

And yet another surprise

N.C. School of Science and Mathematics

by Peggy Payne

“12. North Carolina High School for Science and Mathematics. The North Carolina High School for Science and Mathematics received in 1977-78 a \$25,000 grant from the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation to develop the idea of such a school. Recommended is \$150,000 **to begin the implementation** of the North Carolina High School for Science and Mathematics. Supervision will be provided by the Planning Committee and with the aid of consultants will bring limited faculty, private industry and university scientists together for determining criteria for selection of students, development of curriculum, program design and facility requirements. These professionals will also prepare proposals to seek at least the same sum (\$150,000) from federal sources and at least \$150,000 from private sources including industry and foundations.”

—Recommendations of the Governor
and the Advisory Budget Commission

“N.C. School of Science and Mathematics Board of Trustees
Sec. 42. The sum of one hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$150,000) which is appropriated to the Department of Public Education for the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics in Section 2 of the 1978-79 fiscal year Operating and Capital Budget Bill (1977 Session Laws Chapter 1136) shall be used **to establish** the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics which shall operate under the general auspices of the State Board of Education, but which shall be governed by the following new Article which is inserted in Chapter 115 of the General Statutes...”

—Chapter 1219 of Senate Bill 971

Last June, in the closing hours of a 17-day budget session, the General Assembly voted---after some confusion---to "establish" the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics. The idea of setting up such a school had been around for years. An old college friend of Jim Hunt had mentioned it when he came down from New York for a visit with the newly elected governor. Letters, some meetings at the executive mansion, and the work of a planning committee followed. The proposal hit the General Assembly the way a wide quiet creek enters a narrow gorge and emerges as a fast-moving river. The idea picked up \$150,000 and a board of trustees. In the course of that progress there was a lot of splashing.

The confusion was---and is---over the difference between establishing and planning a school. A question that some legislators answer differently from others is whether the General Assembly has, in effect, committed itself to the creation of the school. However the decision is interpreted, it was made during a 17-day session. Some of the legislators felt that they had been initially misled or that the time for deliberation had been too brief. And the action was taken, not by a straightforward bill to set up a school, but by means of a special provision lining the budget package (See spring, 1978, *N. C. Insight* article by Fred Harwell, "A Surprise Package Called Appropriations"). This is a practice that allows policy to be made without full committee and floor debate. Insufficient time and reluctance on the part of legislators to "break the budget" bill make full consideration difficult.

The idea of a state high school for science and math is many years old. It was part of a proposal that novelist John Ehle made to Governor Terry Sanford when he was a special consultant in the Sanford administration. The idea was to set up specialized high schools in several subject areas. The school that emerged then is the North Carolina School of the Arts.

Eli Evans, president of the Charles H. Revson Foundation, was the person who mentioned the possibility of a math and science high school to Hunt. Evans, author of *The Provincials*, is from Durham. The matter had been filed away for a while, Ehle said, because "we didn't see any possibility of getting the thing done until a governor who was interested in education came into office again. Eli tried it out on Governor Hunt and Governor Hunt responded favorably."

"I think he (Hunt)," Evans said, "saw this as Sanford saw the School of the Arts in the early

60s---as a way to focus the attention of the state and the country on a new innovation in education in North Carolina... I think the governor felt that this was a way to excite people around the country and say to them that North Carolina was back... in the forefront of education innovation."

After the conversation between Hunt and Evans and meetings attended by the governor and other advisors, letters asking for opinions were sent to about 200 scientists, mathematicians, and educators. Of the 139 responses, 66 percent were classed as highly favorable. Nine percent were clearly unfavorable. After receiving the responses, Hunt appointed a planning committee that included Fred Coe, president of Burroughs Wellcome Co.; Dr. William O. Baker, president of Bell Laboratories; Dr. Frank Press of the President's Office of Science and Technology Policy, and several North Carolina educators. During this "exploratory period," Hunt met with Press and with the head of the National Science Foundation in Washington and received favorable response to the idea, Evans said.

Letters were written to superintendents, principals, and math and science teachers in North Carolina. Eight meetings were held across the state to solicit comments from educators, parents, students, and others. "We discussed the thing round and round and round," Ehle said. "We encountered certain opposition from public school people, one of the problems being who was to run the school." The reaction of educators in response to the letters, however, was predominantly favorable. Of about 400 replies, 74 percent were highly in favor of the proposal. Nine percent were opposed. Most of the others expressed praise with reservations.

