Mr. David Ahlquist  
President  
Board of Education  
Grantsburg School District  
Grantsburg, Wisconsin  54840  

Dear Mr. Ahlquist,

We recently learned that the Grantsburg School Board has decided to require the teaching of “theories of origin” in addition to evolution. As geoscientists, we strongly object to the proposition that non-scientific “theories” should be given equal (or any) time in a science classroom. Such alternative “theories of origin” have no standing within the scientific community and no place in a science class. We strongly believe that your students will suffer greatly if this misguided action is not overturned.

Overwhelming geological evidence indicates that the Earth is of great age and that its biota have undergone billions of years of evolution and extinction events over its long history. Your Board’s decision will require students to contextualize these scientific data in some other, nonscientific way. If the Board’s decision stands, Grantsburg students will be misinformed about the most important concept in biology, evolution, and ill-prepared to go beyond what they have learned in high school. Additionally, the likelihood that students presented alternative “theories of origin” will be able to understand the premises of geoscience with any degree of sophistication is small. As faculty members from institutions of higher education across the state of Wisconsin, we wish to warn you that this policy will put Grantsburg high school graduates at a distinct disadvantage compared to other high school graduates when they undertake further studies in the sciences.

It is essential that students today be taught to have a grasp of science – and that grasp means that they must be able to understand the very nature of science rather than merely memorize facts. Evolutionary theory is the single most important framework for tying all of biology together into a coherent whole and underpinning everything we know about the history of the earth. Without such a framework, students are unable to integrate, organize, and compare biological and paleobiological information, which thus remains a dazzling array of isolated facts and details lacking the explanatory power that characterizes real science.

As scientists, we do not doubt the importance of religious thought or religious faith. However, they represent two very different areas of human activity and they are not interchangeable. Religion and science have different methodologies and practitioners ask different types of questions. These differences do not mean that either subject is more important than the other, rather it means that the two fields do not overlap and that each teaches us important, but different lessons. To conflate the two does irreparable damage to both. In his book *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life*, paleontologist Stephen J. Gould makes a strong case for mutual respect and
disengagement between practitioners of science and of religion because their fields do not overlap. All of us are willing to respect religious thought, and we expect the same respect for scientific thought.

We request the Grantsburg School Board reconsider the actions recently taken. Your students deserve to have access to the best education possible. Without such an education, their future options will be greatly limited. Please, for their sake, bring your science curriculum back into the 21st century.

Sincerely,

Iddrisu Adam, Assistant Professor of Geography/Geology, University of Wisconsin-Marshfield/Wood County
Rafique Ahmed, Professor of Geography and Earth Science, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse
Jean M. Bahr, Professor of Geology, University of Wisconsin-Madison
Robert W. Baker, Professor of Geology and Chair, Department of Plant and Earth Science, University of Wisconsin-River Falls
Carol Bendorf, Associate Lecturer of Geology, University of Wisconsin-Platteville
Charles R. Bentley, A. P. Crary Professor Emeritus of Geophysics, University of Wisconsin-Madison
Prajukti (Juk) Bhattacharyya, Assistant Professor of Geography and Geology, University of Wisconsin-Whitewater
Marcia Bjornerud, Professor of Geology and Chair, Department of Geology, Lawrence University
Carl J. Bowser, Professor Emeritus of Geology and Geophysics, University of Wisconsin-Madison
James A. Brey, Professor of Geography and Geology, University of Wisconsin-Fox Valley
Philip Brown, Professor of Geology and Geophysics, University of Wisconsin-Madison
Karl Byrand, Assistant Professor of Geography, University of Wisconsin-Sheboygan
Douglas Cherkauer, Professor of Geosciences, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
William S. Cordua, Professor of Geology/Mineralogy, University of Wisconsin-River Falls
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Tom Fitz, Assistant Professor of Geoscience, Northland College
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Laurel B. Goodwin, Professor of Geology and Geophysics, University of Wisconsin-Madison
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Catherine H. Helgeland, Professor of Geography and Geology, University of Wisconsin-Manitowoc
Eric E. Hiatt, Assistant Professor of Geology, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh
John L. Isbell, Professor and Research Scientist of Geological Sciences, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Harry Jol, Associate Professor of Geography, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire
Norris W. Jones, Professor Emeritus of Geology, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh
Kerry L. Keen, Assistant Professor of Hydrogeology, University of Wisconsin-River Falls
Diann S. Kiesel, Associate Professor of Geography and Geology, University of Wisconsin-Baraboo/Sauk County
Joanne Kluesendorf, Director, Weis Earth Science Museum, University of Wisconsin-Fox Valley
George J. Kraft, Professor of Water Resources, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point
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Zhaohui Li, Associate Professor of Geosciences, University of Wisconsin-Parkside
Frederick Madison, Professor of Soil Science, University of Wisconsin-Madison and Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey, University of Wisconsin Extension
Louis J. Maher, Jr., Professor Emeritus of Geology and Geophysics, University of Wisconsin-Madison
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Paul Mayer, Curator of Geology, Milwaukee Public Museum
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David M. Mickelson, Professor of Geology, University of Wisconsin-Madison
William N. Mode, Professor of Geology and Chair, Department of Geology, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh
Michael E. Nelson, Dean, College of Science & Allied Health, and Professor of Geology, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse
Dan E. Olson, Professor of Natural Science, Edgewood College
Meredith E. Ostrom, State Geologist Emerita and Director of the Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey Emerita, University of Wisconsin Extension
John Palmquist, Professor Emeritus of Geology, Lawrence University
Richard A. Paull, Professor Emeritus of Geology, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Past President, National Association of Geoscience Teachers
Rachel K. Paull, Adjunct Professor of Geology Emerita, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Timothy S. Paulsen, Assistant Professor of Geology, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh
Lloyd C. Pray, Professor Emeritus of Geology, University of Wisconsin-Madison
Alan Paul Price, Associate Professor of Geography and Geology, University of Wisconsin-Washington County
James R. Rougvie, Assistant Professor of Geology, Beloit College
Nita Sahai, Assistant Professor of Geophysics, University of Wisconsin-Madison
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Dean Wilder, Professor of Geography and Earth Science, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse
Ian Williams, Professor of Geology, University of Wisconsin-River Falls

Cc: David Dahlberg, Board Member
Christine Erickson, Board Member
Russell Erickson, Board Member
Cindy Jensen, Board Member
Eric McKinley, Board Member
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