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RECENT ACTIONS TAKEN BY SCHOOL BOARDS AND DISTRICTS TO FOSTER OBJECTIVE ORIGINS SCIENCE

Cobb County Georgia

1. On March 28, 2002, the Cobb County Board of Education unanimously adopted a policy requiring the placement of the following sticker in textbooks that discuss the theory of evolution:

"This textbook contains material on evolution. 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."

2. On September 26, 2002, the Cobb County Board of Education adopted the following policy regarding origins science:

"It is the educational philosophy of the Cobb County School District to provide a broad base curriculum; therefore, the Cobb School District believes that discussion of disputed views of academic subjects is a necessary element of providing a balanced education, including the study of the origin of the species. This subject remains an area of intense interest, research, and discussion among scholars. As a result, the study of this subject shall be handled in accordance with this policy and with objectivity and good judgment on the part of teachers, taking into account the age and maturity level of their students.

"The purpose of this policy is to foster critical thinking among students, to allow academic freedom consistent with legal requirements, to promote tolerance and acceptance of diversity of opinion, and to ensure a posture of neutrality toward religion. It is the intent of the Cobb County board of education that this policy not be interpreted to restrict the teaching of evolution; to promote or require the teaching of creationism; or to discriminate for or against a particular set of religious beliefs, religion in general, or nonreligion.

3. On January 8, 2003, the Superintendent of the Cobb County School District issued the following guidelines for the implementation of the policy adopted on September 26, 2003:

1. Theories of origin shall be taught as defined within the Quality Core Curriculum (QCC). Teachers should seek to help students demonstrate proficiency in understanding those aspects of the theory of origins defined in the QCC and the impact of scientific theories on the disciplines studied.

2. Teachers are expected to set limits on discussion of theories of origin in order to respectfully focus discussion on scientific subject matter; at the same time, it is recognized that scientific instruction may create conflict or questions for some students with regard to belief systems. Discussion should be moderated to promote a sense of scientific inquiry and understanding of scientific methods, and to distinguish between scientific and philosophical or religious issues. It may be appropriate to acknowledge that science itself has limits and is not intended to explain everything, and that scientific theories of origin and religious belief are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

3. Under no circumstances should teachers use instruction in an effort to coerce students to adopt a particular religious belief or set of beliefs or to disavow a particular religious belief or set of beliefs. Instruction should be respectful of personal religious beliefs, and encourage such respect among students. Teachers should not interject their personal faith-based beliefs, or lack thereof, into such instruction, and should maintain a posture of neutrality toward religion.

4. It is recognized that instruction regarding theories of origin is difficult because it is socially controversial and potentially divisive. The administration expects, and will support, every teacher's effort to provide objective and professional instruction.

Ohio

On December 10, 2002, the Ohio State Board of Education unanimously approved for inclusion in State Science Standards, the following provisions that promote objective - evidence based origins science:

The key action taken by the Board involved the replacement of a naturalistic definition of science with a logical definition that is consistent with the scientific method.

The logical definition adopted was: "...science is a systematic method of continuing investigation, based on observation, hypothesis testing, measurement, experimentation, and theory building, which leads to more adequate explanations of natural phenomena."

The naturalistic definition that IDnet had opposed, that was offered by the Ohio Science Writing Team and that was rejected by the Board was:

"Recognize that scientific knowledge is limited to natural explanations for natural phenomena based on evidence from

our senses or technological extensions."

A similar naturalistic definition adopted in Kansas in February 2001, was described by its authors as a definition that necessarily excludes scientific discussion of intelligent causes for life. Thus, a naturalistic definition has the effect of censoring the competing design hypothesis and the scientific evidence and data that support it.

The second positive action taken was the Board's adoption of a new Life Sciences indicator and benchmark that states:

"Describe how scientists continue to investigate and critically analyze aspects of evolutionary theory (The intent of this indicator/benchmark does not mandate the teaching or testing of intelligent design)."

This indicator and benchmark necessarily challenges students and teachers to confront and openly discuss the scientific controversies that surround biological evolution. This is designed to open rather than to shut minds about an issue that is important to science, religion and culture.

On March 9, 2004, the Ohio State Board of Education, on a vote of 13 to 5, adopted a "Critical Analysis of Evolution" lesson plan that implements the indicator and benchmark adopted on December 10, 2002. Go to <http://www.sciohio.org/curriculum.pdf> for the lesson. The document is about 3.2 megs in size and will take time to bring up on a dial-up connection.

New Mexico

In 2003 concerned citizens in New Mexico influenced the State Department of Education to change dogmatic language in the **Working Draft** to more objective language in the **Final New Mexico Science Content Standards, Benchmarks and Performance Standards** (Approved August 28, 2003, http://164.64.166.11/cilt/downloads/science/science_standards.pdf).

Origin of Life

- ***"Recognize that life on Earth began over 3.5 billion years ago; and species today have evolved from earlier, distinctly different species."*** (**Working Draft**)
- ***"Explain that one-celled organisms developed into increasingly complex multi-cellular organisms."*** (*Working Draft*)
- ***"8. Describe the evidence for the first appearance of life on Earth as one-celled organisms, over 3.5 billion years ago, and for the later appearance of a diversity of multi-cellular organisms over millions of years."*** (**Final: Grade 9-12, Strand II, Standard II (Life Science), Benchmark II, Performance Standard 8**)

Common Ancestry

- ***“Explain*** that millions of different species that live on Earth today are related by descent from common ancestors.” (***Working Draft***)
- ***“9. Critically analyze*** the data and observations supporting the conclusion that the species living on Earth today are related by descent from the ancestral one-celled organisms.” (***Final: Grade 9-12, Strand II, Standard II (Life Science), Benchmark II, Performance Standard 9***)

Natural Selection

- ***Explain*** that evolution by natural selection explains both the fossil record of ancient life forms and DNA similarities among species. (***Working Draft***)
- ***13. Analyze*** how evolution by natural selection and other mechanisms explains many phenomena including the fossil record of ancient life forms and similarities (both physical and molecular) among different species. (***Final: Grade 9-12, Strand II, Standard II (Life Science), Benchmark II, Performance Standard 13***)