FLORIDA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY
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October 30, 2026 Via Email

Patricia Duncan, Chief
Bureau of Standards and Instruction
Florida Department of Education

Subject: Concerns Regarding Florida's State Academic Standards for Science

Dear Ms Duncan:

The Florida Native Plant Society (FNPS) is concerned about the process and content of the recently proposed revisions to Florida's State Academic Standards for Science. The review timeframe is insufficient for the public to evaluate these changes, and some of the changes would be frighteningly misleading for Florida's children.

The review process lacks transparency and is unnecessarily rushed. The Florida Department of Education (FDOE) announced the proposed B.E.S.T. Standards on 9/25/26. Only three public meetings were held over the course of a single week from 9/29/26 – 10/5/26, and comments are only being accepted through 10/31/26. An FNPS member attended the meeting at Walton High School, which was not advertised in local or regional media, where she was one of only twenty members of the public who attended. Dr. Paul Burns stressed that FDOE staff were committed to listening to and reading all comments. If that is the case, more time must be allotted for the review. The 37-day review period is woefully inadequate for review of 987 pages of standards (212 for K-5, 264 for 6-8, and 511 for 9-12); certainly not enough time for busy parents and teachers to participate in the review process.

In the FDOE press release about the proposed revisions, Commissioner Mack said that "the book of creation can be read by reason." This implies clear antagonism towards, or a rejection of, the voluminous scientific evidence underpinning evolution and we vehemently oppose the use of the bible or religious doctrine as a basis for understanding science. It would be a tremendous disservice to Florida students to limit their understanding of the world in this way.

We could not locate a list of teachers or instructional experts who comprised the review workgroup or minutes from their meetings, so we cannot evaluate their credentials. However, we can infer much from the proponents of these revised standards. The sole supporter of the proposed standards who attended the Walton High School meeting was a self-identified "young Earth creationist" whose ministry focuses on science denial. The changes were opposed by a representative of the Florida Education Association, a member of the public, and two science teachers, one of whom won a national Teacher of the Year award.

The Florida K-12 Benchmarks for Excellent Student Thinking (B.E.S.T.) Standards for Science is intended to develop "…scientifically literate individuals who can investigate phenomena, communicate scientific understanding, make informed decisions based on evidence, and continue learning throughout their lives." We fear limiting instruction on the theory of evolution

will in fact produce students who are scientifically illiterate and ill-prepared to move on to higher level studies.

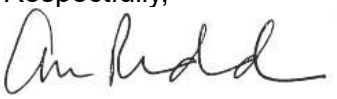
In 1973, evolutionary biologist Theodosius Dobzhansky published his famous essay “Nothing in Biology Makes Sense Except in the Light of Evolution.” The botanists and plant scientists among our society’s members emphatically agree. Understanding evolution is essential to understanding how plants and animals diversify, adapt to their environments, and function on all levels from molecular to ecological. Evolutionary trees help botanists organize plant species by shared ancestry, not just physical appearance. Evolutionary studies explain how plants developed unique strategies for pollination and chemical defenses against insects. Evolution explains the geographic distribution of genetic variation, methods of plant dispersal and the threats to ecosystem integrity posed by invasive nonnative species.

Understanding climate change is vital to plant scientists because plants are the foundation of global ecosystems, drive the carbon cycle, and are facing rapid transformations that threaten biodiversity, food security, and environmental stability. Botanists study how rising temperatures change a plant's ability to capture carbon; how climate change alters the timing of leaf emergence, flowering, fruiting and other phenological traits; and the ecological mismatches with their pollinators and seed dispersers that result. Climate change is forcing plant and wildlife species to shift their geographic ranges. Predicting how individual species and habitat types will respond to these changes will be essential to conserving biodiversity.

We are pleased to see the inclusion of elements that recognize the linkage between the abiotic and biotic. One section addresses the response of coastal vegetation to the surge impacts of a hurricane. The next logical extension of that study would be to recognize the long-term impact that Florida’s exposure to climate-driven sea level rise will have on coastal ecosystems over the course of the next century. Rejecting the reality of human-driven climate change, and the myriad threats it poses to coastal ecosystems and Florida’s water resources, represents another failing of these proposed standards to truly educate Florida’s children. Florida’s students can see that they live in a changing climate. They experience hotter summers, extreme swings in winter, and more violent storms. They must be armed with all the facts, not just the ones that are politically or religiously acceptable and expedient.

Some of the updated standards advance information that all scientists would support; however, we also see changes that align more closely with religious beliefs and political ideology than with established science. With these changes, Florida would put its students at a severe disadvantage by limiting their ability to compete on the world stage and to solve the challenges of the future. Please step back from the rush to adopt these proposed standards so they can be given the thorough, thoughtful and transparent review they deserve.

Respectfully,



Ann Redmond, President
Florida Native Plant Society

cc: Henry Mack, Commissioner, Florida Department of Education
Dr. Paul O. Burns, Senior Chancellor for Strategic Improvement, FDOE