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After a public hearing in Santa Fe in which the flawed science standards for New Mexico were consistently opposed, the Public Education Department is promising to restore part of the removed content on evolution, the age of the earth and climate change — but important concerns remain.

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."

On October 16, 2017 — also the day ending a public comment period on the standards — the Public Education Department held a public hearing on the standards in Santa Fe. As a well-illustrated article in *NM Political Report* (October 17, 2017) [noted](#) [5], "People started arriving an hour-and-a-half before the start of the 9:00 a.m. hearing, and others didn't leave until almost 2:00 p.m. Some New Mexicans stood in line for more than three hours, waiting for their names to be called so they could enter the building, stand before public officials in a small auditorium and speak for three minutes each."

There were complaints that the meeting was not properly organized. The executive director for the New Mexico Foundation for Open Government told *NM Political Report* that the Public Education Department's

failure to accommodate the crowd adequately violated the state's Open Meeting Act, and the *Albuquerque Journal* (October 18, 2017) subsequently [reported](#) [6] that state senator William Soules (D-District 37), who was unable to enter the building, filed a complaint with the state attorney general, asking for the adoption of the standards to be postponed until the hearing is properly held.

Despite the lack of organization and a delay caused by a false fire alarm, the hearing proceeded, with a string of concerned New Mexicans expressing their opposition to the proposed standards, virtually without exception. The *Albuquerque Journal* (October 18, 2017) editorially [commented](#) [7], "Herbert Van Hecke, a physicist at Los Alamos National Laboratory, seemed to sum up what nearly everyone in Monday's audience felt: 'Science is based on facts, evidence and hard work. We are not doing kids any favors by allowing scientific flimflam into the classroom.'"

Conspicuous by his absence was Secretary-Designate of Education Christopher Ruskowski. State representative Bill McCamley (District 33) commented that his absence was "interesting," adding, "his absence shows just how poor these changes are," [according](#) [8] to a report from KOB-4 in Albuquerque (October 16, 2017). In its October 18, 2017, editorial, the *Albuquerque Journal* similarly commented, "New Mexico Public Education Department Secretary-designate Christopher Ruskowski did his cause no favors Monday by skipping a public hearing on his department's controversial changes to proposed science standards."

Then, in what the Santa Fe *New Mexican* (October 17, 2017) [described](#) [9] as a "surprise turnaround," the Public Education Department announced that it "will revise its controversial proposal for new science teaching standards, adding concepts that had been omitted, such as evolution, global warming and Earth's age." Four standards, two at the middle school level and two at the high school level, will be restored to match the corresponding standards in the NGSS on which they were based. The superintendent of the Santa Fe Public Schools described the announcement as "a step in the right direction."

But concerns about the content remain. The Public Education Department's announcement failed to address the absence of a middle school standard about embryological evidence for evolution or the omission of "due to human activity" from a high school standard about Earth's systems, for example. As NCSE's Glenn Branch previously told *Mother Jones*, "These changes are evidently intended to placate creationists and climate change deniers," a diagnosis confirmed by a former Public Education Department employee who [told](#) [10] *Mother Jones* that her superiors "were really worried about creationists and the oil companies."

The same employee — Lesley Galyas — [revealed](#) [11] further details about the revision of the standards to *Education Week* (October 18, 2017): "she said senior officials at the department — with the knowledge of former education secretary Hanna Skandera and Ruskowski, then a deputy secretary — repeatedly asked for revisions to the standards on evolution and human contributions to climate change, among other things, that they felt were controversial." After warning that the revisions would "backfire," Galyas eventually resigned from the agency.

Moreover, there is frustration that the standards are still limited to only the performance expectations of the NGSS, excluding important elements that are also included in the standards. Many individuals and organizations, including the New Mexican Science Teachers Association, have called for the adoption of the entire NGSS without revisions in preference to the proposed standards. Ellen Loehman of the New Mexican Science Teachers' Association told *Education Week* that, without the whole framework of the

NGSS, "you can relegate science to being taught as a textbook class. I'm holding my breath."

Speaking to the *Santa Fe Reporter* (October 18, 2017), Loehman expanded on the importance of adopting NGSS in its entirety. She was paraphrased as [saying](#) [12], "[T]he state's proposed standards leave out much of the framework that make the Next Gen standards so successful," and added, "Suppose someone has a book on how to build a beautiful Victorian house and they tear out the first two pages ... And they say, 'This is what it's supposed to look like. I want you to build this for me.' ... Where's the list of materials, where are the instructions, where are the skills I need?"

While praising the restoration of the four standards cited in the Public Education Department's announcement, the *Santa Fe New Mexican* (October 18, 2017) [editorialized](#) [13], "Rather than rewrite standards behind closed doors, New Mexico should just adopt the Next Generation Science Standards. That way, politics leaves the debate and school districts can go about the business of choosing textbooks while teachers develop new lessons. ... Just adopt the Next Generation Science Standards and get ready to shake up science education in New Mexico — the right way."

It remains to be seen whether the Public Education Department will revise the proposed standards further. According to the *Santa Fe Reporter*, "Despite the statement issued late Tuesday night, Ruskowski has not released a formal version of what his department spokeswoman says is a new proposal on the way."

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