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The Utah state board of education voted 11-4 on December 4, 2015, to adopt a new set of science standards for grades 6-8, [according](#) [4] to a December 4, 2015, press release. Included, despite early signs of controversy, are evolution and climate change.

As NCSE previously [reported](#) [5], the draft standards were to be released for public review and comment in February 2015, but the board decided to postpone their release pending further revisions — owing, it was speculated, to their inclusion of evolution and climate change.

During public comment in October 2015, concern was expressed about a sixth-grade standard that described the natural greenhouse effect as maintaining "Earth's energy balance and a relatively constant temperature" and as "necessary for maintaining life on Earth."

While not challenging the standard's accuracy, April Mitchell, a district science specialist, [told](#) [6] the *Salt Lake Tribune* (October 13, 2015), "My concern was that it would create a misconception that our temperature currently is constant."

As adopted, however, the standard avoids the potential misconception, calling for students to understand "the role of the natural greenhouse effect in Earth's energy balance, and how it enables life to exist on Earth," with no reference to constancy of temperature.

There was also concern expressed about the fact that global warming, which was previously included at the sixth-grade level, was not present in the draft standards until the eighth-grade level. That remains the case in the standards as adopted.

Concern was also expressed about the treatment of evolution in the seventh-grade standards, particularly by NCSE's Minda Berbeco in a blog post subsequently republished by the *Washington Post* (October 22, 2015).

Berbeco [noted](#) [7] that the standards "don't mention evolution by name. Instead, they say 'change in species over time.' That's not just awkward, it's inaccurate. Moreover, they don't address natural selection, whereas the equivalent section of the [NGSS] does."

As adopted, the standards include the word "evolution," although the section title is still "Changes in Species Over Time," and natural selection is mentioned in the introduction to the section, although there is no standard specifically devoted to it.

According to the state board of education, "The standards will go into effect in the 2018-19 school year, following a pilot year in 2017-18." The state is expected to continue revising its science standards, with grades 9-12 next on the agenda.

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