

Proposed New Mexico science standards omit global warming

October 16 2017, by Morgan Lee

A proposed overhaul of New Mexico's state science standards for public schools came under intense criticism Monday at a packed public hearing in the state capital for omitting or deleting references to global warming, evolution and the age of the Earth.

Comments at the hearing overwhelmingly sided against state revisions to a set of standards developed by a consortium of [states](#) and the National Academy of Sciences. Of the 20 initial speakers, none backed the standards.

Public school teachers, state university faculty, Democratic Party officials and the [science](#) chairman for a school catering to local Native American students urged the Public Education Department, led by a recent appointee of Republican Gov. Susana Martinez, to throw out its proposed changes and adopt unedited standards.

William Pockman, a professor and chairman of the biology department at the University of New Mexico, said state revisions would put local students at a disadvantage in the study of genetics in medicine and solutions to climate change.

"They delete or diminish key concepts," said Pockman, who turned in two like-minded letters signed by nearly 150 faculty members and academic department heads from the University of New Mexico.

"Students trained to these standards may not be ready to keep up with their peers from states following more rigorous standards."

Public Education Secretary Christopher Ruszkowski, who did not attend the hearing, wrote Sunday in a public letter that the customized standards will give teachers and families "flexibility and local control around science materials, curriculum and content."

It was unclear how soon final standards will be adopted by the Public Education Department led by Rusckowski, a former social studies teacher appointed in August to lead the agency.

Rusckowski has said he and the agency developed custom-tailored science standards in cooperation with the governor's office based on informal conversations with students, teachers and parents as education officials toured the state to develop a broad, five-year education plan under the Every Student Succeeds Act, along with other encounters.

The agency has declined requests to name anyone it met with, as speculation has swirled around possible political motives and concessions to skeptics of human-caused climate change and scientific evolutionary theory.

Melissa DeLaerentis, coordinator of a math and science learning center for Las Cruces Public Schools, said Las Cruces began applying Next Generation Science Standards in 2015 without any complaints from the community.

"I am appalled that the state of New Mexico would choose to disregard research-based standards in place of politically motivated and scientifically inaccurate information. By excluding scientific facts, educators would be asked to purposefully obstruct preparation for college, careers," she said.

Faith leaders and Democratic Party officials joined an early morning rally against the state's [science standards](#), on a lawn outside Public

Education Department offices in Santa Fe.

Roman Catholic Pastor Paul Chavez, of the Saint Therese school and parish in Albuquerque, came to protest the state-written standards on behalf of the Santa Fe Archdiocese. He noted the church's support of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, and said the proposed state standards would hold children hostage to a "political-creationist agenda."

Democratic state Rep. Bill McCamley of Mesilla Park worried the custom standards would weigh on a lagging state economy and drive away investments from leaders of the new economy at Facebook, Tesla and Amazon.

Albuquerque officials are courting mega-retailer Amazon as a site for its second headquarters, while Facebook is building a major data storage facility in Los Lunas. Tesla passed over New Mexico to build its "gigawatt" automotive battery factory in Nevada.

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