

## SCIENCE EDUCATION

## Ideology Rules Debate Over Teacher Training

There's a saying that all politics is local. But unfortunately for David Bauman and other science educators, educational policy may be an exception to that rule as Congress and the Clinton Administration engage in a fierce ideological battle that threatens a \$335 million program to train math and science teachers.

Bauman runs the nonprofit Capital Area Institute for Math and Science (CAIMS), which serves 23 school districts in central Pennsylvania. The institute's efforts to train science and math teachers are supported in part with funds from the federal Eisenhower Professional Development program, part of a massive law concerning elementary and secondary schools that expires in September. The program, which has existed since 1985 under various names, will give out at least \$250 million this year for math and science teacher training. Most goes to local districts through a formula tipped toward the poorest schools and students, with the rest awarded competitively to universities and nonprofits for workshops, conferences, and other activities.

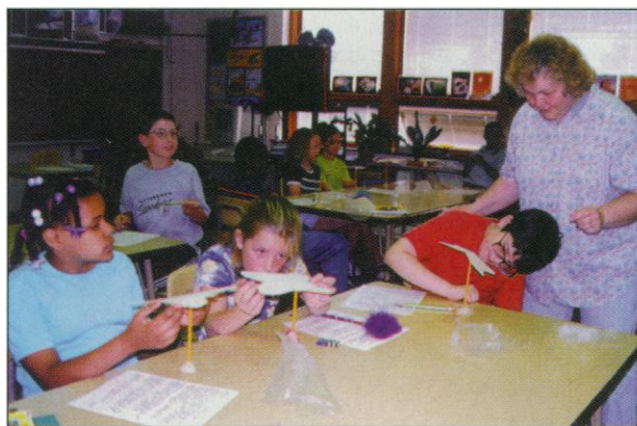
Almost everyone agrees that the money has helped polish teachers' skills, but the program's status is now in limbo as legislators prepare to reauthorize all components of the 1994 law. "There is tremendous pressure to blend Eisenhower into other programs," Gordon Ambach, head of the Council for Chief State School Officers, testified at a 28 April hearing before the House Science Committee. "If something isn't done, the money for math and science will disappear."

Last week the Education Department released a plan that would retain the goals of the Eisenhower program under a new name as part of a broader effort aimed at raising student performance. The Republican leadership has not yet completed work on its bill, although it is expected to eliminate any special earmark for math and science teacher training as part of a wholesale effort to cut the strings on most federal educational funds. The ensuing debate may continue into next year. Last month both sides claimed a small victory when the president signed a Republican-sponsored bill, called Ed-Flex, that points in that direction. It expands a 12-state pilot project that will permit the use of some previously earmarked federal funds, including Eisenhower, for other purposes. But Administration officials say they welcome language that imposes some accountability in return for the granting of such waivers.

One of the key players in the upcoming

reauthorization is Representative Bill Goodling (R-PA), chair of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, whose district includes many of the schools served by the Capital institute. On 5 May Bauman appeared before Goodling's committee to tout the achievements of the institute, which is providing exactly the type of training—125 hours over 3 years, with an emphasis on content rather than pedagogy and links to actual classroom lessons—that an independent evaluation of the program has found most effective at boosting teachers' skills. Bauman also emphasized the importance of Eisenhower funds in attracting other contributions and allowing schools to hire substitutes.

Normally, such an appearance would be an opportunity for a legislator to praise a constituent and signal support for the program. But Goodling and his fellow Repub-



**Heavy message.** Valerie Copenhaver helps fourth graders understand gravity using techniques learned at Capital Area (PA) teachers' institute.

licans in Congress don't like the fact that most of the Eisenhower program funds must be spent on professional development in math and science. (The Administration's bill would raise that floor from \$250 million to \$300 million.) They argue that local officials are in a better position than the federal government to set spending priorities. "The Administration wants to impose Washington solutions to local problems," says Goodling. "Republicans and others who value flexibility and local initiatives have a better approach."

That view came through clearly at the hearing. "He didn't ask any questions," Bauman recalls. "He spent most of his time espousing the good points of Ed-Flex." Bauman had a similar experience with his own legislator, Representative Joe Pitts (R-PA), who authored a bill passed last year by the House and reintroduced this session that would fold 31 federal programs, including Eisenhower, into one block grant to local districts. "Pitts told me that they are working from a philosophical stance, even though they

agree that Eisenhower works," says Bauman. "It's hard to argue with a statement like that."

Proponents of the Eisenhower program, including many Democrats, worry that if local and state officials call the shots, math and science may take a backseat to everything from reading to renovating old buildings. "I speak for state education officials, and we have no fear of direct federal involvement in this area," Ambach said in his testimony. Such waivers would be particularly devastating in science, adds Gerry Wheeler, head of the National Science Teachers Association (NSTA), who notes that Eisenhower is the sole federal source of professional development for the estimated 1.4 million elementary and secondary teachers who instruct students in science. "The federal government spends only 7 cents of the U.S. education dollar, and Eisenhower is peanuts within that total," says Wheeler, who says much more

money is needed to tackle a problem high on the list of every critique of U.S. education. "We're running as hard as we can just to stay in place."

As the debate unfolds, one Republican legislator active in science policy issues is scrambling to define a middle ground. Representative Vern Ehlers (R-MI) broke with his colleagues during last month's House vote on Ed-Flex, leading a lengthy discussion that ended with approval of

an amendment intended to fence off Eisenhower funding through administrative reviews. "The original bill ... would have allowed Eisenhower funds to be used for other purposes," he later explained. "But local school boards don't respect math and science, and we needed to step in. ... Now that we've made that point, I don't expect the issue to come up again."

But others expect to hear a lot more about it in the months ahead. "We're still trying to figure out the battle lines," says a lobbyist for one professional society. "NSTA wants to defend Eisenhower, while the Republicans want to roll it into a bigger program. So does the Administration, although they want to maintain the emphasis on math and science. And what will Ehlers do?"

Bauman doesn't pretend to know the outcome, either. But he's pretty sure about one thing. "There's no way we can be as effective if you take the same amount of money and spread it around to all subjects and other needs," he asserts. "A sustained effort would no longer be possible."

—JEFFREY MERVIS