

Wyoming Delays Consideration of NGSS

The Wyoming State Board of Education met on November 5, 2013, to consider adoption of the Next Generation Science Standards. Having some unanswered questions regarding the new standards, *the Board decided 9-1 to postpone the adoption process pending further review.*

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. 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 NGSS to the State Board for adoption on November 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 an atheistic religious worldview. Kelly said: "I do not understand why the state would spend a dime on implementing a program that is not objective and religiously neutral. Why should the state spend taxpayer dollars implementing a program that may likely be declared unconstitutional by a court?" She pleaded: "I would implore you to halt the adoption of these standards until you have a complete understanding of the effect this will have on Wyoming public school students and their families.... For the sake of Wyoming children, please do not adopt this program today."

[Judy H.](#), a grandmother and former educator, said her concern is about objectivity. She pointed out that NGSS addresses the religious questions "Where do we come from and what is the nature of life?" Judy said the standards "then use a doctrine/rule [methodological naturalism] that permits only materialistic or functionally atheistic answers." Three specific areas of concern were mentioned: "evolution is taught as fact; global warming/climate change is taught as fact; emphasis [is on] the negative impact of humans on the earth." She stated that the standards "seek to infuse students with a particular political view regarding climate change, sustainability, renewable energy and other environmental matters." 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.” She wondered if state adoption of NGSS “forces the district to adopt the state standards.” Erin stated that her understanding is that NGSS was “the ONLY set of science standards that have been considered for this review period. Although some may argue that these standards are ‘better’ than the current Wyoming science standards, the principal question is not if they are ‘better’ but if they are ‘right’.” She summed up by asking the Board “to vote no on the adoption of the Next Generation Science Standards into the review process.”

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. She specifically mentioned high school chemistry and physics as weak areas in NGSS, as well as the lack of mathematics. Referencing a lack of clarity in the standards, Terri asked: “How can a standard that is vague, poorly worded, cumbersome and difficult to navigate be the best?” She concluded: “I trust that you will put our children first and vote NO to NGSS.”

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 especially when such resources have been the cause to celebrate some of the best advances in human history?” Jeff said he is “concerned with the lack of non-educator parental, community, and business/industry/agriculture representation on the review committee.” The overall tone of his testimony was that the environmental standards do not represent Wyoming values.

Cynthia M., a mother of two schoolchildren and former public school teacher, listed four main objections to Common Core and NGSS. (NGSS is aligned with, but not an official part of, Common Core.) First, she expressed the feeling that “hearing from the public may *not be a priority for the Board at all, nor impact the process of adopting standards in any way.*” Second, she questioned whether teachers and administrators are really in favor of Common Core and NGSS. Third, she argued that the standards “indoctrinate children with assumed conclusions about politically charged issues.” Fourth, she pointed out that Wyoming law “prohibits the teaching of religion in our public schools.” She referred to the Kansas legal complaint alleging that NGSS promotes “an atheistic/materialistic/naturalistic worldview.” Cynthia urged the State Board to “vote NO on adopting the NGSS for the review process.”

During Board discussion, 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. A second motion was made and subsequently seconded, however. This called for approval of the standards for the 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 to 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 motion passed by a 9-1 vote. The State Board does not meet in December, so the next Board meeting will be in January.

This delay in consideration of NGSS in Wyoming is a promising sign. It shows that at least one State Board of Education has questions about NGSS that require study and resolution. It would have been better if the State Board had requested the Wyoming Attorney General to review NGSS with regard to its legality in light of the Kansas lawsuit. This did not happen, however. Nevertheless, it seems clear that the Wyoming Board is reluctant to adopt NGSS until various issues can be clarified. The Board's action appears to be a response to political pressure in opposition to the proposed standards. Wyoming citizens should express their concerns about NGSS to the [State Board of Education](#).