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# California school sued over intelligent design

## Rural high school introduces concept in philosophy class

**AP** Associated Press

updated 9:34 p.m. ET, Tues., Jan. 10, 2006

FRESNO, Calif. - A rural high school teaching a religion-based alternative to evolution was sued Tuesday by a group of parents who said the class should be stopped because it violates the U.S. Constitution.

Frazier Mountain High School in Lebec violated the separation of church and state while attempting to legitimize the theory of "intelligent design" by introducing it as a philosophy class taught by a minister's wife, according to the federal lawsuit filed by parents of 13 students.

"The course was designed to advance religious theories on the origins of life, including creationism and its offshoot, 'intelligent design,'" the lawsuit said. "Because the teacher has no scientific training, students are not provided with any critical analysis of this presentation."

The lawsuit was filed by Americans United for Separation of Church and State, which successfully blocked Dover, Pa., schools last month from using science courses to advance the theory that living things are so complex they must have been designed by a higher being.

Similar battles are being fought in Georgia and Kansas over the controversial subject.

Officials in the El Tejon Unified School District, which is a defendant in the case, could not immediately be reached for comment.

Superintendent John Wight said last week that the class, "Philosophy of Design," was not being taught as science and was an opportunity for students to debate the controversial issue.

Fifteen students were enrolled in the class in Lebec, a town of 1,285 in the mountains between the agricultural Central Valley and Los Angeles, about 75 miles south.

Defendant Kitty Jo Nelson, one of two school board trustees who opposed the class, said the costs of the lawsuit would ultimately deprive students. The regional school draws about 500 students from tiny communities to Lebec, a town of 1,285 straddling the Tehachapi mountains between the agricultural Central Valley and Los Angeles 75 miles to the south.

"I'm extremely disappointed and saddened," she said.

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Phone messages left at district offices for other trustees were not immediately returned.

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### No pro-evolution lecturers

The five-member school board was divided when it learned about the class last month and discovered three guest lecturers were scheduled in support of intelligent design but none for evolution.

The class is taught by social studies teacher Sharon Lemburg, whose husband is an Assembly of God pastor.

An initial course description sent to parents in December said it would examine "evolution as a theory and will discuss the scientific, biological, and Biblical aspects that suggest why Darwin's philosophy is not rock solid."

The El Tejon district's Board of Trustees approved the course 3-2 with a revised syllabus in a Jan. 1 session, during which board members had to vote up or down on the entire winter session curriculum.


Classes started two days later with a class plan that relied solely on videos, not guest speakers.

The Washington, D.C.-based Americans United for Separation of Church and State said that with one exception the course "relies exclusively on videos that advocate religious perspectives and present religious theories as scientific ones."

The lawsuit filed on behalf of 11 parents seeks a temporary restraining order to halt the four-week class in its second week.

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