

Hamilton School District



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SENATE EDUCATION

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To: State of Montana Senate & House of Representatives

From: Duane Lyons, Superintendent of Schools

Last year I had a visit from an acquaintance that lived in Darby. He talked to me at length about Intelligent Design and the need to change our teaching of high school students in the area of Biology to include criticisms of Evolution and the inclusion of Intelligent Design. We talked of his approach to the issue in Darby and his plans to 'cover the state' of Montana with similar campaigns... and a warning that Hamilton was next.

Ladies and Gentlemen: as a former science teacher and now an administrator in our public schools, I see danger in the mix of politics, religion and science threatening our present science curriculum. I am truly intrigued by some of the ideas in the mixture, but they are not science. We need to think clearly about what information, what standards in learning, what ideas we want to present to our children in school... and what ideas and values we want to present to our children in our homes and churches. In a recent parental discussion about our teaching of evolution, one of our Science teachers here in Hamilton told a father recently "Please DO explain to your child your concerns about evolutionary theory... but you DON'T want me teaching your child religion, do you?" After a moment's thought, the father calmed down, said "...well you are right about that", and left the meeting.

Scientific theory about the smallest sub-atomic particles used to talk about electrons, protons and neutrons. I used to teach it. Now we have totally changed or expanded the theory in response to new information. There is some wonderful and very hard to explain things happening on the sub-atomic level that has led to quantum theory, with many new and smaller particles and truly bizarre particle behavior. The point is... science and our understanding changes and will change to reflect new information. Intelligent design is not (yet?) new scientific information. IF some elements of it become proven scientifically in future years, it will then be taught as science. Until then, the ideas are more in the realm of social studies, political studies, or religious studies.

School Boards are subject to local politics, intense local politics. The wonderful volunteers who make up school boards are not science teachers or curriculum experts, but are expected to review and approve local curricula or plans for teaching subjects to our children. I believe some State guidelines on this potentially explosive or certainly intense issue of Intelligent Design and local science curricula would be in order to relieve local School Boards many hours or days of debate in each and every local community.