

CITIZENS LEAGUE REPORT

No. 186

**Future of Central High School  
Minneapolis Public Schools**

**September 1965**

Citizens League  
545 Mobil Oil Building  
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55402

September 28, 1965

CITIZENS LEAGUE STATEMENT TO MINNEAPOLIS BOARD OF EDUCATION  
ON THE FUTURE OF CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL  
FOR PRESENTATION TO THE BOARD AT ITS SEPTEMBER 28 HEARING

(Presentation by James L. Hetland, Jr., Chairman of School Building Needs Committee)

We understand that the School Board has called this hearing because the State Junior College Board has requested the future use of the entire Central High School building as a permanent site for a junior college or a junior college branch.

The Citizens League recognizes that the School Board's decision on the future of Central High School must be based on its responsibility to plan wisely for the best possible high school education program in the Central High School area and throughout the city, and that a sound program involves modern, safe, well-located high school buildings adequate to meet the educational needs of high school students-- buildings well suited to house the type of diversified, comprehensive high school program which should be available to all young people in Minneapolis. Only if other educational needs, in this instance the Junior College, can be provided without jeopardizing the long-range high school educational program, would the School Board be in a position to make available the Central High School building to the State Junior College Board.

*We believe that the location of the present Central High School building is not suitable and does not meet the needs for the long-range Minneapolis school building program.* In our view, the educational needs of the future high school students of the Central and adjacent areas can be best met through the construction of new, large senior high school facilities at locations other than Central. These conclusions are based on one of the most exhaustive studies ever undertaken by the Citizens League, a study of Minneapolis school building needs, which culminated in issuance of a 72-page report in October, 1963.

Nothing, we believe, has occurred since issuance of our report and the successful school bond vote in February, 1964, which would lead us to alter our 1963 conclusions and recommendations on the future of Central High School and the related questions of need for high school facilities in the area of south Minneapolis closest to the center of the city. On the contrary, recent events have, we believe, borne out the soundness of the first phase Minneapolis school building program as it has developed and of our 1963 conclusions and recommendations on Minneapolis senior high schools. We refer here specifically to the School Board's plans with respect to the projected size and location of the new South Senior High School.

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. This is particularly true of Central High School, which has an attendance area surrounded by the attendance areas of other senior high schools in the Minneapolis 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 needs of the Central area in particular.

Our fundamental conclusion with respect to senior high school facilities was that it would be extremely desirable to plan all new senior highs with enrollments of 1800-2000 students, if at all possible. We concluded that schools of this size offered the best opportunity at equal dollar expense levels for broad, comprehensive and diversified educational, extra-curricular and athletic programs. Experts who appeared before our committee documented the desirability of schools of this suggested size in connection with curriculum planning, scheduling, and so as to provide for maximum utilization of expensive educational facilities, such as shops and laboratories of varying types, which should be available to students in a comprehensive high school.

We concluded that the per-student cost of school construction, as well as school operation, was lower for schools of the 2000-pupil range than for smaller schools. All modern, up-to-date high schools require certain expensive core facilities, such as auditorium, cooking and cafeteria facilities, and large capacity heating and ventilating plants. We concluded that best utilization of such necessary facilities could be achieved in a 2000-pupil high school, contrasted to a 1000-pupil high school, not to mention utilization of other desirable but expensive facilities such as swimming pools.

We 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 2000 students does not become impersonalized as far as the individual student is concerned.

We noted the fact that several high schools in the city already had enrollments in this suggested range, 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 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 this connection we note the continued enrollments of Central, South and West High Schools at slightly over 1,000 pupils yearly.

Considering also the age and desirability of replacing the existing South High School immediately, West High School at an early date, and Central High School within the next 15-20 years, *we were led to the inescapable conclusion that long-range school building plans should involve the replacement of South, Central and West High Schools, not with three new high schools, but rather with two.* This led to our conclusions with regard to the importance of so locating and sizing the new South High School that it could properly service that portion of south Minneapolis now serviced by Central High School and by South High School generally located east of the Stevens Avenue freeway.

This general plan involving the construction of a new South Senior High School for 1500 pupils and expandable to 2000 pupils was adopted by the Board of Education in its first phase building program entitled "Better Schools", dated November, 1963, which formed the basis for the \$18 million successful school bond issue.

This official Minneapolis Public School program, on Page B-13, notes that the new South High School "will be planned so that if and when a community college is established in Minneapolis, it will be feasible to add to the South High district. The most logical place for a community college would be at Central High School. The building is well located and well suited for such a purpose. It would be possible at that time to add a part of the present Central district to South. Other parts of the Central district would be assigned to West primarily. This would necessitate either expansion or replacement of West High School, as well as expansion of South High School."

Our report also expressed concern with the growing concentration of Negro pupils in certain school districts of the city. In connection with the South and Central High School attendance areas, we noted the fact that a significant number of Negro families live within these school districts. In fact, the number and per cent of Negro pupils in the Central High School district has increased appreciably; for example, from 159 in November, 1963, to 182 in November, 1964, the last sight count data available (increasing the percentage of Negro pupils in the school from 14.2% in 1963 to 18.6% in 1964). We believe that by providing for larger high schools with broader attendance areas, the tendency towards de facto segregation in a given school district can be lessened.

Our basic conclusion that the Central High School building will not adequately meet the long term needs of secondary education in the Central area is extensively discussed and documented in the 72-page report. We concluded that, as soon as more adequate high school facilities could be made available for Central area residents, the Central building and site should be sold or utilized for other educational purposes.

*Timing the eventual disposition of the Central building should be determined according to availability of superior senior high school educational facilities for future high school students from the attendance area now served by Central High.* Two factors seem to be particularly important. The first is the progress on construction of the new South High School, some \$5 million in funds for which have already been approved, and the site for which is expected to be announced at an early date, with the building scheduled for occupancy in the fall of 1968. The second factor is the permanent availability of additional capacity for senior high school students at other high schools adjacent to the Central High School area, particularly West High School.

In concluding that the Central building and location do not meet the long-term school facilities needs of the Central area and the school system as a whole, we wish to have one point clearly understood. *Central should not be closed until superior permanent high school facilities are available to service the Central area.* We would oppose temporary expedients which would cause inconvenience to students in the Central area.

The Citizens League speaks only on the basis of positions developed through careful research on the part of committees and as a result of conclusions and recommendations developed by its committees and acted on by its 36-member board. This statement is based on a careful review of the League's previous position on Minneapolis public school building needs as contained in its report approved by the Board October 29, 1963, and on previous findings and recommendations on Minneapolis school construction and rehabilitation reported in 1962.

The League has recently commenced a comprehensive review of post-high school educational needs in the Twin Cities metropolitan area, and a report on this subject will be prepared in the spring of 1966.

In closing, the Citizens League wishes at this time to commend the Board of Education and the school administration on the fine progress made in meeting Minneapolis school building needs, especially for the leadership provided the community in fashioning and seeing to a successful vote the \$18 million school building program approved in February, 1964. The plans with respect to the projected size and location of the new North as well as the new South Senior High Schools are, we believe, eminently sound and in line with the conclusions we have reached as a result of our extensive studies of school building needs.