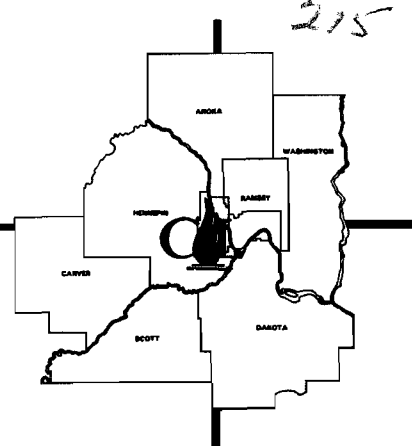


Citizens League

A NON-PARTISAN CITIZENS ORGANIZATION WORKING FOR BETTER GOVERNMENT IN THE TWIN CITIES AREA

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February 21, 1968

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Mr. Joseph F. Malinski, Director
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State Department of Education
Centennial Office Building
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Dear Mr. Malinski:

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to comment upon your proposed report titled "Vocational-Technical Education 1967, a Study of the Effect of the Area Vocational-Technical Schools in Minnesota". I am sorry that I was unable to attend the meeting of the State Advisory Council late in January. But I understand that you will be making a report to the State Board of Education on February 27.

The report includes much valuable information on present and future demand for post-high school vocational-technical education in Minnesota. We note that the number of "training stations" will have to be almost tripled by the year 1980 to meet the demand. It is interesting that out of a projected increase of 21,000 eighteen-year-olds by the year 1980 almost 16,000 or about 75% of this growth will take place in the seven-county metropolitan area.

Additional schools are recommended for the metropolitan area because of this growth. As far as we can tell, the report assumes that the demand for these schools will be met under the present structure of area vocational-technical schools, with the only possible change being an implication that other suburbs will have to follow the example of suburban Hennepin County in banding together for area vocational-technical schools. We believe the report does not fully come to grips with the major problems which must be faced in the Twin Cities metropolitan area to meet the demand.

We do not believe that the needed facilities for post-high school vocational-technical education in this area will be provided adequately with the present arrangements. Unlike out-state Minnesota, school districts in the metropolitan area have

the incentive to wait for neighboring districts to establish vocational schools. If school districts in the metropolitan area band together to establish vocational schools, there is a real question of whether the post-high school vocational program will be subordinated to the high school vocational program.

Voluntary action by local school districts not likely--Can we reasonably expect to provide in the metropolitan area the needed post-high school vocational-technical training by relying solely upon the voluntary action of local school districts, whose primary responsibility is education of youth from kindergarten through the twelfth grade? Anything which a local school district does beyond the twelfth grade, such as the establishment of an area vocational school, is solely voluntary.

We are well aware of the heavy pressure in outstate communities for vocational schools as contrasted with very few applications in the Twin Cities area. We are confident that this is not a product of any less interest of Twin Cities area residents in vocational education. It is simply that the vocational school law was especially designed for outstate Minnesota and not for the metropolitan area. School districts in smaller communities throughout the state, strongly supported by their local chambers of commerce, have petitioned for and obtained area schools because these have been regarded as major assets attracting business and industry. The law is especially beneficial in outstate Minnesota, where the boundaries of a school district include the entire community. The law is not suitable, however, when there are several school districts covering the community, as in the Twin Cities area with approximately 40 school districts. A vocational school must accept non-residents as well as residents. Thus each school district in the metropolitan area waits for a neighboring district to provide the school, knowing that the school district which provides the structure must assume the cost, but has to share the benefit.

Other construction demands--Local school districts in the metropolitan area are faced with terrifically high bonding requirements to construct elementary and secondary schools, with some of them pushing their bonding limits. It is doubtful that with this type of pressure, these school districts can show the same interest in post-high school institutions--which they are not required to provide.

St. Paul and Anoka schools--The St. Paul School Board made a policy decision a few years ago to bond for \$8 million for a post-high school vocational school, thus placing a higher priority on that type of institution than on using the same funds, say, to rebuild some of its elementary schools. We do not question the priorities established by the St. Paul School Board, but we certainly question whether we can reasonably expect that the needs for post-high school vocational education throughout the metropolitan area

can be met by waiting for local school boards to make such policy decisions. The Anoka School Board, for an investment of considerably less because of the availability of an industrial building, has shown tremendous foresight in the establishment of its post-high school vocational school. But this was undoubtedly the product of having a superintendent who was a leader in the first area vocational school in the state and the fact that an entirely new building did not have to be built.

