

# Judge bans stickers questioning evolution: Stickers to be removed from textbooks

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Civil liberties groups are praising a federal judge's decision to ban textbook stickers that notify public school students that evolution is a "theory, not a fact."

The American Civil Liberties Union of Georgia sued the Cobb County School District in northwest Georgia on behalf of five parents who argued that the stickers promoted religious viewpoints over scientific theory.

The three-sentence sticker, approved by the school district in 2002, reads, "This textbook contains material on evolution. Evolution is a theory, not a fact, regarding the origin of living things. This material should be approached with an open mind, studied carefully and critically considered."

On January 13, U.S. District Judge Clarence Cooper ordered the school district to remove the stickers, declaring them an unconstitutional violation of the First Amendment. Said Rabbi Scott Saulson, an ACLU of Georgia board member: "To continue to mask religious belief as science will sooner or later besmirch both faith and religion."

Barry Lynn, executive director of Washington-based Americans United for Separation of Church and State, also praised the court decision, saying that "public schools may not be used to advance religious dogma, and the court has rightly upheld that principle."

The Cobb County Board of Education said on its Web site that it was disappointed by the ruling and that the stickers are "a reasonable and evenhanded guide to science instruction and encouraging students to be critical thinkers." The board has not yet indicated whether it will appeal the ruling.

The Atlanta-based judge said the school board's policy ordering the stickers to be placed in middle-school and high-school textbooks sends "a message that the school board agrees with the beliefs of Christian fundamentalists and creationists."

Applying a test from a 1971 U.S. Supreme Court decision, Cooper said a reasonable observer would conclude that the stickers represented the school board's endorsement of the religious view that God created the world a few thousand years ago literally in six days.