

Education

Science and engineering groups to aid precollege education

National efforts to promote better pre-college science education were launched at conferences in Washington DC last year and now are beginning to take shape. This winter the Triangle Coalition—a partnership of business and labor, science and engineering organizations and education groups—has announced its establishment as a formal organization. Established at a midsummer conference last year (see *PHYSICS TODAY*, November, page 103), the Triangle has acquired a small staff that is supported by grants from the Carnegie Corporation and NSF, and it hopes soon to begin collecting dues or voluntary contributions from member societies. The initial objective of the staff, which is headed by John M. Fowler at the National Science Teachers Association, is to provide services and encouragement to groups around the country that wish to form local "alliances" to promote science and engineering education. Meanwhile, at the "Pyramid conference" held at the initiative of the IEEE and several professional engineering societies in early November, it was decided to establish task forces to:

- ▶ form local alliances
- ▶ develop handbooks for action at the community level
- ▶ track Federal legislation pertaining to education in science, mathematics and technology
- ▶ coordinate public information activities
- ▶ and seek support from industry for improved science, math and engineering education.

The groups involved in the Pyramid conference represent engineering and the physical sciences, in the main, while the Triangle Coalition includes all the natural sciences but not engineering.

The organizations involved in both the Triangle and Pyramid efforts currently are gearing up to encourage local groups to initiate activities during National Science Week, 12–18 May (see box). A Triangle-Pyramid committee also has recommended that local groups organize "Science Olympics," in

which contestants would be required to solve challenging problems on the spot. In time, perhaps, local Science Olympics might be organized into a national event.

Decentralized alliances for education would seem to be a timely move, given the growing importance of state funding for education relative to Federal and local funding. Now that state governments are taking a stronger hand in education policy, often limiting the discretionary powers of school districts, decentralized coalitions ought to be in a position to have substantial influence on policy. Many state governments—Texas, Florida, Kentucky, Arkansas and New Jersey, among others—have acted in recent years to improve precollege education by increasing course requirements for graduation, tightening teacher accreditation standards, mandating use of more demanding textbooks and establishing new teacher training programs.

Judith R. Franz, who headed the APS Education Committee in 1983

and 1984, and Bernard G. Silbernagel, head of the APS Panel of Public Affairs in 1985, have taken note of the support various APS and AAPT groups are giving to decentralized alliances and have urged physicists "to participate in education initiatives locally and through their AIP member societies" (*PHYSICS TODAY*, January, page 160). In recent years, the APS Education Committee has focused especially on physics education at the high-school level.

Kenneth W. Ford of Molecular Biophysics Technology Inc, the new chairman of the APS Education Committee for 1985, says he expects the committee to remain interested in high-school education, but also to expand its concerns both upward to the college level and downward to elementary- and middle-school levels. Ford considers cooperation among professional societies to be particularly important at the lower grade levels. Elementary school science is not divided by disciplines, Ford observes, and individual societies

National Science Week

NSF and four corporations are cosponsoring "National Science Week," 12–18 May, with the aim of providing "a highly visible and focused framework within which a wide range of science-related programs and activities can take place." According to Mary McDonough Keeney, NSF coordinator for Science Week, activities will be aimed at young people, especially junior-high and high-school students. It is not anticipated that all communities will be able to organize activities in time for Science Week, but NSF officials hope that the groundwork will be laid this year for something that will soon become a true national event.

A number of organizations, including the Triangle Coalition, the National Science Teachers Association and the Council of Scientific Society Presidents, have pledged to help publicize and promote Science Week activities. AAAS has promised to devote an entire issue of *Science*

85 to Science Week and will report on the "The Great Paper Airplane Design Competition," which is to culminate during Science Week. Cosponsors of the competition are AAAS, the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum, and NSF. The Smithsonian and the Association of Science and Technology Centers are to support Science Week with various activities.

A number of events also are planned for Washington DC during Science Week, including the National Science Board's annual dinner where the Alan T. Waterman and Vannevar Bush Awards are made. President Reagan is expected to sign a joint Congressional resolution establishing Science Week as an annual national event.

Last year, AT&T, General Electric, IBM, Dupont and Eastman Kodak sponsored a limited science week in the Washington DC area. This year all but AT&T are cosponsors with NSF of Science Week.