

#1473

CLOUDS OVER EDUCATION---II

Presented by

Alan J. Bell, General Manager

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In the previous editorial we discussed court rulings in other states that may ultimately force Maryland to reassess its policies both as to the financing of public school systems and the furthering of racial integration. We will have more to say later about the emotion-charged integration issue. In financing, however, the State has received a specific proposal.

The proposal came this week from the Citizens Commission on Maryland Government, headed by George S. Wills. The Wills Commission study was underway long before courts in California and Minnesota ruled that it is unconstitutional to finance public education through the traditional property tax. These rulings, however, have put new pressure on Maryland to find a means other than the property tax to support local school systems.

The main points of the Wills Commission proposal are these:

First, the State of Maryland would assume the full cost of public education, equalizing expenditures over a three-year period. The counties and Baltimore City would be relieved of their largest local budget item, but the State would take over the revenues from the local piggy-back income tax.

Second, local control would be strengthened through strictly local appointment or election of school boards.

Third, the State Department of Education would enlarge its advisory role by establishing guidelines to assure that local school systems maintain minimum educational standards.

The Wills Commission proposals will almost certainly be introduced as a bill in the upcoming 1972 session of the General Assembly. Thus far the concept of total State financing of public education has not been warmly received by the State leadership. It seems to us, however, that such a step is inevitable, and the State might just as well start planning for it now, with the Wills report as a blueprint.

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