

Statement of Neal J. Ganzel, Jr.

My name is Neal Ganzel and I am a Presbyterian pastor from Ormond Beach, Florida. My congregation and personal acquaintances include three tenured college professors teaching physics and mathematics, and six teachers in the Florida Public School system.

In 2006, the Florida legislature passed HB 7087, requiring the State Board of Education to “facilitate the periodic review of the (Sunshine State) standards to ensure adequate rigor, relevance, logical student progression, and integration of reading, writing, and mathematics across all subject areas” in Florida’s public school system.

The proposed revision of K-12 grade level standards for Science goes much farther than these worthy goals. In fact, some members of the Science Standards Framers Committee have succeeded in adding a pernicious goal of their own. The revisions seek to enshrine a particular scientific viewpoint in the public school system, and are also designed to produce a particular kind of scientific mindset in our students. The science and scientists who will be produced by Florida’s public school system under these revisions will be philosophical Darwinists.

This is tragic. The revisions should have been designed to simply produce students with a scientific mindset, i.e. one that appreciates the multifaceted activity of scientific inquiry and the acceptable methods of that inquiry. Instead, the revisions are devoted to produce a narrow minded scientific mindset in our students.

It is true that Darwinian science is the reigning scientific theory of the day. But the committee’s revisions arrogantly assume that this one theory is the final and only model for the explanation of the existence and variety of species in the animal world, including humans. People have made this kind of mistake before.

May I remind us all that Alchemy was once the ruling theory of science? Newton and Galileo gave us one authoritative understanding of time, then came Einstein and relativity. The human family has been embarrassed many times by versions of the Flat Earth Society. Any theory of science which presumes it is the last word on a subject assumes too much about itself, and assumes too little about what can be known about everything.

What we have here, in effect, the same kind of situation that faced Galileo the scientist in 1633, and John Scopes the high school teacher in 1925. The educational standards and politics of their day plunged them into terrible crises of conscience, professional harassment, public humiliation, termination of employment, and even trial for religious heresy. This is what inevitably happens when a particular scientific theory or religious doctrine utilizes the coercive powers of government as a means of advancing its influence. We don’t do that in the United States of America. Have we learned nothing from history? When one scientific viewpoint gains for its advancement the coercive powers of the State of Florida we are in trouble. And in Florida we are about to be in trouble.

Any Florida teacher whose contract requires him or her to teach according to these revised standards will find him or herself to be teaching only one scientific point of view. If a teacher is conscience-bound to criticize or reject this viewpoint, they will be outside of the standards and may be subject to being penalized, disciplined, harassed, or repressed. It is a truth that dissenters from the reigning neo-Darwinist science are publically derided by men like the atheist propagandist Richard Dawkins and others. Discrimination against non-Darwinist science is a fact of life in our public and private universities. Can you imagine what a descendent of Clarence Darrow could do with the State of Florida today if these revisions force a teacher to court for redress?

Worse, to my mind, these revisions will also blind the Florida student to any other interpretive viewpoint than the Darwinian Theory. Our standards should make sure the student knows and loves the scientific process, and is encouraged to pursue, in an unfettered way, science as an exciting, changing profession. Students should not be predisposed to only one scientific theory. Finally, we simply want competent science, and a respect for science. The specific revisions in question should be rejected.