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Contrary to some recent press reports, the "Theories of Origin" policy adopted by the Cobb County, Georgia, Board of Education on September 26, 2002, specifically disallows the teaching of creationism. As enacted, the policy explicitly states that, "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 non-religion."

The policy was a clear disappointment to groups on the radical religious right such as the American Family Association, which had issued on September 25 an action alert decrying the policy's "failure to guarantee the Biblical account of creation a place at the table."

Eugenie C. Scott, the executive director of the National Center for Science Education, commented, "The Board is to be commended on its unanimous decision to not present creationism in science classes in Cobb County."

"But the Board giveth and the Board taketh away," Scott added. "Mixed signals are still being sent to teachers and citizens."

The policy declares evolution a "disputed view" that must be "balanced". That evolution is scientifically "disputed," however, is inaccurate. "Although there are legitimate debates within science about how evolution happened, there are none about whether it happened: in science, it's a done deal," NCSE's Scott explained. Hundreds of biologists at all of Georgia's leading colleges and universities, as well as The National Academy of Sciences and the National Science Teachers' Association, agreed, writing letters to the Board in support of evolution education. "It's bad science education and simply unfair to mislead students about the status of evolution within the scientific community," said Scott.

Even if the policy specifically excludes creationism, local supporters of evolution education worry that the Board may not be sufficiently vigorous in opposing forms of creationism that don't use the term, such as "intelligent design." A concern also remains that evolution will be "balanced" by the teaching of creationism-derived misinformation on evolution, the alleged "evidence against evolution."

Last spring, the school board required that an antievolution disclaimer be placed in biology textbooks; this action is the subject of a pending lawsuit brought by the American Civil Liberties Union.

The September 26, 2002, "IDBD" policy states:

As stated in Policy IA, Philosophy, it is the educational philosophy of the Cobb County School District to provide a broad based curriculum; therefore, the Cobb County 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 non-religion.

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