



PENNSYLVANIA PARENTS FIGHT TEACHING OF 'INTELLIGENT DESIGN'

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Parents of public high school students in Dover, Pa. have taken the school district to court because, alongside of the scientific theory of evolution, teachers are including a discussion of "intelligent design" -- which argues that some unknown force must be involved in the creation of more complex creatures like humans.

The lawsuit filed by 11 parents charges that the policy violates the principle of separation of church and state, arguing that intelligent design is little more than a modified "creationism" which says a divine being created life. It is the latest legal struggle in a national debate over how the origins of human life should be taught in public schools.

In October 2004, the Dover Area School District voted to require science teachers to read a statement [see below] before lessons on evolution. It explains that there is a difference between theory and fact, and presents intelligent design as an alternative theory.

["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 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.

"The school leaves the discussion of the Origins of Life to individual students and their families. As a standards-driven district, class instruction focuses on the standards and preparing students to be successful on standards-based assessments."]

Although the Dover School District is the first district in the nation to require science teachers to mention intelligent design in their classes, several schools around the nation are considering it.

[Darwinian evolution](#)

Charles Darwin first proposed the theory of evolution in the 1859 book, "Origin of Species." Darwin argued a theory of natural selection, under which living organisms adapt genetically over time in order to thrive in their own environment. Evolutionary theory also suggests that humans evolved from apes in a slow and random change over a long period of time.

The theory was opposed by many religious institutions who argued the Bible laid out how God created man as well as plants and animals.

By the early 20th century, some states had enacted laws that banned the teaching of evolution in public schools. When Tennessee teacher John Scopes was arrested for challenging one of these laws in 1925, the case became a nationwide spectacle. Though Scopes was found guilty for violating the law at the time, the trial was considered a victory for evolutionists since it increased pressure on states to adopt the growing view of evolution as a scientifically valid theory.

In 1968, the U.S. Supreme Court prohibited laws banning the teaching of evolution in public schools in *Epperson v. Arkansas*, citing that it was a violation of the separation of church and state. The court further ruled in 1987 in *Edwards v. Aguillard* that school districts cannot require that equal time be given to the teaching of creationism when evolution is taught.

What is intelligent design?

Proponents of intelligent design assert that Darwin's theory cannot explain the incredible intricacies of complex life forms, such as humans; therefore, they must be the work of an intelligent cause, rather than an undirected process.

The Discovery Institute, a think tank that supports intelligent design, does not think educators should teach the scientific arguments for intelligent design. Instead, they should "teach the controversy," so that students know about the alternatives to evolution. Another organization, the Foundation for Thought and Ethics, has published a pro-intelligent design textbook for high school students titled "Of Pandas and People."

In early August, President Bush said that he felt that both evolution and intelligent design "ought to be properly taught ... so people can understand what the debate is about."

A heated debate

Critics of intelligent design, which include a majority of scientists, argue it is merely another name for creationism, the belief in the literal Genesis story of the Bible. According to the critics, teaching intelligent design in public schools would violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment which states, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion."

Many scientists also denounce intelligent design as being a theory without any actual science behind it.

Kenneth Miller, a Brown University biology professor and author of a high school science textbook, testified in Harrisburg, Pa.: "To my knowledge, every single scientific society that has

taken a position on this issue has taken a position against intelligent design and in favor of evolution."

Evolutionary theory is often used as the foundation for high school biology classes.

But proponents of intelligent design contend theirs is not a religious doctrine, but instead simply an alternative to Darwin's argument.

John West, associate director of the Discovery Institute's Center for Science and Culture, told the Wall Street Journal, "We don't say God designed. It's not about trying to reconcile science with some religious text. It's about this longstanding question in biology and the appearance of design."

The public's beliefs

Public opinion polls have consistently shown that much of the American public does not agree with the scientific community. In a March 2005 poll conducted by NBC News, 57 percent of respondents believed that the "biblical account of creation" was the most likely explanation of the origin of humans; only 33 percent believed it was evolution.

Opponents of evolution use surveys like this to make their case that school boards have the right to require that other theories be taught. The courts, on the other hand, have regularly argued that teaching theories such as creationism and intelligent design would violate the Constitution.

For now, the fight is in federal court and could wind up before the U.S. Supreme Court.

--Compiled by Brian Wolley for NewsHour Extra

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