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"Weaknesses" removed from Texas science standards [3]

PRESS RELEASE

Oakland, CA

In a close vote on Friday, the Texas State Board of Education approved revised science standards which removed controversial language mandating that students be taught the "strengths and weaknesses" of scientific theories.

The National Center for Science Education (NCSE) applauds this move, since the references to "weaknesses" in the old standards have been used to introduce creationist attacks on evolution in textbooks and classrooms.

Dr. Eugenie C. Scott, Executive Director of NCSE, testified in favor of the new standards on Wednesday. She is mostly satisfied with the vote. "The misleading language [in the original science standards] has been a creationist loophole in the science TEKS [Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills] for decades. Its removal is a huge step forward."

Unfortunately, the Board took a sizable step backward, says Dr. Scott. Last-minute amendments to the Earth and Space Science standards and the Biology standards could allow creationists to smuggle their views back into the classroom.

Steve Newton, a geologist and public information project director at NCSE, expressed concern about an amendment offered by Chairman Don McLeroy, an avowed creationist. "This amendment inserts creationist catchphrases like 'sudden appearance' into the heart of the biology standards, and

misrepresents the state of modern geology. The board should consult with the geologists who work the oilfields of Texas, and then remove this inaccurate amendment."

Josh Rosenau, a biologist and public information project director at NCSE, is likewise concerned. "Since the Board failed to keep the old science standards — which offered a huge loophole for creationists — creationists resorted to dumbing down the standards by inserting bogus attacks on evolution — attacks that have long since been discredited by the scientific community. Evolution is central to the study of modern biology, and is supported by centuries of scientific evidence. Texas students — who have to compete in an increasingly technical global marketplace — deserve better than this misinformation."

During debate, several board members were upset they weren't given time to review these amendments and to seek expert opinion.

Despite these qualms, Dr. Scott declared this first round of approval for new science standards as a win. "The Board listened to its scientific advisors and rejected an attempt to insert 'weaknesses' back into the standards. They didn't, however, have time to talk to scientists about the creationist-inspired amendments made at the last minute. Once they do, I believe these inaccurate amendments will be removed."

In a 2005 report from the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, Texas was one of 15 states to earn an "F" for its science standards; it received a "1" (out of a possible 3) for its evolution education. (See www.edexcellence.net/detail/news.cfm?news_id=352&pubsubid=1132#1132 [4].)

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