

STATE ADOPTIONS OF NGSS: California, Delaware, District of Columbia, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Nevada, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington

On May 23, 2013, the **Rhode Island** Board of Education voted unanimously to adopt the Next Generation Science Standards. Peter McLaren, a spokesperson for the Department of Education, was pleased that his state was the first to accept NGSS. He said it will take some time to integrate the new standards. “We are going to go with a four-year timeline. All of the systems are going to be affected by this: professional development, instruction, curriculum, assessment, preservice [undergraduate teacher education], materials and resources.... Nobody wants to rush in.”

There was little opposition to NGSS in Rhode Island, which is of course a solid blue state. The Fordham Institute had rated the state’s previous standards a “D,” compared to a mediocre “C” rating for NGSS. Fordham said that Rhode Island’s previous standards were similar in quality to NGSS, *i.e.*, not very good.

The **Kentucky** Board of Education adopted NGSS unanimously on June 5, 2013, becoming the second state to do so. The Department of Education plans to implement the new standards in the 2014-2015 school year. Unlike Rhode Island, Kentucky has experienced some opposition to NGSS. State Sen. Mike Wilson, Chairman of the Senate Education Committee, has publicly expressed concern about NGSS – particularly regarding the coverage of climate change and evolution. In a May 23 editorial, Wilson said the “standards place substantial emphasis on teaching climate change and there is considerable discussion describing human activities as major factors in global warming.” Wilson pointed out that there are many climate scientists who dispute this human connection.

Wilson also stated that the “standards make it clear that evolution is fundamental to understanding the life sciences.” Wilson described as “supposition” the theory that “one species may evolve into a different species.” He concluded his editorial: “Standards should encourage teachers to create and foster an environment that promotes critical thinking skills, logical analysis, and open and objective discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of multiple theories.” Kentucky’s current standards were rated “D” by the Fordham Institute. Fordham said that the state’s standards were “clearly inferior” to NGSS.

The Kentucky Board of Education’s approval of NGSS may not be the last word in the matter. A required public hearing on the standards was held on July 23, 2013. Both proponents and opponents spoke on the measure. The complaints were mostly related to the standards on

evolution and climate change. On August 8 the Kentucky Board approved a Statement of Consideration that sent the standards to the legislature.

The state Administrative Regulation Review Subcommittee then reviewed the standards and voted 5-1 on Sept. 11 to *reject* them. Subcommittee co-chair State Sen. Ernie Harris said that most of the comments he received from the public were against adoption of NGSS. Two other State Senators and two Representatives joined Harris in voting “no.”

Shortly after the vote, also on Sept. 11, Kentucky Gov. Steve Beshear announced that he “plans to implement the new Kentucky Next Generation Science Standards under his own authority.” The governor has the legal power to do this, so at this point Kentucky’s implementation plans will continue. However, the Kentucky General Assembly could vote to override his decision when they reconvene in 2014.

On June 11, 2013, the **Kansas** State Board of Education voted 8-2 to adopt NGSS. In 2013 Kansas experienced considerable opposition to the Common Core English and Math standards, but vocal opposition to the science standards has been relatively low key. A bill (HB 2391) was introduced during the 2013 legislative session that would delay implementation of Common Core in the state and also delay adoption of NGSS. The bill was vigorously debated in the Kansas Legislature and was eventually defeated by a narrow margin.

The adoption process for the science standards began at the May 14 meeting of the State Board of Education. Greg Lassey, a Director of COPE, spoke during the Citizens Open Forum. [Mr. Lassey’s remarks](#) stated that the expected effect of the *Framework* and *Standards* would be to establish a materialistic, non-theistic worldview. Lassey provided the Board with copies of COPE’s reports describing problems with NGSS. He invited the Board and education officials to meet with COPE representatives to discuss COPE’s analysis of NGSS in detail. Lassey was the only person to speak on the science standards, although at least twenty other speakers urged the Board to suspend implementation of the Common Core English and Math standards.

Later in the May 23 meeting, employees of the Kansas Department of Education spoke in favor of NGSS. Matt Krehbiel, Science Program Consultant, gave a PowerPoint presentation explaining that NGSS was designed to help children, “using science to make sense of the world.” One Board member asked the Department what areas of NGSS were likely to cause controversy. The answer was “evolution” and “climate change.” A department respondent made the telling comment that “we can’t consider the supernatural.” This was essentially an admission that the science standards employ methodological naturalism and are therefore functionally atheistic.

Consideration of NGSS was continued at the June 11 Board meeting. Rex Powell, a member of COPE, spoke on NGSS during the Citizens Open Forum. [Powell's remarks](#) were similar to those of Greg Lassey on May 23, but Mr. Powell noted that neither the State Board nor Department of Education had contacted Mr. Lassey to discuss COPE's concerns. Powell expressed surprise at this, since COPE's complaints raise serious religious and constitutional issues. Six other speakers presented remarks in support of the science standards. None of these presenters addressed concerns raised by Mr. Lassey or Mr. Powell.

Later in the meeting Mr. Krehbiel gave another PowerPoint presentation in support of NGSS, essentially repeating his remarks from the May 23 meeting. Krehbiel explained that the next step in the process after adoption would be to develop curriculum and assessments for the standards; this could take three or four years.

