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Vouchers for creationism in Louisiana?

July 26th, 2012 [Louisiana](#) [Anti-Evolution](#) [2012](#)

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Louisiana is about to spend almost twelve million dollars to fund the teaching of creationism, charges Zack Kopplin, famous for organizing the effort to repeal the so-called Louisiana Science Education Act. In Kopplin's sights now is a controversial new voucher program in the state that uses public school funds to pay for tuition and certain fees at private schools for students who attend low-performing public schools and whose family

income is below 250% of the federal poverty level. When the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education considered a set of accountability guidelines for such private schools at its July 24, 2012, meeting, Kopplin testified that of the roughly 6600 spaces available for students under the program, 1350 will be filled, as the *Lafayette Independent Weekly* (July 26, 2012) [described](#) it, "at private Christian schools that teach creationism and peg evolution as 'false science.'"

[According](#) to the *Alexandria Town Talk* (July 25, 2012), "A number of the schools on the voucher list teach creationism, a doctrine that holds that God created all life out of nothing, and either don't mention the theory of evolution or teach that it is false science. State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education policy on teaching science requires that public schools teach what is in textbooks but they can supplement with BESE-approved material to promote 'critical thinking' on alternatives to evolution." Superintendent of Education John C. White told the newspaper that BESE had approved the curriculum for all of the schools. "Not teaching evolution could show up in the required state testing for students receiving vouchers, he said, and there could be repercussions 'if a school shows a fundamental disregard' for conducting the test."

Writing earlier in the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* (July 18, 2012) about Kopplin's research on the private schools expected to receive new students through the voucher program, columnist James Gill [commented](#), "It is impossible to prepare fully for such a massive reform as going voucher, and some undeserving private schools are bound to receive an OK from harried state officials. But a religious takeover on this scale cannot be accidental. Of the schools on Zack Kopplin's list, one believes that scientists are 'sinful men,' and declares its view 'on the age of the earth and other issues is that any theory that goes against God's word is in error.' Another avers that evolution is 'extremely damaging to children individually and to society as a whole.' A third tells students to write an essay explaining how 'the complexity of a cell shows it must be purposefully designed.' And so it goes."

The creationist instructional material used by such schools include textbooks from Bob Jones University Press and A Beka Books — which were described by the University of California system in the *ACSI v. Stearns* case as "inappropriate for use as primary texts in college preparatory science courses due to their characterizations of religious doctrine as scientific evidence, scientific inaccuracies, failure to encourage critical thinking, and overall un-scientific

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approach” – and Accelerated Christian Education. A textbook from ACE that argued against evolution on the grounds that the Loch Ness monster not only exists but also is a living plesiosaur (incorrectly described as a dinosaur) understandably attracted the [attention](#) of *The Scotsman* (June 25, 2012) and was widely ridiculed nationally and internationally.

The voucher program is presently under legal challenge from the Louisiana Association of Educators and the Louisiana Federation of Teachers along with a number of local school boards. But the issue of the state's funding the teaching of creationism is not part of the challenge. Rather, as the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* (July 10, 2012) [explained](#), "Two key issues are at play in the voucher suit: whether providing private schools with money from the Minimum Foundation Program violates the [Louisiana state] constitution by redirecting those funds from public schools, and whether a last-minute vote setting the new MFP formula in place received enough support in the state House to carry the force of law." The state will be allowed to implement the voucher program while the challenge works its way through the court system, the newspaper reported.

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