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## [\*\*Antievolution resolutions spreading through northern Florida\*\*](#)

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At least nine county school boards in northern Florida have adopted resolutions calling for the state board of education "to revise the new Sunshine State Standards for Science such that evolution is not presented as fact, but as one of several theories," according to a January 23, 2008, [report](#) [4] from Florida Citizens for Science. These resolutions represent a backlash to a draft set of new state science standards, which are presently undergoing revision in response to comments from the public. The state board of education is expected to consider the revised draft set of standards at its meeting on February 19, 2008.

Reviewing the draft standards at the request of NCSE and Florida Citizens for Science, Lawrence S. Lerner [described](#) [5] them as "a giant step in the right direction." He estimated that, evaluated by the same criteria used in the Fordham Foundation's report *The State of State Science Standards 2005*, the draft set of standards would receive a high B, adding, "With a little bit of extra effort, Florida could bring that up to an A." The previous set of standards, adopted in 1999, received a grade of F in the Fordham Foundation's report.

A conspicuous improvement in the draft set of standards is the treatment of evolution. In the previous set of standards, the e-word - "evolution" - was altogether absent. In the draft set, it is not only used but even featured as a "big idea" around which the standards are organized. Newspapers around the state hailed the change, with the *Tallahassee Democrat*, for example, [writing](#) [6] (October 23, 2007), "For science education in our state to be competitive, it must include the teaching of evolution and the explicit acknowledgment that empirical evidence over the past century and a half strongly supports it."

But the county school boards in Baker, Clay, Hamilton, Holmes, Jackson, Madison, St. Johns, Taylor, and Washington counties - all in northern Florida - have adopted virtually identical resolutions opposing the improvement. Wired Science's Brandon Keim [reports](#) [7] (January 22, 2008), "So far, not a single superintendent from those ... school boards has been available for comment. At least Willard Fair,

chairman of the state Board of Education, ... was willing to get on the phone and say that he had no comment whatsoever."

Reporters in Florida were luckier in securing comment from supporters of the resolutions, however. The Jacksonville *Times-Union* (January 17, 2008) [reported](#) [8], "Some school superintendents say the resolutions reflect the religious nature of their constituents in Northeast Florida," quoting Baker County Superintendent Paula Barton as saying, "To be honest with you, we are a strong Christian community here," and reporting Nassau County Superintendent John Ruis as describing himself as a strong believer in biblical creationism.

Similarly, according to Ron Matus's [story](#) [9] in the *St. Petersburg Times* (January 24, 2008), Dixie County school superintendent Dennis Bennett explained, "We just wanted to get it on the record that we're a Judeo-Christian community and we believe in academic freedom," and Ken Hall, a school board member in Madison County, commented, "We're not asking that evolution not be taught, just that it be taught as a theory, one of several. I'm a Christian. And I believe I was created by God, and that I didn't come from an amoeba or a monkey."

In his report, Matus observed that existing case law suggests that the state board of education "would face an uphill court battle if it were to include alternative theories" as the resolutions urge. He also noted, "in the scientific community there is virtually no debate on the fundamental soundness of Charles Darwin's theory. Scores of scientific societies and organizations have issued statements in support of evolution, including the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the National Academy of Sciences and the National Science Teachers Association."

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