Church USA - accept the scientific theory of evolution as consistent with belief in God as the ultimate creator. Many evolutionary biologists are themselves religious. Standard high school biology textbooks explain the science of evolution without taking positions on the existence of God.

Is evolution "just" a theory?

No. Calling evolution a theory and not a fact, as in the Dover policy, exploits the common definition of "theory" as a hunch or a guess. In science, a theory is a systematic explanation of phenomena. The National Academy of Sciences has said that "evolution is one of the strongest and most useful scientific theories we have." And National Geographic wrote in November 2004 that "the evidence for evolution is overwhelming."

Is evolution education important?

Yes. The National Association of Biology Teachers and the National Science Teachers Association agree that evolution is crucial to science education. Efforts to undermine evolution education, such as the Dover Area School Board's, are not only unconstitutional, but also educationally irresponsible.

Kitzmiller et al. v. Dover Area School District

In December 2004 the ACLU-PA sued the Dover Area School District on behalf of eleven parents who objected to the recent policy that required the teaching of intelligent design in biology classes as an alternative to evolution. The parents state that say that presenting intelligent design in public school science classrooms violates their religious liberty by promoting particular religious beliefs to their children under the guise of science education.

In March 2005 the court denied an attempt by parents who want intelligent design taught to intervene in the case. The judge also denied the school district's motion to dismiss parent plaintiffs whose children had either already completed ninth-grade biology or were still 7-8 years from being taught it. On September 13, 2005, U.S. District Judge John E. Jones III denied the Dover Area School Board's petition for summary judgment. The trial will begin on September 26.

Dover Area School District's Policy

The school district policy mandates that Dover public schools treat intelligent design as a bona fide scientific theory competing with the scientific theory of evolution in order to develop a balanced science curriculum. Teachers are also required to read a statement to students in ninth grade biology classes that includes the following language:

"Because Darwin's Theory is a theory, it is still being 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 explanation 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 to see if they would like to explore this view in an effort to gain an understanding of what intelligent design actually involves. As is true with any theory, students are encouraged to keep an open mind."

Objections to the Policy

The lawsuit argues that teaching students about intelligent design in public school science classes entangles government with religion and violates the separation of church and state. *Of Pandas and People*, the alternative book available for students, was authored by advocates of so-called creation science and published by a Christian think-tank that aims to preach "the Christian Gospel and understanding of the Bible."

The lawsuit also states that teaching students that there are "gaps" in the scientific theory of evolution while not presenting any such gaps with intelligent design would lead students to believe that the theory of evolution is false and that the truth lies in the religious beliefs advocated through intelligent design.

For updates and further information about *Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School Board*, visit www.aclupa.org/dover.