

Wyoming Rejects NGSS and Keeps Old Science Standards

On March 5, 2014, Wyoming Governor Matt Mead signed the state's budget bill into law. The bill contains a provision that prohibits the Department of Education from spending funds to review or revise the state's science standards. Prior to this action, the state's Board of Education was poised to adopt the Next Generation Science Standards for use in Wyoming. At least through the two-year budget cycle, *the new law prevents the state from adopting and implementing the Next Generation Science Standards*. This development is a victory for objectivity and neutrality in science education. For the time being, Wyoming will keep its current [2008 science standards](#).

The Wyoming Department of Education (WDE) started a review of the state's academic content standards in 2010, with the aim to complete the process by the end of 2013. The state has a five-year cycle for reviewing educational standards. Under the supervision of WDE Consultant Dr. Jim Verley, the science review process began in early 2012. A Science Content Review Committee consisting of 37 individuals was appointed to conduct this review. WDE stated that "educators, parents, students, business and industry representatives, community college representatives, and the University of Wyoming" all helped with the development of the standards. However, nearly all of the committee members were educators. Also, the Committee really didn't "develop" any standards; they merely recommended that the Wyoming State Board of Education (WSBE) adopt in whole the Next Generation Science Standards.

WDE presented the [draft standards](#) to the State Board for consideration at its Oct. 8, 2013 meeting. The Board received further information on the NGSS-based standards at its next meeting, on Nov. 5. The department provided a statewide survey (with 34 teachers as participants) showing support for NGSS. A public participation period followed in which eight citizens commented on NGSS. Only one of these individuals, a teacher and Review Committee member, spoke in favor of adoption. The other seven spoke against the new standards. Six of these testimonies came from members of [Wyoming Citizens Opposing Common Core](#):

* [Kelly S.](#), a mother of two elementary students, spoke about COPE's legal Complaint in Kansas which alleges that NGSS endorses a materialistic/atheistic religious worldview. "For the sake of Wyoming children," she said, "please do not adopt this program today."

* [Judy H.](#), a grandmother and former educator, said her concern is about objectivity. She urged the Board to "not adopt this Plan which appears to promote an atheistic worldview rather than objective science education."

* [Erin G.](#), mother of an elementary student, expressed concern that the Wyoming public and local schools had been bypassed during the standards review process. "It is obvious to me that local school districts were largely left out of the process leading to this point."

* [Terri B.](#), a mother of two young children, pointed to the [Fordham report](#) on NGSS as a reason not to adopt the standards. "Fordham Institute shows concern at every level of K-12," she said.

* [Jeff H.](#) focused his remarks on the environmental standards in NGSS – especially the standards’ promotion of human population control, the negative effects of human activities, the use of renewable energy sources, and manmade global warming. He asked: “If Wyoming’s economy revolves around fossil fuels, do we really want to teach our children to look negatively at the use of such resources?”

* [Cynthia M.](#), a mother of two schoolchildren and former public school teacher, listed several objections to Common Core and NGSS. (NGSS is aligned with, but not an official part of, Common Core.) She referred to the Kansas legal Complaint alleging that NGSS promotes “an atheistic/materialistic/naturalistic worldview.”

Wyoming Citizens Opposing Common Core published a [brochure](#) and a detailed list of [concerns about NGSS](#) on their website.

During Board discussion on Nov. 5, one member made a motion to put NGSS “on hold” so the Department and Board could take a closer look at the standards; this motion was not seconded. Another motion was made, seconded, and then approved on a 9-1 vote. This called for approval of the standards for a public comment period, accompanied by the following actions by WDE:

1. Provide a comparison of the current Wyoming science standards to the proposed NGSS revision.
2. Provide an analysis of the impact of the proposed revisions on teacher professional development and student assessment.
3. Provide a plan to address the impact the revisions will have on teachers and on student assessments.
4. Provide a communications plan to assure that parents, the public, and educators have full access to the appropriate research and the standards.

The State Board did not meet in December. At the Jan. 24, 2014 Board meeting, proposed new standards in science (NGSS), social studies, physical education, and career and vocational education were discussed. Prior to the meeting, Wyoming Citizens Opposing Common Core had distributed a [memo to legislators](#) outlining problems with the standards review and adoption process. Twenty legislators then signed a [statement](#) saying that the review process “is in need of serious review and correction.” This statement was presented to the State Board, and the Board subsequently decided not to take a vote on adoption of the standards at the January meeting.

The draft standards were posted on the Department website, which invited public feedback until the end of February. Standards Team Supervisor Laurie Hernandez stated: “We will present that feedback [to the State Board] at their next meeting in March.”

In the meantime, the Wyoming Legislature initiated its own action on education standards and assessment. A bill was introduced (House Bill 97) that would (a) establish an “advisory council” (including parents and teachers) to make recommendations on content and performance standards, (b) prohibit the state from joining the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (which is linked to Common Core), and (c) strengthen security on student data collected by the

state. Note that Common Core standards in English and math were implemented in Wyoming schools in 2012. Rep. Tom Reeder sponsored H.B. 97 to counter the state's earlier adoption of Common Core without significant input from parents and local school boards.

H.B. 97 passed introduction 47-13 and was approved 6-3 by the House Education Committee. Unfortunately the bill died without receiving a vote on the House floor. Another anti-Common Core bill (H.B. 168) failed to even get introduced in the House.

It is unclear whether H.B. 97 would have had any effect on the adoption of NGSS standards. However, House Education Chairman Matt Teeters was able to insert an amendment pertaining to NGSS into the state's budget bill (H.B. 1). This states that "neither the state board of education nor the department shall expend any amount appropriated under this section [education budget] for any review or revision of the student content and performance standards for science."

This budget amendment aroused the anger of NGSS proponents, who began lobbying the governor to use his line-item veto to remove the science standards provision. Lisa Hoyos, founder of the environmental group Climate Parents, said "Governor Mead must stand up for the best interests of Wyoming kids and their future by removing this harmful, backward looking provision from the budget bill." Earlier in the year, Climate Parents had submitted a petition to the governor asking for his support of NGSS. Fortunately this input failed to sway Gov. Mead, and he signed the bill on March 5 with the amendment intact.

This new development in Wyoming is a victory for objectivity and neutrality in science education. The courageous stand by Wyoming citizens against NGSS can serve as a model for other states. COPE urges states considering NGSS to reject the program – or at least to delay action until the lawsuit in Kansas is settled.