

Americans United files court challenge on 'intelligent design' Suit against Dover, Pennsylvania, school board: Suit against Dover, Pennsylvania, school board

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Two civil-liberties watchdog groups have filed the first known lawsuit to prevent public schools from teaching the theory of “intelligent design.” Critics of the theory, including supporters of evolution, call it “junk science” and say it is a back-door way to teach creationism.

Americans United for Separation of Church and State and the American Civil Liberties Union filed a federal lawsuit December 14 against the Dover, Pennsylvania, school board to bar the district from teaching intelligent design.

The theory argues that an “intelligent agent” guided the development of life on Earth, using that assertion to explain alleged gaps or inconsistencies in the theory of evolution. Conservative evangelical Christians have been intelligent design’s main promoters.

The majority of mainstream scientists, including many Christian biologists and anthropologists, have criticized intelligent design as pseudo-science. On October 18 the Dover Area School District Board passed, by a 6-3 vote, a resolution requiring students to “be made aware of gaps/problems” in evolutionary theory. The district—in a small town near the state capital of Harrisburg—then produced a statement that ninth-grade biology teachers at Dover High School would have to read to their classes.

The statement points to an intelligent-design text, *Of Pandas and People*, available for students who “would like to explore this view.”

The groups filed the lawsuit on behalf of 11 Dover parents who oppose the teaching of intelligent-design theory in their children's classrooms. It charges that such teaching violates the First Amendment's ban on government endorsement of religious views.

The Supreme Court has previously ruled that public schools could not teach creationism, which is the belief that God created the world in six literal, 24-hour days several thousand years ago.

"Intelligent design is a nonscientific argument or assertion, made in opposition to the scientific theory of evolution, that an intelligent, supernatural actor has intervened in the history of life, and that life 'owes its origin to a master intellect,'" the suit charges.

Dover science teachers opposed the policy at the time of the board's vote, and the three board members who voted against it later resigned in protest. The suit further contends that *Of Pandas and People* was published by a group that promotes so-called creation science and Christianity, and that the school board's purpose in recommending it was religious.

"As far as we know, this is the first [legal] challenge of the intelligent-design concept being taught in science classes," said Americans United spokesman Joe Conn. Intelligent design is "clearly not coming from the science community—it's coming from ideological sources," he said. -*Associated Baptist Press*