



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on July 22, 2011

Texas School Board Debates Adding Books With Alternatives to Evolution

Because the school district does not have the finances to purchase new textbooks, the board is examining the standards of science e-books. The electronic sources would be used alongside the textbooks.



DallasNews.com [reports](#):

Although science materials for several grades are up for consideration, most of the debate is expected to center on high school biology books and their coverage of evolution. The board's social conservative bloc has been adamant that the e-books present both the evidence for and against key principles of Darwin — and a conservative think tank that has pushed for critical analysis of Darwin's theories is arguing that the e-books generally fail to cover all sides of the various issues.

Mainstream science education groups have been generally supportive of the e-books and are warning the board against watering down the coverage of common ancestry, natural selection and other key Darwin principles.

Supplemental materials recommended by Education Commissioner Robert Scott do not adequately address "alternatives to evolution," note some conservatives. As currently none of the books being considered includes creationism, voting against the recommended reading materials would be viewed as a victory in the effort to include evolution alternatives in science education.

Thus far, six of the 15 members on the school board have asserted that "intelligent design" has a place in the curriculum.

Leading the school board is Chairwoman Barbara Cargill, a former biology teacher who refutes the theory of evolution. Proudly one of the most conservative members on the board, Cargill observed, "Right now there are six true conservative Christians on the board, so we have to fight for two votes."

Some have been critical of her leadership, however, asserting that she is allowing her political and spiritual beliefs to impose an agenda.

Kathy Miller, president of the Texas Freedom Network (TFN) — an organization which purportedly supports "religious freedom" — said this: "The right-wing faction of the State Board of Education will make every effort to put their personal and political beliefs in science instruction."

TFN spokesman Dan Quinn added, "[Cargill] questioned the faith of her colleagues and she point blank



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said that she will demand that publishers make changes in the science materials to meet her own personal objectives — not science objectives.”

According to Cargill, and others on the school board, she is not being defensive but instead hopes to add some balance to the curriculum.

Reuters [reports](#).

Debate on the issue grew heated during a hearing on Thursday, even as board members sought to reassure the crowd that none of the supplemental materials currently being considered mentioned creationism.

Board member Tom Davis asked the conservative members of the board, “Do you also plan to start teaching the philosophy of Astrology as science?”

But Jonathon Saenz of the conservative Liberty Institute quickly pointed out that not all scientists are in agreement on evolution. “There are scientists who have all kinds of different views. That’s what the scientific community is all about.”

The *Blaze* notes, “The Republican-dominated board drew national attention in 2009 when it adopted science standards encouraging schools to scrutinize ‘all sides’ of scientific theory.”

This particular debate has not been limited to Texas. In Pennsylvania, for example, teachers were required to read a statement to biology students that mentioned intelligent design; however, in 2005 a federal judge ruled that the statement had too many religious overtones and the practice was halted.

Similarly, Louisiana legislators passed a law in 2009 that allowed educators to use materials outside of the textbooks that teach different theories about the origins of life.

In 2008, Florida lawmakers mandated that educators begin teaching evolution as a theory. Prior to that, the standards referred only briefly to evolution as “change over time.”

By the end of the day today, the school board will vote on which materials to adopt. If the supplemental materials recommended by Education Commissioner Robert Scott are rejected, the vote will be a victory for the conservatives.

Regardless of which e-books are adopted, the school districts are not required to purchase them; however, a majority of districts are expected to do so, as the e-books will likely help schools reach achievement requirements on standardized tests.

(For an update on the board’s decision, [click here](#).)



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