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The Florida state board of education's vote to adopt a new set of science standards on February 19, 2008, is continuing to attract comment, due largely to the board's decision to adopt, not the final draft of the standards as submitted by the writing committee, but a revised version in which the phrase "the scientific theory of" was inserted before mentions of plate tectonics, cell theory, atomic theory, electromagnetism, the Big Bang - and evolution. The *Orlando Sentinel* (February 16, 2008), [reported](#) [4], "By adding the word theory, which many opponents of the standards had argued for, the new version may appease those who do not view evolution as a scientific fact or those whose religious beliefs are in conflict with evolution." And there was opposition to the revised version from a majority of the writing committee, as well as from board member Roberto Martinez, who described the revisions as "an effort by people to water down our standards."

Nevertheless, Florida Citizens for Science [regarded](#) [5] the vote as a clear triumph: "Florida won! Science education won! Teachers, students, Florida's future economy, etc. all won! No, it wasn't a clean victory, but it was a victory nonetheless." NCSE's deputy director Glenn Branch, writing for Beacon Press's blog, [observed](#) [6], "Evolution is still described, correctly, as 'the organizing principle of life science' and as 'supported by multiple forms of evidence.' And the standards distance themselves from the pejorative sense of 'theory' that creationists from Bryan onward like to exploit: 'a scientific theory is the culmination of many scientific investigations drawing together all the current evidence concerning a substantial range of phenomena; thus, a scientific theory represents the most powerful explanation scientists have to offer.'"

The eminent biologist Paul R. Gross, who was in charge of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation's 2005 evaluation of science standards that awarded the grade of F to Florida, was less sanguine, describing the revisions to the standards as "transparent and wacky" in the *Tallahassee Democrat* (February 25, 2008). Gross [argued](#) [7], "The standards refer persistently to the scientific theory of evolution, so should they not

at least touch upon the implied nonscientific theories of evolution? Surely we should ask, 'Are there any such theories?' No. Not for any serious scientific or any other educational purpose. What then, pray, is the point of belaboring, with the pompous prefix 'scientific theory of,' the following: evolution, cells, geology, atoms?" He added, "In fact, it provides inside Florida's new standards a perfect counter-example to the intellectual integrity the standards themselves promote."

The revisions, in any case, were obviously not enough to satisfy Florida's creationists, including board member Donna Callaway, who was pressing for a so-called academic freedom amendment which, the *Miami Herald* (February 19, 2008) [reported](#) [8], would have given teachers the explicit permission to engage students in "critical analysis" of the evidence for evolution. The next fight may be in the state legislature: House Speaker Marco Rubio (R-District 111) [told](#) [9] the *Florida Baptist Witness* (February 21, 2008) that he thought that the Florida House of Representatives would be receptive to legislation to revise the standards along the lines proposed by Callaway. The *Orlando Sentinel* (February 23, 2008) editorially criticized the idea, [writing](#) [10], "This academic-freedom law is just an attempt to sneak creationism through the schoolhouse's back door. ... Even with the last-minute compromise, the new science curriculum is a huge improvement. Leave it alone."

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