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The new state science standards proposed in New Mexico — which omit references to evolution, human responsibility for climate change, and the age of the earth — are attracting scrutiny and criticism across the state.

As NCSE previously reported, the proposed standards are modeled on the performance expectations of the Next Generation Science Standards, which have been adopted by eighteen states and the District of Columbia so far. But, as *Mother Jones* (September 15, 2017) [observed](#) [4], "the draft released by New Mexico's education officials changes the language of a number of NGSS guidelines, downplaying the rise in global temperatures, striking references to human activity as the primary cause of climate change, and cutting one mention of evolution while weakening others."

In its editorial, the Santa Fe *New Mexican* (September 20, 2017) [observed](#) [5] that "New Mexico values science," adding, "For this state — of all states — to adopt even a hint of pseudo-science in its curriculum should be out of the question. Yet that is apparently what the state Public Education Department is seeking to do with new science standards that would omit key scientific concepts, including those on evolution and climate change." "Already," the editorial lamented, "the proposed standards are receiving unwanted national publicity, including articles in *Mother Jones* magazine, newspapers and blog posts around the country."

Subsequently, the Santa Fe *New Mexican* (September 23, 2017) [interviewed](#) [6] a sampling of teachers in

the state about their views on the proposed new standards. None was enthusiastic. A middle school teacher in Santa Fe warned, "Anybody who wants to pervert the teaching of science has lots of room to work with," while other teachers, though appreciating the NGSS-inspired approach of the standards, expressed concerns about the weakening of the coverage of climate change. A high school teacher in Los Lunas complained, "The last thing New Mexico needs is bad standards, and there are some really bad standards in here."

Two state representatives, G. Andrés Romero (D-District 10) and Bill McCamley (D-District 53), [offered](#) [7] their view in a column for the *Las Cruces Sun-News* (September 24, 2017). They blamed the flaws in the proposed new standards on Governor Susana Martinez (R), who earlier in 2017 vetoed their bill requiring the state to adopt the NGSS: "During one of the committee hearings, a former member of her staff admitted the reason for the governor's decision. 'Toward the end of my tenure at the Public Education Department, I was tasked to edit and change some of the language in the standards to make them politically sanitized.'"

On NMPolitics.net, New Mexico's senators Tom Udall (D) and Martin Heinrich (D) [wrote](#) [8] that they were "disturbed to learn that the New Mexico Public Education Department has proposed watering down science education standards for our public schools by removing any references to rising temperatures, climate change and evolution." They added, "If we weaken our science standards to advance an ideological agenda at the expense of scientific facts, we will put New Mexico at a distinct disadvantage. And we encourage all New Mexicans to speak out against this plan to undermine the quality of K-12 science education."

Describing the divergences of the proposed standards from the NGSS as "fly[ing] in the face of accepted science" and "breathtaking in their offensiveness," the *Albuquerque Journal* (September 26, 2017) [editorialized](#) [9], "Whether [Secretary-Designate of Education Christopher] Ruskowski is bowing to political pressure to water down the science curriculum that New Mexico teachers will deliver to students — or simply doesn't believe in climate change, evolution or scientific dating processes — his recommendations are deeply troubling and take New Mexico in the wrong direction for education and the new economy."

And the *Las Cruces Sun-News* (September 27, 2017) editorially condemned the idea that the proposed standards represent a satisfactory compromise, [writing](#) [10], "Science isn't about finding the middle ground. It's not about presenting a wide range of options designed to conform to various political and religious beliefs and simply letting people choose which one they are the most comfortable with. The proposed changes may soothe the feelings of those who disagree with scientific conclusions, but they will put our students at a disadvantage when competing against those from other states where the standards are more rigorous and less susceptible to political whims."

There is still time for concerned New Mexicans to protest the proposed standards. The Public Education Department will be [accepting](#) [11] written comments on the standards from the public through October 16, 2017 and will then hold a public hearing in Santa Fe.

[Revised on September 28, 2017, to add the next-to-last paragraph.]

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