Position Statement on the Teaching of Evolution in Schools

Council of State Science Supervisors

March 28, 2012

Biological evolution is the central unifying concept in biology and one of the most widely accepted of all scientific theories. By definition science is based on evidence generated through observations of phenomena occurring within the natural world. Biological evolution is firmly supported by empirical evidence gathered both from the study of past life forms and from the study of relatedness and diversity of present-day organisms.

Biological evolution is one of the Disciplinary Core Ideas in the National Research Council's (NRC) Framework for K-12 Science Education. The Council of State Science Supervisors (CSSS) firmly embraces this vision of science education and supports the emphasis on the importance of teaching biological evolution in this document. Discounting or omitting biological evolution from inclusion in the public school curriculum undermines the very essence of our understanding of life and the connectedness of all living organisms. The CSSS does not support the introduction into the curriculum of any explanations for the evolution of species that are not based on empirical evidence. Scientific explanations regardless of content must follow similar constraints, therefore ideas not based on empirical evidence are not scientific, and should not be included in the science curriculum of public schools.

The Council of State Science Supervisors fully supports the teaching of biological evolution and also actively discourages the promotion or adoption of regulations and policies that conflict with the basic rules and ideas of scientific discourse. Responsible public policy on the teaching of all sciences in the public schools must demonstrate an understanding that:

- A scientific theory is not the same as an opinion or a belief.
- Scientific ideas begin as hypotheses and must be extraordinarily well supported before they may be considered theories. Because of this, scientific theories do not have significant weaknesses than can be demonstrated through comparison to non-scientific beliefs.
- Opinions or beliefs not supported by evidence have no place in scientific discourse.
- Critical thinking should not be promoted by mandating inappropriate comparisons between evidence-based ideas and ideas based on faith or belief.

The CSSS encourages policy-makers at all levels to support the teaching of evolution as a core disciplinary idea in science to benefit the scientific literacy of students and citizens in their schools, communities, and society.