

1 November 2004

Mr. David Ahlquist  
President  
Board of Education  
Grantsburg School District  
Grantsburg, Wisconsin 54840

Dear Mr. Ahlquist,

We are writing because we are extremely concerned about a recent decision the Grantsburg School Board has made with respect to science education in the Grantsburg School District. It is our understanding that the Board has altered the District's science curriculum to force the teaching of "theories of origin" in addition to evolution. Given that such alternative "theories of origin" have no standing within the scientific community, we strongly believe that your students will suffer greatly if this misguided action is not overturned.

We issue this strong warning as professional educators with specific expertise in the fields of study your ruling affects the most. Indeed, we are faculty members from institutions of higher education across the state of Wisconsin with areas of professional competence in religious studies and biology. It is likely that we will receive many of the Grantsburg students desiring higher education. If the Board's decision stands, Grantsburg students will be misinformed about the most important concept in biology, and ill-prepared to go beyond what they have learned in high school.

We have joined together in writing this letter to demonstrate as clearly as we can that your actions stand to do great harm to students' understanding of both science and religion. Additionally, we want to demonstrate that when it comes to the teaching of evolutionary theory, there need be no conflict between science and religion. Such a conflict arises only when people misunderstand the basic nature of science and religion and when they are grossly misinformed about what modern evolutionary theory actually says.

It is essential that students today be taught to have a grasp of science – and that grasp means that they must be able to understand the very nature of science rather than merely memorize facts. Evolutionary theory is the single most important framework for tying all of biology together into a coherent whole. Without such a framework, students are unable to integrate, organize, and compare biological information, which thus remains a dazzling array of isolated facts and details lacking the explanatory power that characterizes real science. Indeed, the great geneticist Theodosius Dobzhansky wrote a seminal paper entitled, "Nothing in Biology Makes Sense Except in the Light of Evolution." Unfortunately, the alternative "theories of origin" the Grantsburg School Board wants taught are nothing more than ill-informed attacks on evolution coupled with sectarian religious orthodoxy dressed up to appear to be scientific. Your students will not be prepared to make meaningful progress in science *or* religious studies classes at the

university level if they are presented with this material in their high school science laboratories.

Given that we have dedicated our professional lives to gaining and disseminating an understanding of religion and biology, you can rest assured that we believe that both subjects are of utmost importance. But that doesn't mean that the two subjects are interchangeable. Religion and science have different methodologies and practitioners ask different types of questions. These differences do *not* mean that either subject is more important than the other, rather it means that the two fields do not fully overlap and that each teaches us important, but different lessons. To conflate the two does irreparable damage to both.

Because there is ample opportunity to teach about religion, both in our public schools and in our homes, there is no need to bring religion into your district's science classrooms and laboratories. Students are not well served when such a blending of disparate fields occurs.

We request the Grantsburg School Board reconsider the actions recently taken. Your students deserve to have access to the best education possible. Without such an education, their future options will be greatly limited. Please, for their sake, bring your science curriculum back into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Sincerely,

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