

# 'Intelligent Design' vs. Darwin

The teaching of evolution comes under fire—again.

While teachers can't be jailed for discussing evolution—that was banned by the Supreme Court in 1968—the evolution controversy has emerged once again. Last October, the Dover (Pennsylvania) Area School District became the first school system in the country to require biology teachers to instruct students in "Intelligent Design," an alternative theory about the origin of life, and to discredit the theory of evolution.

Dover's new policy states: "Students will be made aware of gaps/problems in Darwin's Theory and of other theories of evolution including, but not limited to, Intelligent Design."

Intelligent design is a theory that certain features of life and the universe are so complex that they had to be the product of some master intellect—an intelligent, supernatural designer—rather than the product of natural selection or random mutations, as Darwinists argue.

After intense media coverage, the Dover school board announced last November that science teachers would implement the curriculum change simply by reading to all ninth-grade biology classes a

10-sentence statement prepared by the board. That statement says, in part: "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."

In December, a group of 11 parents sued the Dover board, claiming that intelligent design is not a valid scientific theory, but a religious belief that cannot be taught in public schools.

And the Dover High School science faculty took collective action as well. With the help of the Pennsylvania State Education Association, the science teachers sent the superintendent a joint letter on January 6, strongly objecting to the requirement that they read the prepared statement in class.

That mandate, the teachers wrote, "will inevitably (and understandably) [lead students to] believe that Intelligent

Design is a valid scientific theory, perhaps on par with the theory of evolution. That is not true." They declared: "INTELLIGENT DESIGN IS NOT SCIENCE,... IS NOT BIOLOGY,... AND... IS NOT ACCEPTED SCIENTIFIC THEORY."

In response to the teachers' protest, the superintendent announced the following day that teachers would not be required to read the statement, which will be read by administrators instead.

In addition, the school district sent a letter to parents promising, "Our teachers will not be teaching Intelligent Design or the Origin of Life," and advising that children can leave class while the ID statement is being read. The science teachers have said that they also will leave the classroom while the reading takes place.

For Eugenie Scott, Executive Director of the National Center for Science Education, the stakes in the Dover lawsuit are exceedingly high. In 1987, the Supreme Court ruled that schools can't teach creationism—the doctrine that a "supernatural

creator was responsible for the creation of humankind"—in science classes. That's because it is a "religious doctrine" based on the Bible, and to teach religion as science violates the Establishment Clause.

Scott says that the creationists have learned that you can't use the "c" word, so they have turned to intelligent design, which she calls "creationism lite." If the Dover school district wins

the pending lawsuit, Scott predicts that the "intelligent design curriculum will pop up everywhere." She adds that the goal of many creationists is to discredit evolution, and that there were anti-evolution activities in 24 states last year.

Meanwhile, in Georgia, six parents sued the Cobb County School Board last fall, challenging its order to paste a disclaimer in all of the district's biology textbooks. The sticker stated: "Evolution is a theory, not a fact, regarding the origin of living things. This material should be approached with an open mind, studied carefully, and critically considered."

In January, a federal district judge agreed with the plaintiffs and ordered the stickers removed because they send "a message that the school board agrees with the beliefs of Christian fundamentalists and creationists." The school board, the court added, has "improperly entangled itself with religion by appearing to take a position [in favor of] religious theories of origin."



In the beginning, it was a crime in some states to teach Charles Darwin's theory of evolution in public schools. In fact, high school biology teacher **John Scopes** was convicted and fined in 1925 for violating Tennessee's anti-evolution law. Scopes gave up teaching for good.

