

CITIZENS LEAGUE REPORT

No. 188

**Location of the New South High School
Minneapolis Public Schools**

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Citizens League
545 Mobil Oil Building
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CITIZENS LEAGUE STATEMENT TO MINNEAPOLIS BOARD OF EDUCATION
ON THE LOCATION OF THE NEW HIGH SCHOOL TO REPLACE SOUTH
FOR PRESENTATION TO THE BOARD AT ITS NOVEMBER 8 HEARING

A decision on the exact site for a major public high school must be based on educational considerations and on careful planning, including extensive consideration of such factors as projected population shifts and land use changes. Development and analysis of such information is the task of school and city planners. We doubt that any individual or citizens organization could or should advise the Board on an exact location for a new school, and we are not here for that purpose.

We believe that, in deciding on the new site and ultimate attendance area for the new school, your Board will be making crucial decisions on the future quality of secondary education in Minneapolis, and particularly in that part of the city located directly south of the central business district. In 1962-63 our organization conducted careful studies and issued extensive reports on school building needs. Nothing, we believe, has occurred since issuance of our report which would lead us to alter our 1963 conclusions and recommendations on the need for high school facilities in south Minneapolis. On the contrary, events including population changes and freeway and land use development have, we believe, borne out the soundness of our 1963 recommendations.

The future of a single senior high school cannot be discussed except in the context of the future educational needs of the entire secondary school system. It was in the context of considering the whole long-range high school needs of the city, and especially of that part of the city immediately south of the downtown area, that we considered the desirable size and general location of the proposed new high school.

Specifically taking into account the age, locations and desirability of replacing the existing South High School immediately, West High School at an early date, and Central High School within the next 15 years, we come to the key conclusion that long-range school building plans should involve the replacement of South, Central and West High Schools, not with three high schools, but with two. We are convinced that the alternative of maintaining these three small schools would result in an inferior educational program at higher cost to the community. We firmly believe that, for a belt extending across the whole center section of the city, your decisions will vitally affect not only the quality of high school buildings, but also the quality of the educational program available to students in this large part of the city.

We therefore attach great importance to so locating and sizing the new South High School that it can properly service that portion of south Minneapolis now serviced by South High School and partially by Central High School generally located east of the population center of the city. The second new high school, we believe, should then be planned for a size and location to generally service the western half of the city.

The decision on the ultimate attendance area of the first new high school is of the utmost importance. The site you select, we believe, should be such as

to not preclude the early implementation of the two-high school program and commencement of planning for the second new school.

In this connection, our report recommended that, "In no event" should the site "be located east of Hiawatha Avenue". Considering the ultimate attendance area of the new school, we noted that, "Since a substantial majority of the enrollment in the area will live west of Hiawatha, and since this is also the part of the future attendance area which would most benefit from having a new school situated within easy access of the pupils' homes, an obviously centrally-located site would be directly south and perhaps a few blocks west of the present school."

The two-high school plan evolved as the result of two basic conclusions which emerged from our studies: (1) that the "Size of enrollment appears to be the most important factor influencing the number and variety of courses available at each senior high school." (1962 report) and (2) that "It would be extremely desirable to plan all new senior highs with enrollments of 1,800-2,000 students, if at all possible." (1963 report).

For the benefit especially of all the communities concerned it might be helpful, therefore, to review here some of our committees' research and conclusions which led to our specific recommendations.

Major guiding principles governing conduct of our studies include the following:

- . "First and foremost is our belief that tax savings which jeopardize the providing of adequate schools, school facilities and equipment, and a comprehensive curriculum, or which discourage the attraction and retention of competent teachers is short-sighted economy indeed. The general health of a community can often be judged by assessing the quality of its schools. We therefore look most sympathetically on proposed programs designed to provide and maintain an adequate educational system. . .
- . "The offering to each student in Minneapolis of a reasonably equal educational opportunity, meaning the offering of a reasonably comparable curriculum and provision of reasonably comparable facilities and equipment.
- . "Sufficient minimum enrollment at each school to enable the offering of a comprehensive curriculum at an economical cost and minimum variation in enrollments among schools, particularly at the senior high level. . ." (emphasis added)

In our 1962 report we noted that "At this time, a student at the largest high school may select from an offering of courses which is almost twice as broad as that available at the smallest school." This conclusion is documented with 16 pages of data and text in the report, some excerpts from which follow:

"The information in the tables and graphs shows that there is a direct relationship between the size of a senior high school and the number and variety of courses offered at that school. Not only do the larger schools offer a greater number of courses than the small schools, but there is also a considerable difference in the composition of the curriculum. Three of the four schools with an enrollment of 1,500 or more - Roosevelt, North and Edison - offer a wide variety of courses in each of the general areas of study, while at some of the other schools there are more courses in some areas of study than in others.