After a motion was made to adopt the science standards, Board discussion ensued. Board member Kenneth Willard took the floor. He explained that a week earlier he had circulated a memo to the Board and Department that listed his concerns with the *Framework* and *Standards*. His [remarks](#) were then read into the record. Willard emphasized the lack of objectivity and religious neutrality in the standards, particularly in the coverage of biological origins (evolution) and environmentalism (climate change). He opined that this could result in "a possible constitutional challenge." Willard urged the Board to respond to the issues raised by COPE before acting on the motion to approve the standards.

Board Chairman Jana Shaver recognized that Mr. Willard's concerns had not been addressed, and she wondered if they should postpone a vote on the motion to adopt NGSS. Most members of the Board thought that the vote should be taken that day. The Board then voted 8-2 to adopt the standards, with Willard and John Bacon dissenting.

Two days later (June 13, 2013), the Fordham Institute issued its report on NGSS. According to a [report by the Associated Press](#), Kansas made a mistake in replacing "B"-rated standards with the NGSS, which barely rates a "C": "Kansas is replacing some of the nation's strongest science standards for public schools with weaker multistate guidelines...."

Commenting on the Kansas Board's decision, Fordham President Chester Finn said: "We think that the ones [standards] you are ushering out the door are superior. I hope you give them a very nice going-away party."

The **Maryland** State Board of Education unanimously approved NGSS on June 25, 2013, making it the fourth state to do so. Full implementation is not expected until the 2017-2018 school year. Dr. S. James Gates, a physics professor and State Board member, commented that

“these standards will make it [science] an integral part of education for every student.” He continued with remarks that might be a bit optimistic and overly dramatic: “These standards provide the foundation for the jobs of tomorrow. They can be the key to unlocking the American dream.”

Maryland’s previous science standards were given a “B” rating by Fordham, who stated that the standards were “clearly superior” to NGSS. So Maryland becomes another state turning in “B”-rated standards for the “C”-rated NGSS.

Also on June 25, the **Vermont** State Board of Education adopted NGSS by a unanimous vote. “Adopting the standards is a step in the right direction,” opined Secretary of Education Armando Vilaseca. “Along with the adoption of the Common Core State Standards, NGSS is another tool for our schools.” State Board Chair Stephan Morse added: “We share the goal of constantly striving to better prepare our kids for college and the global workforce.” Gov. Peter Shumlin believes NGSS may eventually help businesses to fill technical jobs in the state. He opined that the new standards could help to “keep Vermont’s schools on the leading edge nationwide.”

Vermont’s previous science standards received a “C” rating from Fordham, which is the same grade given to NGSS.

On September 4, 2013, the **California** State Board of Education unanimously adopted NGSS. State Superintendent Tom Torlakson said “the adoption of the Next Generation Science Standards in California marks a crucial step in making sure our students are prepared to succeed after they leave our classrooms. Scientific information and technology have changed remarkably since the last time California updated its science standards, and how and what we teach have to change with them.” The old California standards date back to 1998, so an update certainly seems reasonable. However, the 1998 standards were rated “A” (the best in the nation) by Fordham, so it seems odd that they are being replaced by the “C”-rated NGSS.

Torlakson said the next step is putting together a Strategic Leadership Team to form a development plan for implementation of NGSS. This will include a timeline, a science framework, student assessments, and strategies for school districts.

The **Delaware** State Board of Education adopted NGSS by a 7-0 vote on September 19, 2013. Secretary of Education Mark Murphy remarked: “Our current standards do not emphasize science and engineering practices and don’t promote the type of deeper critical thinking skills students need to be successful after graduation. These new performance expectations will increase opportunities for all students.”

The State Board President, Teri Quinn Gray, is a DuPont scientist/manager. Dr. Gray opined that NGSS “provide clear and consistent, research-based standards that engage students in science instruction that will prepare them to utilize critical thinking and creative problem-solving necessary to excel in the global society.” Both the old Delaware science standards and NGSS received a “C” rating from Fordham.

On July 10, 2013, the **Washington** State Board of Education voted to recommend adoption of NGSS. The Board took their vote after hearing from a panel of science/education experts and discussing the issue for about two hours. State Superintendent Randy Dorn announced the official decision to accept NGSS on October 1. He said “NGSS will give our students the skills they need for success, whether they are college- or career-bound.” Washington’s previous science standards received a “C” rating from Fordham – the same mediocre grade given to NGSS.

On December 18, 2013, the **District of Columbia** State Board of Education voted 8-0 to adopt NGSS. Acting State Superintendent of Education Jesus Aquirre said: “With the adoption of the Next Generation Science Standards, the District is poised to take science education to a new level as we prepare our students for the increasing number of STEM careers.” The District expects to implement the standards by the 2016-2107 school year.

On January 23, 2014, the **Illinois** State Board of Education voted unanimously to adopt NGSS. Final state adoption is pending review by the Joint Committee on Administrative Rules (JCAR), a legislative oversight committee.

On September 4, 2013, the **Nevada** State Board of Education conducted a workshop on science education, and afterwards the Board voted unanimously to make NGSS an actionable item at a future meeting. On February 26, 2014, the State Board held a public hearing on NGSS. The Board then voted to officially adopt NGSS “to reflect the value of science education and bring science education to the 21st century learner.”

On March 6, 2014, the **Oregon** State Board of Education adopted NGSS on a unanimous vote. The state went through a multi-month review process after the final version of NGSS was released in April, 2013. The Department said that since Oregon is a local control state, implementation will be led by local districts. State assessments of NGSS are projected for the 2018-2019 school year.