The planning committee recommended to the governor on May 8 that steps be taken to establish the school. It called for the hiring of a core of outstanding full-time faculty members and hiring public school teachers for fixed periods of time to supplement the faculty. It recommended a low student-faculty ratio with an average of 12 to 15 students per teacher suggested as a guideline. Students should be selected, according to the committee's recommendations, on the basis of their abilities in science and mathematics with attention given to balanced composition by sex and race, and students with limited money and prior training should get full consideration. The school should enroll high school juniors and seniors and have the flexibility to offer an extra "early admissions" year. Not more than 15 percent of the two upper classes would be from out of state, and early admissions students would be only from North Carolina. The committee recommended that the school be related to but not controlled by the State Board of Education. It recommended no site.

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—Gary Pearce

The committee’s recommendation to establish the school was acted on during the special legislative session last June. The governor and the Advisory Budget Commission recommended spending \$150,000 to “begin the implementation” of the school. That expenditure was approved by the Appropriations Committee. Then came the language of the supplemental budget bill (Senate Bill 971) that said the school is “established” and set up a board of trustees. That bill received both committee and Senate approval. But it ran into trouble in the House, where Rep. Dave Diamont moved to take out the board of trustees and to study rather than to establish the school. House Speaker Carl Stewart broke a 48-48 tie vote by voting against the amendment. On the following day, the last day of the session, the amendment was offered again. After an overnight personal campaign by the governor, it was overwhelmingly defeated.

The confusion apparently began in committee. “I don’t know what happened in the Appropriations Committee,” said Gary Pearce, Hunt’s press secretary. “Nobody’s ever been able to figure it out. Somebody screwed up somewhere and it didn’t get explained right. The amendment proposed in the House “just sprang up on the floor and caught us completely by surprise,” Pearce said. “The hang-up apparently was over the word ‘establishment.’ They had gotten the impression . . . in the Appropriations Committee . . . all they were approving was some planning money for the school. Then they see the appropriations bill . . . They obviously got one impression in the Appropriations Committee and a completely different impression on the floor of the House. Why that is and who’s to blame, I can’t say . . . That’s why it was important that they hear it from the governor.”

Rep. Hartwell Campbell of Hunt’s home county was one who heard from the governor. “We felt like we had been misled,” Campbell said, “in the sense that we were favoring the establishment of the money to plan and determine the feasibility and . . . here, lo and behold, it’s already established.” Diamont, a U. S. history teacher and football coach from Pilot Mountain, had been collecting information on the science and math school since he first heard about the idea at a district meeting of the state school board association. Campbell, Diamont said, had suggested offering an amendment to the special provision budget legislation.

Diamont offered his amendment on Thursday, June 15. Stewart, who broke the tie by voting against

the amendment, said he was voting with the Appropriations Committee recommendation. He does not characterize himself as a strong supporter of the school. “About all I know about the school is what I’ve read in the newspapers and what I heard on the floor. In my situation it was largely a matter of breaking the tie having listened to relatively short debate. Normally in a matter such as that, I would vote with the committee recommendation . . .” Undue significance should not be attached to his vote, he said.

Before the session ended that night, there was an objection to the final reading of the supplemental budget bill. On the following and final day of the session, Friday, June 16, Diamont would offer his amendment again. Between the Thursday and Friday sessions, Diamont said, “a lot of lobbying went on.” Diamont was invited to come to the governor’s office. “Quite frankly, I was scared when I went in there. I don’t get called to the governor’s office. I’m not in the ‘in crowd.’ The only time I get called is when I jump up and down in the middle of the road.”

Hunt’s reasoning, he said, for establishing the board of trustees was that the action would lend credence to the seriousness of efforts to attract foundation and federal funding. “I was saying that when you establish the board that the General Assembly is not going to stop that, that there would be pressure on us to go ahead and fund it all.” Hunt argued that the General Assembly would still have the option to back the school or not. Diamont said Hunt didn’t pressure him. “He made it easy for me to do what I had to do.” He offered the amendment again on Friday.

In the meantime, Campbell had also been called in by Hunt and offered the same arguments for passing the proposal as it was. Campbell said that when the money was first voted into the budget bill, the committee members were told that it was for planning. He had not seen the language establishing the board until he was on the floor. After Hunt’s argument for establishing credibility, Campbell voted against the Diamont amendment.

