

Kansas to Allow Evolution Theory Back in Science Classes

By John Milburn
ASSOCIATED PRESS

TOPEKA, Kan. — A newly elected Kansas Board of Education moved yesterday toward restoring evolution to state science curricula — a year after causing an uproar over how biology and faith should be taught in the classroom.

After more than two hours of debate, the board decided it would give final approval to the new standards at its Feb. 13-14 meeting. No vote was taken, but enough members signaled their support for the revised standards to guarantee their

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adoption next month.

The new science standards would replace ones adopted in August 1999 that omitted references to many evolutionary concepts.

The discussion was dominated by board member Steve Abrams, one of the three remaining supporters of the current standards.

"It still comes across that this is dogma, that this is the only way it

is," Abrams said of the latest version.

But John Staver, chairman of the committee that wrote the current standards, said the scientific community can't test the supernatural or the existence of God.

"In my personal life, when I encounter that, I leave my science background and I go to church," Staver said.

Evolution, a theory developed by Charles Darwin and others, holds that the Earth is billions of years old and that all life, including humans, evolved from simple forms through a process of natural selection. Some religious fundamentalists and others object to the teaching of evolution,

saying it contradicts the biblical account of creation.

A public comment session on the new standards also was held yesterday.

"You will be legislating naturalism into the public school curriculum," said Jody Sjogren of the Intelligent Design Network, which maintains that evidence shows a higher power created the universe. "We need to stop making evolution a religion."

But Jack Krebs of Kansas Citizens for Science said the revisions would help improve the state's tarnished image with scientists by restoring mainstream standards on the history

of the universe.

The board in 1999 voted 6-4 in favor of science standards that critics said stripped evolution from its accepted place at the center of biological studies. Republican Gov. Bill Graves called the board's action "terrible, tragic, embarrassing." Two members who voted in the majority lost in primary elections last year, and a third didn't run.

Kansas is one of several states, including Arizona, Alabama, Illinois, New Mexico, Texas and Nebraska, where school boards have attempted to take evolution out of state science standards or de-emphasize evolutionary concepts.

SF Chronicle

Jan. 10, 2001

DH 2001002/E1