

February 28, 2006

Mr. Joe Isaac
Chair, State Board of Education
126 Grey Fox Loop
Pawleys Island, SC 29585

Dear Mr. Isaac:

On behalf of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), the world's largest general scientific society and publisher of the journal *Science*, we urge you to resist efforts to weaken science education in South Carolina. High quality education for all citizens is critical to the future security, economic vitality, and health and well-being of the United States. As President Bush made clear in his recent State of the Union Address, the nation cannot afford to compromise the quality of its science education, especially at the K-12 level.

As you know, the South Carolina Education Oversight Committee has proposed alternative language for Standard B-5, which includes the phrase "critically analyze aspects of evolutionary theory." On the surface this might seem reasonable enough, but in fact it misrepresents the nature of the scientific process. All aspects of scientific knowledge are subjected to rigorous and critical analysis. Evolution is one of the most robust and widely accepted principles of modern science. Indeed, it is the foundation of modern biology. Adopting the proposed language would suggest there is some special reason to single out evolution from other scientific theories such as the theory of relativity, the germ theory of disease, or the atomic theory of matter. This is simply not true. It would mislead the students of South Carolina and undermine their science education.

The AAAS Board of Directors recently expressed its deep concern about attempts to undermine the teaching of evolution with means such as the language proposed by the EOC. A copy of the Board statement is enclosed.

South Carolina has an established record of excellence in science education, one that is admired across the country. A recent report on state science standards by the Fordham Foundation applauded the treatment of evolution in South Carolina's 2000 Science Curriculum Standards as "exemplary" and granted South Carolina an "A" grade, one of only seven awarded in the entire nation. We urge you to maintain those high standards by rejecting the language proposed by the EOC and retaining your standards as originally written: "The student will demonstrate an understanding of biological evolution and the diversity of life." This standard is clear, concise, and sound. It supports the high-quality science education the students of South Carolina deserve.

Sincerely yours,



Gilbert S. Omenn, M.D., Ph.D.
Chair, AAAS Board of Directors
Professor of Medicine, University of Michigan

enclosure