

FEDERAL AID TO EDUCATION AND THE
HIGHER EDUCATION FACILITIES ACT OF 1963

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

During the 1952 Presidential campaign General Dwight Eisenhower declared, "the American answer to the School classroom shortage is federal aid."¹ Eisenhower presented the solution as he stated the problem: "The American answer is to do in this field what we have been doing for a long time in other fields. We have helped the states build highways and local farm-to-market roads. We have provided federal funds to help the states build hospitals and mental institutions."² The schools could be aided without federal interference in their operation.

Federal aid had been proposed before and had been debated in the 1930's and 1940's, but no bill had been enacted. The biggest obstacle in its path was that federal aid would mean federal control and that was a consequence far too dangerous to be risked. The Republican platform had been clear on this point:

The tradition of popular education, tax supported and free to all, is strong with our people. The responsibility for sustaining this system of popular education has always rested upon local communities and the states.³ We subscribe fully to this principle.

There were other obstacles. Most important was the issue of aid to parochial schools -- the question on which aid-to-education foundered in 1949.⁴ After 1954, with the Supreme Court school desegregation decision, came another issue -- whether federal aid should be given to segregated schools. Finally, federal aid to education was opposed by those who objected on fiscal grounds to any avoidable increase in federal expenditures.⁵

So it was to be a long and tortuous course from the simple problem of a national shortage of classrooms to the equally simple solution of federal aid. When asked by poll takers, the public was overwhelmingly in favor of the general proposition of federal aid to education and most members of Congress, both Democratic and Republican, favored some form of federal aid. Yet it was not until 1963 -- eleven years after Eisenhower expressed "the American answer" to the school construction crisis that the national government passed the Higher Education Facilities Act that opened the door for more extensive aid to education in 1965. This research paper traces the reasons, and answers the question, why there was no federal aid to education passed during the Eisenhower administration and why John Kennedy was successful in having federal aid to education passed by Congress.