

Citizens League
530 Syndicate Building
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55402

March 8, 1972

TO: Board of Directors

SUBJECT: Voter Response to St. Paul School Bond Proposal

- 1. We recommend the voters of St. Paul vote "yes" March 14 on the proposed school bond issue.

Three considerations compel this conclusion:

- * The need for the replacement and improvement of school buildings in the city is clear, and broadly recognized. Almost 30 per cent of the elementary schools in St. Paul are more than 60 years old, and contain major deficiencies which were fully described in the 43-page report issued by the Citizens League in October 1971. Nineteen of the schools have been ordered closed by 1976, as fire-safety hazards.
- * A bond issue is essential if the job of replacing these elementary schools is to begin now. Money is required, and money is available, immediately, only from a bond issue.
- * The recent action of the School Board, by a 6-0 vote, does -- we are satisfied -- commit the Board to the formal, well-staffed, orderly and open planning (physical and financial) on which the community has, rightly, been insisting as a condition of its support.

The critical factor, we believe, is the commitment to prepare and publish this year a detailed capital program which will:

- * Extend a five-year period into the future.
- * Be updated annually, to take on a new fifth year.
- * Cover all three sources of capital funds: bonds issued with voter approval; bonds issued without voter approval; and the direct capital levy opened up for cities of the first class by the 1971 Legislature.
- * Identify the nature and location of projects on which funds are to be spent.
- * Be developed jointly by school staff and citizen groups.

In the context of this five-year capital program, (work on which will have to be under way this summer) concerned individuals and community groups can effectively raise questions about the future direction and planning of St. Paul schools with respect to facilities, to programs and to financing.

- 2. We believe the Board also acted soundly in settling on a financing policy which uses a mixture of both major sources of capital funds: revenues from borrowing, and revenues from the annual capital levy. The bond funds are needed, because only these are available in time to permit work to begin promptly on replacement of the 18 life-safety elementary buildings. The direct levy is essential, because St. Paul faces not a once-in-a-generation

building project, but a continuing program for the gradual replacement of obsolete facilities . . . and not only for schools, but for municipal facilities as well. The direct levy will reduce tax levies significantly over the longer term, will enable the city to keep up with building needs rather than continually falling behind, and will permit the scheduling of work in a more orderly fashion and much more in relation to high-priority needs.

The Board is expected to have available, from this levy, about \$14 million by 1975. We believe it is sound to apply these revenues to the proposed building program, drawing on the bond authorization only for the balance of the cost of the program presently proposed. Additional expenditures to remedy other deficiencies in the physical plant -- as, for example, repairs and maintenance -- will come into the capital program through the budgeting process which the Board will institute this summer.

3. The Board's commitment to coordinate its capital program fully with other public agencies, and with the non-public schools, will fill a long-standing need, and substantially enlarges the prospects for orderly planning and development in the city.
4. Finally, we believe the Board acted wisely in reaffirming its intention to continue and to expand the role of citizen committees in the various districts of the city, in planning the future of the school system. The Board's decision to include a citizen-participation process at the citywide level is particularly important, to provide discussion of the systemwide, as well as of neighborhood, considerations in the educational program.