

# Texas gets a 'C' for school science courses

*By Gary Scharrer- Houston Chronicle*

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AUSTIN - Texas public school science courses "pay lip service" to critical content and largely ignore evolution in the middle grades, according to a national education foundation study that gives the state of Texas an overall "C" for science education.

The average grade for Texas science curriculum standards by the [Thomas B. Fordham](#) Institute in a national report card Tuesday represents a step up from the "F" issued for Texas two years ago by the [National Center for Science Education](#).

Texas science curriculum standards are "just too vague," said [Kathleen Porter-Magee](#), a senior director at Fordham. "They cover a lot of the essential content, but they don't do it in a way that can actually guide curriculum or guide instruction in the classroom or can guide assessment development."

The report offers a mixed review on how Texas teaches evolution. The evolution portion of the new Texas science curriculum standards provoked considerable controversy before the [State Board of Education](#) adopted them in 2009.

"In spite of the [Texas Board of Education](#)'s erratic approach to evolution, the state's current high school biology standards handle the subject straightforwardly," the report says

The authors, however, lament students' ability "to handle this course, given the insufficient foundations offered prior to high school."

Texas middle school students are never exposed to the word "evolution" in the science standards, and the term "natural selection" is never explained, the authors said in the report.

Some State Board of Education members who tried to dilute the evolution portion of the science curriculum standards emphasized the positive portions of the report.

## *Praise for score*

"As a science teacher, I am pleased that our standards received a score of 5 out of 7 for content and rigor," said board chairwoman [Barbara Cargill](#), R-The Woodlands. "We look forward to continuing to work with Texas teachers to bring the best instruction to the classroom with our excellent science standards."

Former board member [Don McLeroy](#), R-Bryan, lost his chairmanship, in part, because [Senate Democrats](#) believed he injected his strong religious beliefs into the curriculum development and blocked his nomination three years ago.

McLeroy said he was pleased the report described the high school evolution teaching as "exemplary."

"The report confirms what I have always insisted: that the creationists inserted real scientific rigor into the teaching of evolution," McLeroy said.

The [Texas Freedom Network](#) and many scientists tangled with the board's social conservative members over the evolution-related standards.

*'Weak score here'*

"I'm sure most parents want more than a C-grade education for their kids because they know that competing in a 21st century economy will require much better than that," Freedom Network President [Kathy Miller](#) said. "But the weak score here isn't surprising given that board members replaced so many recommendations from teachers and scholars with revisions that simply lined up with their own personal beliefs instead."

The Fordham Institute is a conservative-leaning think tank that supports school choice.

The 50-state report concluded that science curriculum standards across the country are "woefully inadequate" and place America's scientific leadership "in grave jeopardy." California, Indiana, Massachusetts, South Carolina and Virginia are the only states to score higher than a "B" in the study.

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