

Teaching Evolution:

Ten Top Challenges for St. Louis-Area Teachers

The following list of 10 top challenges associated with teaching evolution is based in part upon advance focus groups with St. Louis-area teachers and students, conducted for AAAS by the nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization, Public Agenda.

Starting with this list of 10 challenges, teachers participating in the AAAS Evolution on the Front Line event will be asked by AAAS President Dr. Gilbert Omenn to identify their top four concerns, by using audience-survey devices.

Teachers' resulting four key concerns will be addressed later in the program by a panel of leading scientific authorities, moderated by Cornelia Dean of The New York Times.

When prompted, please select your top four concerns from the following list.

- 1) Students or their parents object to evolution-related instruction, and the controversy consumes valuable class time.
- 2) Knowledge of human evolution is not assessed by statewide standardized tests, so covering this topic is not a priority -- particularly if it stirs trouble.
- 3) It is difficult to frame evolution instruction in a way that leaves students' minds open -- yet also does not sound to them like equivocation.
- 4) Superiors have at times sent implicit or explicit messages to steer clear of human evolution, or to "teach both sides" in science classrooms.
- 5) Feeling confident about teaching evolution can be difficult because professional-development opportunities -- or even simple answers to basic questions about evolution and the nature of science -- are not readily available to help teachers refresh their content knowledge.
- 6) There has been so much conflicting discussion of "intelligent design," it is hard to know what this term really means, or how to find answers.
- 7) No one has explained how teachers can best answer parents, students or others who ask, "Why not teach the controversy?"
- 8) Students who are offended by evolution instruction are allowed in many instances to skip those class dates, and this may send a negative signal to other students.
- 9) Policies about teaching evolution are unclear, and teachers who resist pressures to compromise the science curriculum are not always assured of support.
- 10) Hands-on, visual teaching aids on evolution are not readily available.