



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on October 21, 2013

Under Pressure, Largest N.H. School District Looks Beyond Common Core

With nationwide outrage escalating quickly over the Obama-backed nationalization of education through "[Common Core](#)" standards, Manchester, the largest school district in New Hampshire, voted last week to move beyond the national scheme and create its own set of superior standards. Under intense public pressure to reject the establishment's controversial program entirely, the school board refused to adopt Common Core and the curriculum aligned with it. Instead, however, they voted to create "The Manchester Academic Standards" (TMAS) — using the national standards as a supposed "floor." Both sides are claiming victory, but the battle is far from finished.



To say that there has been confusion and controversy surrounding the decisions would be an understatement at the very least. While outraged parents and activists originally thought they had secured a major victory against the Common Core machine, contradictory and confusing statements made by officials have muddied the waters. Some have even publicly claimed that, while Manchester will modify the standards in some ways to make them better, the [radical scheme](#) will essentially be used as the basis for the new educational standards developed locally. It was not immediately clear whether the district would use the embattled federally funded tests currently being developed.

"Manchester has chosen not to implement the Common Core in its entirety but rather to use the standards as a floor on which to build its own academic standards for student learning," Manchester School District Assistant Superintendent David Ryan told *The New American* in an e-mail when asked to clarify the situation. "Our teams of teachers will be using bodies of work from other sources such as but not limited to the NH College and Career Ready Standards, the Massachusetts Frameworks, the New Hampshire Grade Span Expectations and the NH Grade Level Expectations. Several others states and sources will be researched in terms of effective, high level academic standards."

With wide swaths of Common Core already implemented in the school district, analysts said it would be hard to drop it entirely at this point. Going forward, though, Assistant Superintendent Ryan suggested that new standards would be in the pipeline. "Our teams will begin with English/Language Arts and Mathematics standards before tackling science and social studies," he said. "It is our vision that our standards will be developed with our students' best future interests in mind and combined with innovative instructional practice and valid assessments for learning that all students will achieve and grow at high levels."

The statewide and even national implications of New Hampshire's largest school district ditching the deeply controversial standards would be huge. It would, among other key points, lay the groundwork



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for other districts in the state to follow suit. However, with Big Business, the establishment, education bureaucrats, and the state teachers union on one side — and outraged parents, voters, educators, and citizens largely on the other — local officials appear to be engaged in a delicate balancing act aimed at trying to please both sides. The smaller Alton, New Hampshire, district [voted](#) to reject Common Core last month, but the stakes involved in the Manchester battle are far more significant.

Rich Girard, host of the influential “Girard at Large” radio show in Manchester, played a key role in the local battle against Common Core simply by informing citizens, often through interviews with some of the nation’s top experts on Common Core or by asking local officials hard questions. He told *The New American* that the vote appears to mean that Manchester will be developing superior standards “without strapping itself to Common Core” or the national testing consortium. “If this is what happens, Manchester will emerge as a center of educational excellence and lead New Hampshire to a better educational paradigm where student learning based on the ‘tried and true,’ rather than ‘the latest and greatest,’ will once again take place,” said Girard.

“Manchester cannot be and never is ignored in the state of New Hampshire,” he continued, citing testimony by an Alton school board member who said that while his district was the first in the state to reject Common Core, only Manchester could lead the way. “If Manchester develops a superior set of standards, Common Core will be dead here. Regionally and nationally, it sends a message that local folks can and will do better if left to their own devices.” Separately, Girard said, given mounting criticism over the state’s handling of Common Core — even within the state School Boards Association — it is likely that other districts and boards will examine the issue much more seriously.

According to Girard, who has been following local developments carefully while using the tagline “Common Sense, not Common Core!”, pro-Common Core advocates have fought back with a “vengeance” — even “recasting Manchester’s refusal to adopt the Common Core-aligned curriculum guides it spent \$84,000 developing over the summer as a victory because the city said it will use Common Core as a ‘floor’ for its standards.” Citing as an example a recent analysis [posted](#) on the New Hampshire state teachers union website, Girard added that, “they’re simply ignoring what the school board really did.”

Grassroots pressure and accurate information was “indispensable” in the victory, he said. Once his radio show started to share the facts and ask tough questions, however, the Common Core issue could no longer be ignored. With national experts on education coming on the airwaves — including, for example, Dr. Sandra Stosky, who [refused to sign off](#) on the English standards as a member of the Common Core Validation Committee — it became impossible for local officials to dismiss the information and avoid having to answer the questions. The public began showing up at school board meetings, too, and state officials lacked credible or satisfactory responses to the barrage of facts and criticism being presented — including [extremely controversial](#) examples of Common Core-linked classroom material.

However, the battle in Manchester, like the nationwide fight, is far from finished, and critics remain skeptical that officials will follow through without continued public pressure. “I am very concerned about those who will lead this effort to develop the new standards, ever mindful that just weeks ago, they were apologists for Common Core,” Girard continued, echoing widespread concerns in New Hampshire and across America. “The district has promised a transparent process, we will hold them to that and [publish](#) what we believe will ensure transparency. We are merely at the beginning of the next phase in what we hope has become a brawl over how best to best educate our kids, and are determined



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to ensure it's not simply another way to implement Common Core as a 'floor' or anything else."

In the longer term, Girard said he suspects that the "whole thing is going to crumble." However, activists must keep the pressure on and use proven strategies to do so. "I don't expect the pro-Core forces are going 'to go quietly into that good night,'" he explained. Among other points that could help defeat Common Core, Girard said citizens who ask tough questions must demand written proof of answers provided by officials at all levels of government. Education on the facts — without exaggerations or over-the-top rhetoric — is also key, he said. Finally, even after what appears to be a victory, the public must continue to demand transparency and accountability to ensure that it is not quietly reversed when nobody is paying attention.

In more than a few ways, the battle in Manchester represents a sort of microcosm of what analysts say is going on around the county: Politicians trying not to alienate outraged voters too much, while simultaneously working to please the establishment and keep the [taxpayer-funded bribes from the Obama administration](#) flowing. Several states, for example, have already suggested that they would back out of the national testing regimes being funded by the Obama administration — a key backer of the nationalization. However, with Common Core still largely in place in the 45 states that have adopted it, analysts are divided on the significance of the efforts to reject the accompanying assessment schemes.

Some school districts — especially in "local-control" states — have already [rejected](#) Common Core, and more are expected to do so as awareness and outrage continue to grow. Texas, Alaska, and a handful of other states have rejected the standards in whole or in part. Under heavy pressure, multiple states have also started holding hearings, where parents, experts, and teachers were given an opportunity to [express their opposition](#). As criticism of the standards grows in tandem with awareness of them, Common Core is still marching on across the country. However, experts and analysts involved in the fight say that with continued public involvement, it is not too late to stop the nationalization of education — and everything the scheme brings with it.

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