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The Texas state board of education heard testimony about the proposed new set of state science standards during its meeting on November 19, 2008 — and plenty of the testimony concerned the treatment of evolution in the standards. As the *Dallas Morning News* (November 20, 2008) [explained](#) [4], the standards "will dictate what is taught in science classes in elementary and secondary schools and provide the material for state tests and textbooks. The standards will remain in place for a decade after their approval by the state board."

The standards under consideration were not the version released in September 2008, but a revised version drafted in November 2008 and not posted on the Texas Education Agency's [website](#) [5] until November 17, 2008. A significant difference is that the September version omitted the "strengths and weaknesses" language of the old standards, which was selectively applied in 2003 by members of the board seeking to dilute the treatment of evolution in biology textbooks, while the November version includes a variant of it: "strengths and limitations."

Texas Citizens for Science's Steven Schafersman told the board that the "strengths and weaknesses" language was unscientific and pedagogically inappropriate, [according](#) [6] to the *Austin American-Statesman* (November 20, 2008). He was not alone in his view: according to a [report](#) [7] (PDF) issued by the Texas Freedom Network Education Fund just two days before the hearing, 94% of Texas biology

professors regard the "weaknesses" of evolution cited by creationists as not representing valid scientific objections to evolution.

Nor was Schafersman alone in defending the teaching of evolution at the meeting. In a story significantly headlined "Evolution proponents descend on state education panel," the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* (November 20, 2008) [observed](#) [8], "With few exceptions, the speakers — scientists, teachers, clergy and grassroots activists — took the side of evolution," a situation that evidently vexed the chair of the board, avowed creationist Don McLeroy, who complained, "This is all being ginned up by the evolution side."

Reflecting on the spectacle, the *Corpus Christi Call-Times* (November 20, 2008) editorially [commented](#) [9], "Members of the state Board of Education, as they prepare to establish a new science curriculum, should certainly heed the advice of the state's top science teachers: Teaching the 'weaknesses' of the theory of evolution raises questions about its validity, questions that are not shared by established science. Public schools should teach evolution. Period. Texas students will have to compete in the real world, not the flat earth of the past."

In addition to the newspaper reports, detailed running commentary on the meeting was posted on their blogs by representatives of two of the groups defending the integrity of science education in Texas: [Texas Citizens for Science](#) [10], on the *Houston Chronicle's* [Evo.Sphere blog](#) [11], and the [Texas Freedom Network](#) [12], on its own [blog](#) [13]. Both groups are going to continue to monitor the standards, which are expected first to return to the writing committee for revisions in December 2008, and then return to the board for consideration in January 2009.

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[5] <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/teks/scienceTEKS.html>

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