

## Teaching Darwinian Evolution Objectively

**The Problem:** Much of the evidence that supports the Darwinian evolution theory which is taught in our public schools is controversial. The Mount Vernon City Schools do not offer a place in the curricula to scientifically and critically examine this theory. In fact, at this time there is confusion among some MVCS science teachers over whether they are even allowed to encourage critical scientific thinking on evolution, even though it is considered excellent scientific reasoning to do so with any other controversial science theories (such as the particle versus wave theories on light).

**Proposal:** Add a policy statement to the MVCS science curricula that allows teachers / students to critically examine the evidence both for and against evolution. A suggested policy statement is attached below for the school board to consider.

### What does the law say:

- ★ According to an attachment on the Federal *No Child Left Behind* Act of 2001, "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,..." (Dec. 13, 2001, House Report No. 107-334).
- ★ *Teach the Controversy*, part of the attachment, states that science teachers should be required to teach Darwin's theory of evolution, **including evidence both for and against it.**
- ★ The Ohio State Board of Education voted 18-0 to adopt the new Science Standards on December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2002, which states for its Grade 10 indicator 23: "Describe how scientists continue to investigate and **critically analyze aspects of evolutionary theory.**"
- ★ The Mt. Vernon Board of Education has the following policy: The students have the right -
  - 1) to study political, economic, social, and moral controversial issues;
  - 2) to have access to relevant information regarding these issues;
  - 3) to study in an atmosphere of freedom from bias and prejudices.
  - 4) **to form and express opinions on controversial issues.**(See Program 2240\p.1 of 1)

### What do people in Ohio say about this?

82% of Ohioans want evolution to be able to be questioned in the schools, according to a poll by the Mason-Dixon Polling & Research, published in the Plain Dealer, June 9, 2002.

Fifty-two Ohio scientists signed a press release on March 20, 2002 affirming that students should be permitted to **learn scientific evidence both for and against controversial theories** such as evolution. The statement read that a science curriculum should **encourage critical thinking** and not censor it. (Issued by Science Excellence for All Ohioans. See [www.sciohio.org/start.htm](http://www.sciohio.org/start.htm))

Nationwide, 100 highly credentialed scientists recently signed a statement that included this: "**Careful examination of the evidence for Darwinian theory should be encouraged.**" (published by the Discovery Institute, Seattle, WA; See [www.intelligentdesignnetwork.org/Polls.PDF](http://www.intelligentdesignnetwork.org/Polls.PDF))

**Please see the attached suggested policy statement.**

***A Suggestion to the Mount Vernon City School Board  
for an Objective Origins Science Policy:***

This policy encourages objectivity, critical thinking and discussion of the full range of scientific views regarding origins as contemplated by the *No Child Left Behind* Act of 2001.

(This statement and the policy itself copied from  
[www.intelligentdesignnetwork.org/TeachingResources.htm#List%20of%20questions](http://www.intelligentdesignnetwork.org/TeachingResources.htm#List%20of%20questions))

**OBJECTIVE ORIGINS SCIENCE POLICY<sup>(1)</sup>**

**BE IT RESOLVED THAT THE FOLLOWING POLICY IS HEREBY ADOPTED FOR USE WITHIN THE \_\_\_\_\_ SCHOOL DISTRICT:**

It is the intent of this Board that to enhance the effectiveness of science education and to promote academic freedom and the neutrality of state government with respect to teachings that touch religious and nonreligious beliefs, it is necessary and desirable that science which seeks to explain the origins of life and its diversity (origins science), be conducted and taught objectively and without religious, naturalistic, or philosophic bias or assumption. To further this intent, the instructional program provided by schools within this district shall do all of the following:

- (A) Encourage the presentation of scientific evidence regarding the origins of life and its diversity objectively and without religious, naturalistic, or philosophic bias or assumption;
- (B) Require that whenever explanations regarding the origins of life and its diversity are presented, appropriate explanation and disclosure shall be provided regarding the historical nature of origins science and the use of any material assumption which may have provided a basis for the explanation being presented;
- (C) Encourage the development of curriculum that will help students think critically about the claims of evolutionary theory, understand the full range of scientific views that exist regarding the origins of life and its diversity, and understand why origins science may generate controversy.

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1. The policy is nearly identical to the provisions of HB 481, a proposal pending in the Ohio House of Representatives as of July 27, 2002. A Technical Explanation of this policy may be found at <http://www.IntelligentDesignnetwork.org/schoolpolicyexplanation.htm>.

The Science Curriculum Committee met on April 22, 2003. The committee members were asked to share with the Board of Education some of the points they used in deciding not to support John Freshwater's science curriculum proposal. All members agreed with at least one of the points listed below:

1. Intelligent Design is not science: not repeatable, measurable, etc. (belongs perhaps in social studies).
2. NABT (National Association of Biology Teachers), NSTA (National Science Teachers Association), AAAS (American Association of the Advancement of Science), Genetics Council have rejected Intelligent Design. No national group has endorsed it.
3. State Standards allow for discussion of controversy at 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Three standards in evolution theory listed at 8<sup>th</sup> grade have nothing to do with Intelligent Design or other controversial issues.
4. With no standard curriculum proposed, teachers would teach different information (should use standards).
- 5. Proposal mentioned critical thinking skills – redundant, we're already doing this.
6. Intelligent Design is basically a religious issue – how do we account for all other religions not represented (leaves children behind)?
- 7. Illegal
8. The board of education policy addresses controversial issues – Freshwater proposal is already addressed.

THIS LETTER IS FROM  
DR. LINDA WESTON

April 23, 2003

To: Mr. Maley  
Dr. Weston

From: John Freshwater

This letter is in regard to the curriculum meeting that was held on April 22, 2003.

From the onset, it has been my desire that all parties involved consider my proposal as proposed. Myself, and others who support this proposal have made every effort to clarify that this <sup>is</sup> not a religious issue. My proposal speaks only to the request that our school system be allowed to critically analyze the theory of evolution. It does not request the teaching of creation or intelligent design. Clearly, some people involved in this discussion have allowed their own personal prejudices regarding my religious convictions to cloud their judgment.

It has been confirmed through no less than two sources present at the meeting, that my personal religious beliefs were brought into the discussion regarding my proposal. I am very disappointed that this was allowed to happen. Dr. Weston made no attempts to stop this questionable dialogue. I understand that this dialogue was finally stopped by a teacher, and not someone in the position of authority. To allow my personal religious beliefs to enter into this discussion is plainly inappropriate at best. I will consider this matter closed at this time. I prefer that you focus your debate on what I actually proposed and direct others to do the same.

Respectfully,

John Freshwater