The Politics of Expanded Federal Control

Based on Conflict of Interests by Joel Spring Chapter 1
History of Federal Involvement in Education

- 1958 National Defense Education Act--passed as a result of the cold war.

- Why? US perceived need for scientists, foreign language experts to ensure military superiority.

- Trigger was the Soviet launch of Sputnik in 1957

- Energized groups that complained about “child centered education that were educating American students for USSR style collectivism

Key point little to no evidence given to support claim that US schools to blame for failure to best Soviets in Space. **Why?** Do we have a pattern here? (See Spring Page 2)
The political consequences of National Defense of Education Act (NDEA/ESEA) Repositioned the Republican party as supporters of the federal role in education and set the stage for later developments. How were the tensions in Republican base reflected in NDEA/ESEA who were for local control.

What was the compromise that was struck?

Hint-- read Spring page 3
NDEA set the stage for later debates

1. Criticism of schools for failing to teach basic subjects by prominent individuals and groups
2. Claims that education linked to military (1950s) and economic power (1980s)
3. Concerns about balancing local and federal control of education
4. Use of schools as a scapegoat for national ills related to the failure to praise schools when US seems to be doing well economically etc.
1983 report spoke in ominous terms about being left behind by superior educational systems, “mediocre” education system seen as “equivalent to act of war.”

Report received lots of press coverage and the consequence was that Reagan who was opposed to federal role in education and wanted to abolish the US Department of Education was placed in a difficult position.

What was his response? To satisfy the base that was against expanding the federal role or spending any more funds on education

See Spring p.5
The Nation at Risk was a peculiar tribute to the power of one individual who was savvy enough to preserve the federal role that Reagan was intent on diminishing.

How did Terrell Bell who was told to dismantle the US Department of Education by Reagan maneuver his 1981 National Commission on Excellence in Education to place Reagan in the bind that made him preserve the US Department of Education and eventually expand the federal role? (see Spring page 6)
Enter the Interest Groups

- Business groups were the first to back the Nation at Risk analysis followed by groups like the Council of Chief State School Officers (CSSO) and the AFT
- Political candidates like Clinton and Bush were the next to embrace education as a political issue.

Why the bandwagon of support for a sweeping agenda that included: Curriculum standards and testing and was later to include School choice?
Clinton understood that economically poor states like Arkansas could boost their attractiveness for business investment if their schools were seen as highly ranked according to test scores. Business backed the idea and Clinton was the ideal spokesman for the idea that education and economic progress were connected. Clinton had ran on education in Arkansas and the decision returned him to the State house in 1982 after losing office. Raising standards appealed to voters particularly in poor states because it did not mean spending more on schools.

Clinton’s success and leadership in the NGA propelled other Southern conservative governors to follow suit, Lamar Alexander in TN and Richard Riley in SC leading to the creation of the Goals 2000 agenda.

What effect did those changes have on local control issues?
See Spring p. 11
Clinton becomes President and expands the federal role to embrace state standards and testing which gains support from a broad coalition including business for Goals 2000.

Why did business embrace the Goals 2000 agenda so energetically?

Hint -- read Goals 2000 (Spring page 13)

What other factors led them into champions of Clinton style reform? Better workers through improved schooling was just one of the theories that sold but what else?

Hint at the state level they did not want teachers to be paid more and only accepted pay increases if they were tied to testing results.

(See Spring p.12)
Rise of NCLB

George W Bush saw the way to national power by touting his “success” in improving test scores in Texas and translated his Texas model to revamping Goals 2000 to be test driven where everyone was to be held accountable--students, schools as well as teachers for improved results in Math, English, Science and History

But he was in a bind--how do you mandate more testing as well as advocate for what much of his base believed that local control needed to be strengthened?

What did he give to the right wing part of his base in return?

Spring pp. 19-20
Rise of Choice

Because of NCLB and the branding of schools that were failing the choice movement (that was gaining ground among both liberals and conservatives who wanted to “escape” the trap of sending their children to “failing schools”) gained momentum. NCLB included a federal choice plan--so that if a school was failing the parent could take a voucher--the cost of that child’s education to another public school within same district.

What were the consequences of this policy on local control and the choice movement? Spring p.22 (only partially covered here)
According to the Multiple-Streams framework, (See last week’s reading McLendon, M. & Cohen-Vogel, L. (2008). Understanding education policy change in the American states: Lessons from political science) the federal government can be viewed as an arena through which three "streams" of separate, concurrent activity flow.

1. The problem stream consists of those conditions which policymakers have chosen to interpret as problems.
2. The policy stream consists of the various ideas or "solutions" developed by specialists in myriad policy communities.
3. The political stream consists of changes or developments involving the national mood, interest group politics, and administrative or legislative turnover.

These streams of problems, policies, and politics flow, Kingdon asserts, through the governmental system largely independent of one another and each according to its own set of internal dynamics. Consequently, change within one stream may occur independently of change in other streams.

Question: What is the Key Policy Stream Now Influencing Federal Policy? What is the evidence needed to support such a theory?
In sum, federalism in education governance, a uniquely American system, is complicated enough as a system of shared governance across governmental levels; but the polity has evolved into a bewildering mixture of federal and national activities that add even more texture and complexity. Education policy making in the United States takes place in a dense, contested, entrepreneurial environment. Those who wish to work successfully in it need a lot of savvy, some wise mentors, and some good protective headgear. Those who wish to change it must adopt a dual agenda involving both policy and process.

Who benefits the Most from this Complexity and Why?
Is there a clear federal Role?

Wong points out that one driver of Federal education policy has been redistribution. As Lee and Wong (2004) found, states that were active in accountability during the 1990s did not focus their fiscal efforts to narrow the resource gap between high-needs districts and their more affluent peers. Whether the federal government needs or is willing to fill the resource gap in the NCLB context will be a topic for more systematic examination.

To What Extent is there now a clear federal role in education. (See Kaestle below)

“Presidents and Congress will continue to reinvent the federal role, because education has become a top-tier domestic agenda item and because federalist traditions do not make clear what the federal role in education is, nor how reformers should proceed to improve education on a national scale. Federal officials will have to work in the context of a large, diffuse, nationwide polity that fosters multiple viewpoints and multiple policy strategies, which makes it difficult to achieve consensus or even to have a conversation about achieving consensus. They will continue to work in a federalist system in which states and districts can resist, renegotiate, and to some extent ignore federal efforts at educational governance.”
Readings For Discussion

Thou shalt not fully fund education, apparently

Which States Are Applying for NCLB Waiver Renewal?

Inside the Mammoth Backlash to Common Core