Suburban Hennepin school districts--There has been considerable publicity given to the fact that suburban school districts in Hennepin County under a special 1967 law now may establish jointly an area vocational school, giving a broader base. It is still too early to know what the full implications of this will be. We understand that a study is now under way. Nevertheless there are some real questions that can still be asked. Perhaps the most serious question is the extent to which an area vocational school established by these suburban school districts will, in fact, serve post-high school vocational-technical education adequately. We understand that there is a great deal of feeling among the suburban school superintendents that the institution shall serve high school students as well. Many of these superintendents talk in terms of having their high school students attend the regular high school for half days and then spend the rest of the day at the area vocational school. To the extent that this takes place, the post-high school enrollment will be restricted. With a large number of school districts feeding high school students to the area school, it is doubtful the post-high school program will be very extensive.

We do not in any way intend to downgrade the importance of high school vocational-technical education. But if our goal is post-high school vocational education, it is doubtful it can be accomplished to any great extent when it is mixed with the high school curriculum. We need only look to Minneapolis for a good example of that. Minneapolis, as you know, has the only vocational school in the state with a substantial portion of its enrollment at the high school level. This has meant that the post-high school enrollment has had to be severely restricted. There are other concerns about this joint arrangement in the suburbs. It will be solely a voluntary action, thus there is no requirement that the schools go ahead. Finally, we understand that under a joint arrangement the amount of state aid forthcoming will be less, because there will be fewer non-residents. As you know, the non-resident aid is substantially greater than the resident aid.

Another shortcoming of the voluntary arrangement of establishing vocational-technical schools is that there is no assurance institutions will be placed where the greatest need exists.

Our Conclusions and Proposals--Problems of post-high school vocational-technical education were considered by a Citizens League committee which prepared a report published in June, 1967, titled "Community Colleges for the Metropolitan Area". In that report we concluded: (1) An adequate supply of post-high school vocational-technical education facilities will not be made available in the seven-county area through the voluntary actions of local school boards. (2) Vocational-technical education is far too important to be left to voluntary action of local school boards. (3) Action at the state level is required. (4) Opportunities for youth for post-high school education must be broadened and not be restricted to certain curricula. (5) Unnecessary duplication of physical plant and courses between junior colleges and vocational schools should cease.

This led us to our recommendation for a new state board, superseding the State Junior College Board, to be responsible for post-high school vocational-technical education and junior college-type courses. Thus, the responsibility would be clearly in this new board to provide the necessary vocational-technical facilities in the Twin Cities area as part of true community colleges. We were well aware of long-standing disputes between the vocational-technical people and the junior college people. We felt that the new board should be adequately representative of all interests, and that the governor be required to appoint persons in such a way as to assure that these interests would be represented. We suggested there could be a 9-member board with 3 members appointed by the governor from a list of potential appointees suggested by the Minnesota Vocational Association, 3 appointed by the governor from a list of potential appointees suggested by the Association of Minnesota Colleges, and 3 additional persons appointed by the governor at his discretion.

We further stressed these would be open-door institutions in which the students would first be admitted without question if they had finished high school. They would not have to meet requirements before they were admitted. After they were admitted, then higher requirements might be imposed for certain technical courses. But a student would not be denied admission before he got inside the door, as is currently the case with the vocational-technical schools. Nor would a student be required to make a decision on his vocation before he was admitted to the school. By the same token, if he desired he could make that decision and take all his courses in that direction. At the same time he would have the opportunity, if he chose, to take some of the academic-type courses as well. Individuals need to have the opportunity to take general education and job-oriented courses in the same institution. The average 20-year-old can expect to change jobs about six or seven times during his life. Young people need not only to be trained for specific jobs but also to be provided with general education to equip them for job changes.

We acknowledged the problem of tuition, and felt that a modest tuition uniformly applied would be preferable to any type of discriminatory tuition in which certain courses required tuition and others did not. We would readily support a system of free tuition, but felt on balance that this would be an unrealistic recommendation to the State Legislature. We were aware that certain individuals might find it impossible to attend a school if the tuition were too high. We believe that this can be overcome by a system of scholarships or other types of aid. The important thing to stress is that a student should not be encouraged to take one type of course because he can't afford to take another type.

We have outlined what we believe to be the real crucial problems that must be faced and how we believe they can be solved. It would appear appropriate that your report might try to answer some of the questions we faced, such as the following:

- . Is it reasonable to expect that the post-high school vocational schools needed in the Twin Cities area will actually be provided under the present law?
- . Is it realistic to attempt to offer both high school and post-high school vocational-technical education in the same institution and expect to give adequate attention to both?
- . Should restrictions on admission to specific courses be applied before a student is admitted to the school, or after admission?
- . Should students have the opportunity to take academically oriented courses, if they want to, while enrolled in vocational courses?

We would be most happy to visit with you at greater length.

Sincerely,


Ted Kolderie
Executive Director