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06.02.2004

## **[New Science Standards Adopted in Minnesota](#)** [3]

On its last working day, the Minnesota legislature adopted new science standards for the state. In one of their last acts before adjourning on May 16, both houses voted for the standards as forwarded to them by the Department of Education in December, 2003. They thus approved the standards as written and submitted by a committee of educators and citizens.

In contrast with some other states, the place of evolution in the science curriculum attracted only a moderate amount of public attention during the writing and approval process in Minnesota. Much more debate and controversy surrounded the proposed social studies standards, a final version of which was also adopted as part of the same legislation as the science standards. The legislature was actively and directly involved in revising a compromise set of social studies standards.

The House of Representatives did amend the science standards at one point, but the Senate refused to accept the amendment and the final version remained unchanged. The House amendment would have taken some language from a general "nature of science" section and repeated it in several specific locations within the standards, under specific topics. The language repeated was to the effect that "The student will be able to explain how scientific and technological innovations as well as new evidence can challenge portions of or entire accepted theories and models...", with the addition of the examples of "atomic theory", "plate tectonic theory", "big bang theory", "cell theory", "theory of evolution", and "germ theory of disease".

Since none of these theories is subject to repeated challenges in public schools except evolution, some observers viewed this change as a way of calling attention to challenges to evolution without singling out evolution from other scientific concepts. Singling out evolution as controversial or questionable is a very common indicator of anti-evolution attitudes in debates over proposed legislation or standards. In the case of Minnesota, all these theories were already mentioned in the nature of science section. Repeating them in the specific subject areas could be seen as providing an opening for those who might want to

claim that the state or the standards themselves implied that there were scientific questions about the status of evolution. This amendment was opposed by most members of the standards writing committee, who saw no need or reason for it except as a subtle opening for future opposition to evolution. The Senate voted to reject the amendment, and in the end the House accepted this position.

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