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Shaping Educational Policy

The requirements of a complex, mobile, and highly interrelated society sometimes conflict with the constitutionally established principle that education is a state responsibility. In *Shaping Educational Policy* (McGraw-Hill, published 15 November), James Bryant Conant proposes that we resolve this conflict by creating a nationwide planning body. Policy is now made by such a welter of agencies—states, local boards of education, the organized teaching profession, public and private colleges, and a variety of organizations—that, short of a constitutional amendment, "we cannot have a national educational policy, but we might be able to evolve a *nationwide policy*." Dr. Conant recommends that an "Interstate Commission for Planning a Nationwide Educational Policy" be created by interstate compact and approved by Congress. The commission's recommendations would not be binding on any state, but could be expected to be strongly influential.

The timing is excellent, for, whether the proposed commission comes into existence or some other approach gains greater favor, 1965 clearly seems to be the right year for intensive efforts to develop better planning and greater coordination in the nation's heterogeneous educational system.

One sign that the time is right is to be found in the recent narrowing of the gulf that has existed between two opposed positions concerning the use of federal funds. Congressional appropriations for education have always been on a categorical basis—to support science, to improve instruction in foreign languages, to build laboratories, or for some other prescribed objective. Congress has not abandoned this principle, but in 1964 the categories eligible for federal assistance were significantly broadened. Loans are now available to superior students in any field instead of only to those who plan to teach or who excel in mathematics, science, engineering, or modern foreign languages. Grants can now be made to improve teaching of English, reading, history, geography, and civics, in addition to science, mathematics, and foreign languages. Grants or loans are now available to assist with the construction of a wide range of undergraduate and graduate teaching facilities.

In 1964, also, there was a lessening of insistence by some educational groups that federal education grants be made on a noncategorical basis and be available for use much as each state sees fit.

There are other signs of change. The proposal that a portion of the federal tax income be allotted to the states is gaining wider support. The President's majority in the recent election will encourage him to press forward on at least some parts of his "great society" concept. A new Federal Interagency Committee on Education was established a month ago to coordinate federal educational programs and policies.

Local administration of schools and colleges is too well established to be changed, but local planning will no longer suffice. Our population is too mobile; interrelationships are too complex; federal assistance is growing; demands upon the educational system are increasing.

Conant has proposed one means to achieve planning on a broad base. This is the time for other proposals to be brought forward, for 1965 is sure to see some lively discussions of nationwide educational planning, and may see some far-reaching decisions.—DAEL WOLFLE