That Friday, Diamont said, Campbell told the House that the governor had explained the matter to him. A couple of other legislators mentioned that Hunt had called. “I knew I was whipped,” Diamont says. Rep. Bruce Ethridge of Onslow County voted for the amendment both times and he spoke for it. On the second day, “I could see the change,” he said. “I knew when I got up that

that amendment was dead."

By a margin of almost 50 votes, the amendment was defeated. "The motion just got pulverized because of all the politics that went on the night before and that morning," said Rep. James Ezzell of Nash County. The governor, Charles Winberry, Hunt's legislative liaison, and several legislative supporters had gotten to work talking to people. Pearce said, "The governor was the thing that turned it around. I don't think there's any question about that."

Though the vote went in favor of establishing a board of trustees, the school is "not irrevocably established," Pearce said. The legislature could refuse further funding. Diamont thinks the school is "nailed down" and that the legislature is not likely to reverse itself. Senate Appropriations chairman Harold Hardison thinks the legislature is committed to the idea of the school. Senator Kenneth Royall, who sponsored the provision for the school, says a school can't be established without the funding.

Speaker Stewart doesn't expect a turn-around in a later session, but he doesn't think "it's a 100 percent sure thing. That was the tone of the debate on the House floor---that there was still going to be some pretty rigorous examination when it comes back in." Campbell says he doesn't know what will happen next session. He doesn't think the General Assembly is committed. "Within the legislature, I didn't feel any real strong upsurge of support for it." Asked what he thinks of the actual proposal, Campbell said, "I don't know. We did not have full opportunity to study the thing. You can't determine something in 10 days." Rep. Margaret Tennille, a strong supporter of the school, thinks there would have been more support the first day in the House if there had been hearings in the legislature. All the legislators had the material they needed to make a decision, she said. But "I felt like they just simply had not had an opportunity to take the time necessary to really read and study it."

The lines for a full debate on the merits of the school, the kind of debate that did not take place during last summer's abbreviated session, have already been suggested. Supporters of the school argue that highly talented students in science and mathematics are not being adequately challenged now. They note that there are special programs for the handicapped and other groups, but that little is done, particularly in rural counties, for students specially gifted in science and math. They say both the students and the state's level of math and science teaching would benefit from the school. Its graduates, Hunt writes in a booklet outlining plans for the school, "will emerge, over time, among the leading scientists and mathematicians of the world. From the experience of operating the best school of its kind in this nation

or any nation, we will master those methods of teaching that will inspire excellence in mathematics and science in all North Carolina schools."

Plans to set up the school have drawn favorable comments from a number of scientists and thinkers. Gerard Piel, publisher of *Scientific American*, wrote that much could be done in such a school that would not be possible in the typical day school. "You are intuitively inspired in a very important direction," wrote theorist and author Buckminster Fuller. Said anthropologist Margaret Mead, "Caution, but I believe there is a need for higher level secondary schools, especially for rural and disadvantaged young people with high aptitudes but poor preparation."

Some of those who responded with reservations to the idea of the school stressed the importance of assuring all students a broad general education. Some argued that the science and math school would siphon off funds and the best students from the other public schools and consequently weaken those schools. Rep. Trish Hunt of Chapel Hill told her fellow legislators during floor debate on Diamont's amendment that they would find that the people who work in the public schools are opposed to the idea. Joab Thomas, the chancellor of North Carolina State University, said in a comment to the planning committee that he had reservations about the school because he thinks a good home life is important to students of high school age.

Even though there has not yet been full legislative debate, officials in a number of North Carolina cities, including Durham, Charlotte, and Raleigh, have expressed interest in providing a home for the school. Diamont says that towns are putting together their proposals "like they're competing for the Olympics." In Durham, an 18-member citizens committee has been formed to make "an official effort" to bring the school to that city, according to Robert Booth, executive vice-president of the Durham Chamber of Commerce.

What the school would cost depends in part on where it would be. Several communities have offered land and buildings that might serve as school facilities. Assuming that facilities could be found, the annual cost of the school as proposed is estimated at about \$5 million. If all goes as the school's proponents hope, the first class could be admitted in the fall of 1980.

Barring unforeseen changes, the legislature will meet during that year for another short budget session. If the legislators have long enough memories to recall the confusion over "establishing" the School of Science and Mathematics, they will pay close attention to those "special provisions" in the budget package and insist that policy initiatives be handled during a regular session as subjects meriting full consideration and debate. □