

EVOLUTION TEACHING UNLIKELY TO CHANGE

BY JOHN RICHARD SCHROCK

The Kansas State Board of Education voted 7-to-3 this week to initiate a full external committee review of K-12 science-education standards beginning in August 2004. Will this resurrect the “equal time for creation science” argument? Veteran board members and school administrators with solid school law training know this is not a possibility.

Louisiana tried requiring “equal time” for creation science if evolution was taught, and the issue went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1987. In that decision, *Edwards v. Aguillard*, the Supreme Court found that mandating “equal time” for creationism advanced religious belief, and their decision was not a close vote.

Therefore, opponents of evolution in the Kansas science standards probably have two options.

One option would be to return to the 1999 Kansas science standards that removed macroevolution, defined science as “logical” rather than “natural,” and tinkered with the geological time scale, etc. This excluded evolution questions from the state assessment and was also defended as leaving the inclusion of evolution up to local school boards.

Could that enable a local Kansas school board to prohibit teaching of evolution in biology classes? Not if this action was tailored to meet local religious objections—again clearly decided in a U.S. Supreme Court ruling in 1968 in *Epperson v. Arkansas*.

and has **almost*** no credibility in the science community.

And because a researcher who tried to use ID theory would have to somehow get into the mind of the designer, there is the likelihood that such a requirement would already be prohibited as religious and covered by previous court rulings. If not, the first state to attempt this would become the test case to be appealed up to the Supreme Court, putting that state’s science standards in limbo for several years.

As a biology student-teacher supervisor who travels the state, I do not know of one Kansas high school biology teacher who stopped teaching macroevolution when the state board voted in 1999 to not include the concept in state science standards. And I do not know of any creationist teacher who was forced to teach evolution after the February 2001 reversal re-established those concepts. So far, Kansas science standards have been guidelines and do not dictate curriculum.

Biology teachers who understand evolution generally teach about it; creationist teachers generally do not. Adding or subtracting words from the current standards will not substantially change this.

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John Richard Schrock of Emporia was a member of the original committee that drafted the science education standards that included evolution.

Can the state require equal time for creation science? Not and be constitutional.

*Editor inserted this “almost”!; I am complaining.

A second option is to make Kansas the first state to insert a new “intelligent design” proposal into the standards on an “equal time” basis. While advocates have worked hard to portray it as non-religious, ID has produced no science research

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COUNTDOWN ON REVISING KANSAS SCIENCE EDUCATION STANDARDS

Kansas law requires that education standards for the major disciplines be reviewed every three years. With mathematics and reading revisions just approved, the history-government and science standards are now due for review.

Commissioner Tompkin's reminder at last week's Board caught everyone by surprise and the State Board of Education tabled their review decision until the August meeting. Kansas law does not specify the nature of the review. It could vary, from a cursory rubber stamping of the current standards, to an internal KSDE staff review involving some clarifying rewriting (but no major policy changes), to an external 25-member committee of classroom-to-university educators. The Commissioner took a hard line on this hot topic, stating that he did not want to seem insubordinate, but he was not moving on the science review without the SBOE specifying exactly how they wanted the review to proceed and how the committee would be appointed.

The SBOE split 5-5 between having an internal or external review. Five conservative members would likely favor changes in the emphasis on evolution in biology, and five appear happy with the science standards as they are. Board member Morris correctly pointed out that there was little likelihood of change in the "e-word" in the science standards in 2003-2004 since the votes are not there.

That could change with the 2004 fall elections. Four of the five seats up for vote will be pro-evolution Board members, and it could be difficult to hold all four seats. If six members of the new SBOE wished to de-emphasize evolution, they could revisit the science standards in 2005 or 2006.

Are we looking at a countdown to renewed controversy in Kansas over evolution? Perhaps. Will this resurrect the "equal time for creation science" argument? Veteran board members and school administrators with solid school law training know this is not a possibility.

Louisiana tried requiring "equal time" for creation science if evolution was taught, and the issue went all the way to the Supreme Court in 1987. In that *Edwards v. Aguillard* decision, the U.S. Supreme Court found "equal time" advanced religious belief, and their decision was not a close vote. As much as advocates may want their religious views of origins

presented in the science classroom, the Establishment Clause that draws the line between church and state makes clear that this will not change short of a Constitutional Amendment. That will require a Constitutional Amendment in Washington DC, not a re-vote in Topeka.

Opponents of evolution in the Kansas science standards probably have two options. One option would be to restore to the 1999 Kansas science standards that removed macroevolution, defined science as "logical" rather than "natural," and tinkered with the geological time scale, etc. This excluded evolution questions from the state assessment and was also defended as leaving the inclusion of evolution up to local school boards. However, while local school boards had virtually never designated the specific lessons taught in various courses, the 1999 removal of evolution from the state standards resulted in several Kansas school districts specifically requiring evolution in their biology curriculum. But could a local Kansas school board actually prohibit teaching of evolution in biology classes if the topic was removed from the state standards? Not if this action was tailored to meet local religious objections—again clearly decided in a U.S. Supreme Court ruling in 1968 in *Epperson v. Arkansas*.

The second option is to make Kansas the first state to insert a new "intelligent design" (ID) proposal into the standards on an "equal time" basis. While advocates of ID have worked hard to portray it as non-religious, it has produced no science research and has no credibility in the science community. And since a researcher who tried to use ID theory would have to somehow get into the mind of the Designer, there is the likelihood that such a requirement would already be prohibited as religious and covered by previous court rulings. If not, the first state to attempt this would become the test case to be appealed up to the Supreme Court, putting that state's science standards in limbo for several years. Attempts to make "equal time for ID" part of the Ohio and Louisiana science standards have failed within the last year. Unless another state adopts ID in its science standards and begins the appeal process to the Supreme Court, Kansas may have begun the clock ticking—a countdown to again being the focus of national attention over evolution in public schools.

As a biology student-teacher supervisor who travels the state, I do not know of one Kansas high school biology teacher who stopped teaching macroevolution when the 1999 KSBE vote removed the concept. And I do not know of any creationist teacher who was forced to teach evolution after the

February 2001 reversal reestablished those concepts. So far, Kansas science standards have been guidelines and have not dictated curriculum.

In Kansas, about 1-in-5 biology teachers believe creationism has a scientific basis, a portion slightly smaller than in other surveyed states. Biology teachers who understand evolution generally teach about it; creationist teachers generally do not. Adding or subtracting words from the current standards will not substantially change this.

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