

Education Panel to Promote National Standards

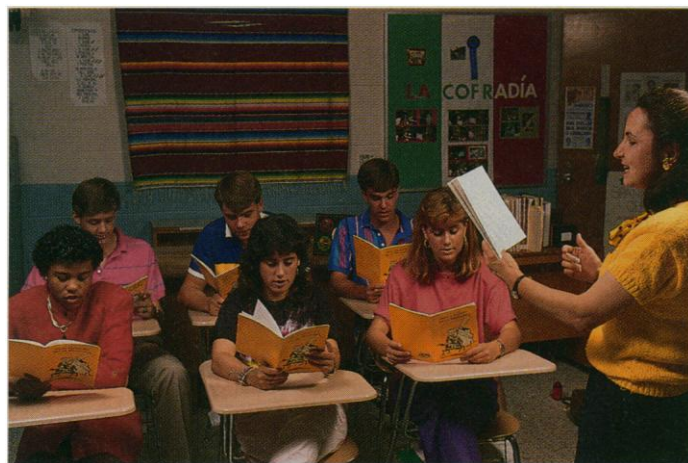
■ Advocates of uniform standards for public education are likely to get a boost from a forthcoming report written by a select White House panel.

The report in question, to be released on 30 September, is the first major publication by the National Education Goals Panel, a group formed to follow up on last year's presidential "education summit." The members are making no recommendations—only providing data—but according to several insiders, the implications are clear: National education standards and tests are needed in order to monitor educational progress and to enhance the motivation and accountability of both students and teachers.

Already, some high-powered

advisers to the panel, such as Lauren Resnick of the University of Pittsburgh, are trying to design projects to specify what children at given grade levels should know in science, math, English, history, and geography.

The panel's report will undoubtedly heat up the already intense debate on how to raise U.S. standards—one in which, as one industrial psychologist puts it, "the politics are way out in front of the psychometrics." President Bush is already on record in favor of national standards, but civil rights groups, critics of standardized tests, and many teachers complain that they would promote cultural biases, stigmatize low achievers, and stifle creative teaching.



Researchers say children would benefit from national standards.

Hess Hangs It Up at Agriculture Department

■ Charles Hess, the top science official at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), will resign from his post as assistant secretary for science and education on 30 September. He plans to return to the faculty of the University of California at Davis. No great policy clash seems to be involved: Hess simply does not want to remain in Washington while his wife and their 22-month-old son move to Davis, where she will enter a medical residency at the university.

Hess guided the USDA science administration through a smooth 2.5-year stretch in which the White House en-



Charles Hess

dorsed a new "national research initiative" for agriculture, including a sizable increase for competitive grants. Funding grew from around \$42 million to about \$100 million in pending legislation.

However, the administration's plan to start a competitive grant program for research facilities was scuttled by agriculture barons in the House.

While no successor has yet been named, agriculture research leaders say that J. Patrick Jordan, head of USDA's Cooperative State Research Service and Hess's principal deputy, is a leading candidate for the spot.

ADAMHA Reorganization Held Hostage?

■ A plan to move the research components of the Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health Administration (ADAMHA) into the National Institutes of Health (NIH) may have become a political pawn in upcoming negotiations between the House and Senate.

The plan proposed by the Bush Administration would create a new agency to administer the treatment programs for alcohol and drug abuse programs that ADAMHA now

controls. It would also make the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), the National Institute on Drug Abuse, and the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism new institutes at NIH. The Senate passed legislation authorizing the plan in August.

It's a different story in the House. An aide to Representative Henry Waxman (D-CA), an influential legislator who must approve the measure, says Waxman sees no reason to embark on a major reorganization. But his stance may be nothing more than political posturing, since earlier in the year Waxman raised no objections to the plan.

Could Waxman be hoping to trade the ADAMHA reorganization for, say, the overturn of the Administration's ban on fetal tissue research? His aides aren't saying, and those on the Senate side can only guess. They probably won't find out until it comes time to hammer out differences in the House and Senate versions of the NIH authorization bill, a conference expected later this month or early next month.

Mount Graham Telescope Endangered by Ohio State Pullout

■ The future of a major telescope planned for an observatory at Arizona's Mount Graham is suddenly far from certain. Last Saturday, Ohio State University—one of three partners involved in the \$60-million, 8-meter binocular Columbus telescope project—announced it was bailing out, pleading financial hardship brought on by a \$19-million cut in state funding to the university.

Ohio State's decision came as an unexpected and "distasteful" surprise, says University of Arizona astronomy director Peter Strittmatter. Noting that his university and Ohio State had just completed informal negotiations in July on managing the cash flow of fundraising, Strittmatter

blames Ohio State administrators for "going back on their commitment." Strittmatter is not the only one upset: The dean of science and the chairman of the astronomy department at Ohio State have both announced their resignations as a result of the decision.

While the University of Arizona and Italy's Arcetri Astrophysical Observatory remain committed to the project, Strittmatter says, they are considering scaling it back and stretching out the schedule, which is already 5 years behind original plans. They are also courting several other institutions that had earlier expressed interest in the project "with renewed vigor," he says.