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## **[State Board of Education Adopts Another Evolution Disclaimer](#)**

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by Eric Meikle

The Alabama State Board of Education voted on November 8, 2001 to require that a statement referring to evolution as controversial be inserted in science textbooks. Since 1995 an evolution disclaimer (see below) has been pasted in Alabama's state-approved texts. Early this year the Board of Education adopted a new K-12 science education framework, the Alabama Course of Study: Science (ACOSS). Some observers had thought that Board might simply drop the previous disclaimer, given changes in ACOSS since 1995. However, the Board voted instead to require a new insert consisting of four paragraphs from the Preface to the 2001 ACOSS.

The new evolution insert reads:

The word "theory" has many meanings. Theories are defined as systematically organized knowledge, abstract reasoning, a speculative idea or plan, or a systematic statement of principles. Scientific theories are based on both observations of the natural world and assumptions about the natural world. They are always subject to change in view of new and confirmed observations.

Many scientific theories have been developed over time. The value of scientific work is not only the development of theories but also what is learned from the development process. The Alabama Course of Study: Science includes many theories and studies of scientists' work. The work of Copernicus, Newton, and Einstein, to name a few, has provided a basis of our knowledge of the world today.

The theory of evolution by natural selection is a controversial theory that is included in this textbook. It is controversial because it states that natural selection provides the basis for the modern scientific explanation for the diversity of living things. Since natural selection has been observed to play a role in influencing small changes in a population, it is assumed that it produces large changes, even though this has not been directly observed. Because of its importance and implication, students should understand the nature of evolutionary theories. They should learn to make distinctions between the multiple meanings of evolution, to distinguish between observations and assumptions used to draw conclusions, and to wrestle with the unanswered questions and unresolved problems still faced by evolutionary theory.

There are many unanswered questions about the origin of life. With the explosion of new scientific knowledge in biochemical and molecular biology and exciting new fossil discoveries, Alabama students may be among those who use their understanding and skills to contribute to knowledge and to answer many unanswered questions. Instructional materials associated with controversy should be approached with an open mind, studied carefully, and critically considered.

The following evolution disclaimer has appeared in science textbooks in Alabama public schools since 1995:

"This textbook discusses evolution, a controversial theory some scientists present as a scientific explanation for the origin of living things, such as plants, animals and humans. No one was present when life first appeared on Earth. Therefore, any statement about life's origins should be considered a theory. The word evolution may refer to many types of change. Evolution describes changes that occur within a species. (White moths, for example, may evolve into gray moths.) This process is microevolution, which can be observed and described as fact. Evolution may also refer to the change of one living thing to another, such as reptiles into birds. This process, called macroevolution, has never been observed and should be considered a theory. Evolution also refers to the unproven belief that random, undirected forces produced a world of living things. There are many unanswered questions about the origin of life which are not mentioned in your textbook, including: Why did the major groups of animals suddenly appear in the fossil record, (known as the Cambrian Explosion)? Why have no new major groups of living things appeared in the fossil record in a long time? Why do major groups of plants and animals have no transitional forms in the fossil record? How did you and all living things come to possess such a complete and complex set of instructions for building a living body? Study hard and keep an open mind. Someday you may contribute to the theories of how living things appeared on Earth."

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