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To Help Improve Quality

Sharply contrasting attitudes toward the best use of federal funds for support of education are evident in three types of legislative proposals now before Congress. One type proposes federal aid for school construction. Such proposals were defeated in 1956 and 1957, but the idea continues to have appeal because the issue of federal control of education is clearly avoided. A second type proposes unrestricted federal grants to augment state and local school budgets. The National Education Association and school officials who would determine the use of the funds find this idea attractive. The third type is represented by the Administration and the Hill-Elliott bills [for details, see *Science* 127, 389 (21 Feb. 1958)]. The two are similar in detail and identical in purpose: to use federal money selectively to raise the quality of education. This objective is supported by those who reject the easy dictum, "There's nothing wrong with education that more money won't cure," and who believe that additional federal money should be directed toward the educational needs of highest priority.

This last point of view is given strong support in *The Pursuit of Excellence*, the most recent in the "America at Mid-Century" series of reports from Rockefeller Brothers Fund (published 23 June 1958). This admirable analysis of current educational problems is the work of a panel that was chaired initially by James R. Killian, Jr., and later by John W. Gardner. It presents no detailed recommendations for legislative or other action, but forcefully demonstrates the urgent necessity of raising quality standards from the elementary school on up.

Senate and House committees have held extended hearings on education bills. The House Committee on Education and Labor is expected to bring out a new bill soon, perhaps before this gets into print. Details are not yet known, but emphasis will be on quality. Likely to be included are funds, either on a matching or full-grant basis, for counseling and guidance programs, employment of counselors to help inexperienced teachers of science, mathematics, and (perhaps) foreign languages, purchase of laboratory equipment, research on teaching methods, scholarships and student loans, and perhaps other measures.

Both in scholarship plans and in programs for improving teaching, emphasis will be on science and mathematics. Some critics whose interest in the welfare of science cannot be questioned would rather see no federal scholarship program than one restricted to prospective scientists and engineers. The bill will almost certainly compromise on this issue—as it will on others—by favoring science and engineering students without being exclusively for such students. Political necessity requires such an approach, for unless the bill can be supported on national defense grounds it will have no chance of passage. Such a bill also merits support on the grounds that it is a good start and will lead the way for similar improvements in other important fields, such as English and history.

The chances seem good that the House will have an opportunity to debate and vote on the new bill, and that if it passes before the last mad rush for adjournment it will also pass the Senate. The big question is how the vote will go in the House. Public and press support has faded badly since last winter. Some business and education leaders, scientists, academies of science, and others have endorsed the general provisions of the Administration and Hill-Elliott bills, and it is a bill such as these that this year appears to have the best chance of adoption, but recent evidence of support has not been great enough to have much impact. Without widespread support, last winter's bright hope that this is the year for constructive federal legislation to raise the quality of education will continue to grow dimmer and dimmer.—D.W.