"The basic reason for this relationship between size of enrollment and number of courses is that the number of teachers assigned to each high school is based upon the enrollment at that school. Each senior high school is allocated one teacher for every 27½ students. Apparently, the only deviation from this ratio is that some schools receive an extra teacher because of their small size (e.g. 8/10 of one teacher at Marshall and one teacher at West) and some are given additional teachers because of the socio-economic background of the student body (e.g. (Marshall and West each receive one extra teacher for this reason). The use of a rigid teacher-pupil ratio for determining the number of teachers to be employed at each of the schools means that the average class size at each school will be essentially the same regardless of school size. Therefore, courses which are taken by a small percentage of the students at a school, such as foreign languages, will not attract sufficient numbers of students at the small schools to form a minimum sized class, even though such a course may be selected by the same percentage of the students at the small school as at the larger school.

"An example of this size-curriculum relationship may be found in the field of mathematics. The four largest schools in the system - Roosevelt, Washburn, North and Edison - all have courses in the accelerated mathematics program, while of the six schools with an enrollment of under 1,500 only West offers this program. Likewise, only the four schools with an enrollment of over 1,500 students have classes in PSSC Physics in addition to the regular physics course. The greatest variation, however, is in the field of foreign languages. Roosevelt, the only school with over 1,800 students, conducts classes in six different foreign languages, two of which a student may take for three or four years. Students at Washburn and South have their choice of five different languages; however, at Washburn, the larger of these two schools, four of the five languages are being taught for three or more years, while at South only two years of each language are given. Five schools conduct classes in four languages, while at Central, one of the smaller schools in the system, the student may take any of three different languages each of which is taught through the third year. At Marshall, the smallest school in the system, only two foreign languages are taught, each for two years.

Limitations of Choice

"The data presented in the tables and the foregoing examples indicate that students at the smaller high schools have a much smaller number of courses from which they may select their course of study than do the students at the larger schools. Many of the courses which are available at some high schools but not at others are advanced or accelerated programs designed for higher ability students and courses designed to meet special interests or develop a unique ability of the students. It is also, of course, much more difficult to classify students by ability or interest in the smaller schools as compared to the larger schools where a larger number of classes in the same course is available.

"Another difficulty of the small school which further limits the students' choice of courses is the problem of scheduling classes. In the smaller schools, courses such as physics, chemistry, and advanced mathematics are held only two or so periods a day. Thus, because of the scheduling conflict which may result it is at times difficult for a student to select all of those courses which he desires to take, even though they may all be available at his school. West High School apparently has so many one-class courses that four classes meet at 7:30 a.m. in order to avoid scheduling conflicts.

"The ability of a school to provide a full program of extra-curricular activities is also inhibited by small enrollments. While a large percentage of the students at the smaller schools has the opportunity to participate in such activities as interscholastic athletics, it is extremely difficult for the smaller schools to compete with schools which are two to four times as large as they are. As an example of this, the administration at Marshall has, in the past, considered the possibility of dropping interscholastic hockey."

In our 1963 report a major recommendation was: "That the Board of Education should give major attention to the basic policy question of the desirable size of the secondary schools and to the question of the number of schools which will be needed to serve future high school enrollments in Minneapolis. (Emphasis added) . .

"Certainly, it would appear to us that in an age of increasing specialization it is becoming increasingly important for each senior high student to have the opportunity to select a course of study which will meet his particular needs. Within the Minneapolis comprehensive high schools we must have a curriculum sufficiently broad to meet the needs of the college-bound student, while at the same time - and equally as important - the school must offer courses which will satisfy the educational needs and desires of those who will terminate their formal education upon graduation from high school. The curriculum should also be sufficiently appealing so as to deter potential dropouts from leaving school before graduation.

"'Specialization in depth' is another factor which should be mentioned in a discussion of the effect of school size upon education. At the small school, teachers more frequently have to teach courses in more than one field. The effect of this upon the quality of education is pointed out by the MSU survey team in their report. They state that 'rapidly expanding new knowledge in the physical sciences, the social studies, and other areas of the curriculum is placing increased demands for specialization in depth on the secondary school teacher. For example, no longer can most social studies teachers double as a science teacher. The modern high school must offer both a breadth and depth in program and educational services not previously envisioned.' . . .

