



The Paleontological Society

23rd March, 2009



Members of the Texas State Board of Education
Texas Education Agency,
1701 North Congress Avenue
Austin, Texas 78701

Dear Board Members,

The Paleontological Society is an international professional organization, based in the United States. The society's sole mission is to advance the science of paleontology, which is critical to the discovery and prudent exploitation of the Earth's resources and to our understanding of the history of life on Earth.

The Paleontological Society is committed to the principle that we should teach only science as science in the nation's schools and universities. A proper understanding of evolutionary processes and of the facts that document the course of evolution of all living things is essential to the work of paleontologists, geologists, and all citizens or their elected representatives who make decisions on the wise use of resources and proper management of the Earth's environment.

The Paleontological Society supports the science standards **developed by the science panels** for publication as Chapter 112, Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Science, Subchapter C. High School. The Society is opposed to amendments to these draft standards that have recently been proposed by Texas State Board of Education.

In particular, we regret that the Board is proposing to single out some areas of science as being subject to more uncertainty than others. In the §112.34 Biology standards, the amendment introduced as (7) (B) implies that the inference of common ancestry of living organisms is not firmly established as a fact. It also sets up reasoning from an inference arrived at by induction to evidence that it may or may not explain. This is not a legitimate scientific argument. In the §112.36 Earth and Space Science standards, article (8) (A) is slated to be modified to expect students to evaluate evidence of the fossil record "for and against universal common descent." Students should be encouraged to question "common knowledge" and arrive at independent judgments. They should not be led to think that everything we know in physics and chemistry is well established, whereas core principles of biology and earth science are subject to tests of a different kind, based on religious beliefs held by some and not others.

We trust that the State Board will address issues raised by all the proposed amendments to the standards developed by the science panels and arrive at decisions that are in the best interests of students in the State of Texas and throughout the United States. In a competitive world, we cannot afford to teach science that is compromised by standards influenced by ideas or beliefs, wherever these may arise, that are not scientific in nature.

Sincerely yours,

RDK Thomas

Roger D. K. Thomas

Secretary, The Paleontological Society

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