Book Reviews

The American High School Today. A first report to interested citizens. James B. Conant. McGraw-Hill, New York, 1959. xiii + 140 pp. Cloth, $2.95; paper, $1.

An Essay on Quality in Public Education. Educational Policies Commission. National Education Association of the United States, Washington, D.C., 1959. 31 pp. $0.35.

When James B. Conant resigned his appointment as ambassador to Germany, he began immediately, under a grant from the Carnegie Corporation, to study the American comprehensive high school. He and four collaborators visited 103 high schools, plus four city school systems, in 26 states. Information was gathered on course offerings, the courses actually taken by students of different ability levels, and the effectiveness with which the schools achieved different educational objectives.

Specialized institutions such as the Bronx High School of Science may be desirable under certain circumstances, but those circumstances are rarely found, and it is the public, comprehensive, general-purpose high school that serves most students of high-school age, be they brilliant or dull, academically highly motivated or restlessly waiting for the day when they can escape school and get a job. Conant undertook to find out whether this kind of school can "at one and the same time provide a good general education for *all* the pupils as future citizens of a democracy, provide elective programs for the majority to develop useful skills, and educate adequately those with a talent for handling advanced academic subjects."

Most high schools he studied were not doing an adequate job on all three tasks, but some were. These facts led him to conclude that no fundamental change in the prevailing structure of the American high school is necessary, but that improvements are widely needed.

In the same week that Conant's report appeared, there also appeared *An Essay on Quality in Public Education,* a statement by the Educational Policies Commission of the National Education Association and the American Association of School Administrators. The two documents reinforce each other. Both are intended to be read by members of school boards and by citizens interested in appraising the quality of schools in their own communities. Both are middle-of-the-road documents far from the extremist positions that have marked much of the recent debate over American education. On a number of recommendations, the two are in agreement. Both agree that the high school must provide general education for all, vocational education for some, and intellectually rigorous education for the academically talented. Both agree that there should not be separate tracks or programs, such as a vocational curriculum and a college preparatory curriculum, but rather that there should be a variety of academic and vocational offerings within which good guidance can provide an appropriate and individually selected program for each student. Both agree that much more emphasis should be given to the teaching of foreign languages and that those students who are able to do so should take three or four years of one language—enough to gain useful facility in reading and speech—instead of quitting after two years or instead of taking inadequate amounts of two different languages. Both agree that small high schools are inefficient and can be maintained only at extravagant cost or by sacrificing quality; to be efficient a high school should have a graduating class of at least 100 (Conant) or a total four-year enrollment of 500 (EPC); to the maximum extent possible smaller high schools should be combined into larger schools.

The two reports are similar in intended audience, in their basic point of view, and in several recommendations, but they differ sharply in the way in which the recommendations are presented and in the points given greatest emphasis. Under the heading "Prerequisites to High Quality in Education," the EPC report concludes with a formula for determining whether or not a school is adequately supported: "In a school district of adequate size the minimum annual per-pupil current expenditure needed today to provide a good educational program is about 12 percent of the salary necessary to employ a qualified beginning teacher in that district. . . . The minimum starting salaries for qualified beginning teachers in any community should equal the average of the salaries offered to new college graduates in that community." The implication is clear that if the community supports its schools this well, the community will have schools of high quality.

Conant agrees that more money is needed, but addresses himself to the ways in which that money should be spent and to specific changes in school organization and policy, some of which require no money at all. The 21 recommendations he collects in one chapter are down-to-earth proposals that could be put into effect next semester, next year, or year after next. On any scale of specificity, Conant comes out far in the lead. Perhaps this is a difference between an author and a committee. Conant could write what he thought, while the Educational Policies Commission could write only what was agreed to by 19 members. However one explains the difference, the Conant report provides much the better basis for community action. On too many points, I fear, people can agree with the words of the EPC report while holding quite different views of what those words mean. One can agree or disagree with Conant, but both sides will know precisely what they are talking about. The recommendations Conant makes are specific, and each has been found to work effectively in one or more high schools.

In a foreword to Conant's report, John Gardner concludes, "If I had to recommend a single piece of reading to all Americans who want to improve their schools, I would ask them to read this report." I agree.

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Bacteriological Code, International Code of Nomenclature of Bacteria and Viruses. Edited by the editorial board of the International Committee on Bacteriological Nomenclature. Iowa State College Press, Ames, 1958. xxii + 186 pp. $3.50.

It has long been apparent that the bacteria and the viruses occupy an intermediate position between the plant and animal kingdoms, but the early suggestion that they be considered as belonging to a separate kingdom, the Protista, was never generally accepted. The formal classification of at least the bacteria as plants has not been seriously disputed, perhaps in part because the point appears of little importance to the majority of bacteriologists. At the same time, the limitations of the Botanical Code as applied to these forms has been clearly evident. This inadequacy, or rather the special requirements of a bacteriological code of nomenclature, was