"Our studies since 1962 indicate that the enrollment standards we cited then were probably too low, particularly with respect to senior high schools. In our studies we have found that the prevailing practice in other Minnesota school systems appears to be to build senior high schools for 1,800 to 2,200 students if the system has a total senior high school enrollment within the district sufficient to warrant the construction of that many spaces. As examples, we may cite the:

- . Bloomington School District where the voters have recently authorized a \$4,500,000 bond issue to finance the construction of a new 2,400 student capacity senior high school. Bloomington's existing high school, which was built in 1957, has a capacity of 1,800 students.
- . Fridley School District where the new senior high school has been planned for a capacity of 1,800 students.
- . Robbinsdale School District which has let contracts for the construction of a new 2,200 student senior high school. The existing Robbinsdale High School has a similar capacity.

- . St. Paul School District, which recently has completed two new senior high schools - Harding and Johnson - each with a capacity of 1,800 students.
- . Roseville School District, where a new senior high school is being planned for an eventual capacity of 2,000 students. Alexander Ramsey, the existing Roseville High School, now has a similar capacity.

"Actually, there are many more examples both within and outside of the Twin Cities metropolitan area which might be cited.

"During our study we were told by Guy Tollerud, State Director of School Planning, that as far as the utilization of the building is concerned the most effective and most efficient size for a senior high school is about 2,000 students. As an example, Mr. Tollerud cited the field of industrial arts, where the State suggests that the schools should provide the following shops: (1) Drawing - architectural and mechanical. (2) Electricity and electronics. (3) Power mechanics. (4) Machine shop, sheet metal, bench metal, welding and foundry. (5) Graphic arts. (6) Wood-working, plastics, carpentry, bricklaying and plumbing.

"He said that in most large new schools they are considering the possibility of offering the whole list, but that in a school of about 1,000 students some of the shops would have to be left out and others combined. In a larger school, all of these facilities could be utilized.

"Mr. Tollerud also cited other facilities, such as those for physical education, science and business education, which would be utilized more fully in a large school. He pointed out that in a large high school you can get the specialized teachers and the specialized spaces you need to offer the course and also a sufficient number of students to take the course.

"We are convinced that the per student cost of school construction and operation generally is higher for smaller schools if facilities and services are provided which are comparable to those available at the larger schools. For example, at some of the smaller Minneapolis schools there are vocational education shops which are used only one or two hours a day. These facilities - both the space and the equipment - would be just as adequate to meet the needs of a student body two to three times the size of the present enrollment at such schools. Indeed, if such facilities were utilized more fully it would become more justifiable to provide the vocational education students at such schools with better and more up-to-date equipment.

"There are a number of core facilities which should be provided at every senior high school. If the enrollments of the schools are too small for full utilization of these facilities, it means that the per student costs for providing such core facilities is higher than it should be. In short, it is less expensive to build and operate one high school for 2,000 students than it would be to build and operate two high schools for 1,000 students each. Similarly, two high schools with an enrollment of 1,500 students in each would be less costly to the taxpayer than would three 1,000-enrollment high schools."

Our report also took note of the ability of school planners and architects to plan diversified and decentralized modern high school facilities, so that a school of 2,000 students does not become impersonalized as far as the individual student is concerned.

We particularly noted the fact that several high schools in the city already had enrollments at or above 2,000 pupils, but that there was a great disparity in size among the various high schools in the city. This disparity in size and the resulting disparity in academic, extra-curricular and athletic programs should be reduced, so as to provide for more equal student opportunities at the various senior high schools throughout the city, we strongly urged.

We also studied very carefully and consulted with educational and city planners and others on the matter of future school enrollments, particularly in that part of south Minneapolis now encompassed by the high school attendance areas of Marshall, South, Central and West High Schools, areas of possible future decline in population due to land use changes, freeway construction and other factors. In our current review we now note that the enrollments of Central, South and West High School continue at slightly over 1,000 pupils yearly, but that the projected future enrollment of the existing South High area is markedly down.

This statement is based on positions developed through careful research on the part of committees and as a result of conclusions and recommendations developed by committees and acted on by our 37-member Board of Directors. The statement reflects careful review of the League's positions on Minneapolis public school building needs contained in a 72-page report approved by the Board October 29, 1963, and on previous findings and recommendations on Minneapolis school construction and rehabilitation made in a 50-page report approved May 23, 1962.

The Citizens League wishes again to commend the Board of Education and School Administration on the progress being made in meeting Minneapolis school building needs.