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Prof. who flunked Florida science standards says new ones are shooting for an A

Expert gave current statewide standards an F but new draft is "a dramatic improvement."

December 3, Oakland, California -- A national expert on statewide science education standards has reviewed draft Sunshine State standards, and says the writers deserve a gold star. In 2005, statewide science standards in Florida earned an F in a national report from the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation. An author of that report, nationally recognized expert Lawrence S. Lerner, has reviewed the draft science standards being prepared for the Florida Board of Education, and he is impressed. "This draft is a giant step in the right direction," announced Dr. Lerner, emeritus professor of physics from California State University, Long Beach, and author of numerous evaluations of state science standards for the Fordham Foundation. "It is clear, comprehensive, and most importantly, accurate."

Evaluated with the same methods he has used to assess science standards for over a decade, the current draft would earn a high B. Lerner is delighted: "This draft already represents a dramatic improvement across the board. With a little bit of extra effort, Florida could bring that up to an A." The National Center for Science Education, Florida Citizens for Science, and Dr. Lerner will give the assessment to the Florida Department of Education, along with suggested revisions to the draft that would move science education in Florida to the front of the class. Lerner's report confirms a recent endorsement of the draft standards by biologist Paul Gross. Gross, another author of the Fordham report and a former provost at the University of Virginia, told the *St. Petersburg Times* on November 30 that the draft standards are "much better," and that the writing committee has "taken to heart all the arguments that have been made about lousy standards."

Brandon Haught, a spokesperson for Florida Citizens for Science, a grassroots organization dedicated to

improving science education, welcomed Lerner's evaluation. Haught observes, "Accurate and honest science education is critical to our state's future. The Department of the Education shot for the stars, and Dr. Lerner's report shows how they can get there. These improved standards will give teachers a vital resource as they prepare the doctors, scientists, and citizens of the 21st century."

The Florida standards have already moved from an F to an A in one subject. The 2005 report failed Florida and 11 other states for their treatment of evolution, and Florida was one of only five states to avoid using the word "evolution". In Lerner's assessment, the current draft earns an A for its treatment of evolution.

"Evolution is the central organizing principle of modern biology," explained Josh Rosenau, a biologist and spokesman for the National Center for Science Education. "Cutting-edge work in biology, medicine, computer science, and even geology and astronomy requires a clear understanding of evolution. Adopting these improved standards will mean that Florida students will be better prepared to make life-saving and life-enhancing breakthrough discoveries, to make the best use of those new discoveries as they arise, and to maintain Florida's standing in an ever more competitive world."

The Department of Education committee drafting the new standards will meet December 17-19 to finalize a draft for review by the Board of Education. The Board of Education will decide whether or not to accept these improved standards in the new year. "We are confident that the Board of Education will do what's best for the Sunshine State," said Brandon Haught, of Florida Citizens for Science. "Our teachers and our children are counting on them."

The National Center for Science Education is an Oakland, CA based nonprofit organization dedicated to defending the teaching of evolution in the public schools. On the web at www.ncseweb.org [4]. Florida Citizens for Science is a grassroots organization dedicated to improving science education in the Sunshine State. On the web at www.flascience.org [5].

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