

CITIZENS LEAGUE REPORT

No. 163

**Review of the Michigan State University
report on Minneapolis Public School
needs.**

October 1963

163

APPROVED
BOARD OF DIRECTORS
DATE OCT 14 1963

Citizens League
545 Mobil Oil Building
Minneapolis 2, Minnesota

*Incorporated into
larger report of
Oct. 29, 1963*

REPORT TO: Board of Directors

FROM: Minneapolis School Construction Committee

SUBJECT: General Conclusions and Recommendations on the Michigan State University Survey Report

GUIDING PRINCIPLES USED IN REVIEWING THE PROPOSED PROGRAM

1. In our May 1962 report, we stated that "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." We still hold this belief and we have reviewed the consultants' recommendations in the context of the foregoing statement.

2. In this study, as in May, 1962, we also were guided by the principle of "offering to each student in Minneapolis a reasonably equal educational opportunity, meaning the offering of a reasonably comparable curriculum and provision of reasonably comparable facilities and equipment."

GENERAL REACTION TO SURVEY TEAM REPORT

1. As we have stated previously, we are very pleased that the Minneapolis Board of Education chose to engage the services of outside consultants experienced in the area of school planning to make a study of the long-term and immediate school building needs of the Minneapolis school system. In our May 1962 report, which urged the Board of Education to take this step, we stated that such a study was necessary in order to expedite the early submission to the voters on the first stage of a 15-20-year long-range school construction and rehabilitation program and in order to offer greater assurance to the voters that such a program is needed. We believe that the Michigan State survey has demonstrated the needs of the school system, and we further believe that a school construction program, based generally upon the study, should be presented to the voters in the near future.

2. We are favorably impressed by the Michigan State University survey team and by its report. We believe that the survey team has discharged its contract with the School District in a conscientious and capable manner and that its report should be of great assistance to the Board of Education and the school administration in planning for the future of the Minneapolis school system. The survey has provided the Board of Education, the school administration and the people of Minneapolis with:

- (a) An organized perspective view of the entire Minneapolis school system, and a frame of reference which will help guide the planning of the school system for many years.

- (b) An orderly inventory of Minneapolis school facilities, including detailed information about every school in the system, presented in a consistent format which facilitates comparisons between the different schools.
- (c) A list of needed improvements at each school in the system developed by the survey team by inspection of each school.
- (d) A recommended first phase program, in which the consultants considered the long-range needs of the entire school system and recommended for inclusion in the first phase those projects which they considered to be the most critically needed. The listing of long-range needs could well serve as a basis for the 15-year comprehensive long-range building plan which, by law, the School District is required to formulate and revise annually.
- (e) A "Recommended Planning Guide" which provides the basic assumptions utilized by the team in developing its long-term and short-term recommendations.

3. Along with its virtues, we believe that the survey also has some deficiencies. While these deficiencies are not so serious as to make the recommendations invalid, they are matters which should be considered in any evaluation of the survey or the recommendations, and therefore we have listed them here:

- (a) The report does not set forth the standards against which existing buildings were measured and rated and which could be used as a continuing basis for priorities to develop a long-range program for school rehabilitation and replacement.
- (b) The survey report does not call attention to the recent extensive school rehabilitation program. Recent capital expenditures at the various schools are a factor which should be considered in deciding which schools are critically in need of further work or replacement and in the development of the comparative priorities of the different schools.
- (c) Although the consultants have verbally presented us with some amended enrollment projections, the projections for individual schools which are published in the report are based upon a formula method which fails to reflect fully the impact of anticipated freeway construction, urban renewal projects, or other land use changes. Also, although we appreciate the difficulties of estimating future school enrollments, it would appear that enrollments for individual school attendance areas are not projected far enough into the future in the report. The consultants' recommendations to build new schools with an anticipated life of many years appear to be based upon enrollment projections for only five years into the future.
- (d) The report does not discuss the present uses of the $3\frac{1}{4}$ mill (about \$1.3 million) per year Repair and Improvement Fund, nor does it appear to consider for what purposes this fund could be used in the future. In past years a substantial part of this fund has been used for major rehabilitation projects, and it is important that expenditures from the R & I Fund, totalling over \$6.5 million during the next five years, be coordinated with any proposed construction program.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. In our May 1962 report, we stated "A substantial increase in the present rate of expenditure for school construction and rehabilitation is essential during the next several years, if the Minneapolis public school system is to provide an adequate educational opportunity for our children." This conclusion was based in part upon the finding that about one-third of all existing Minneapolis school buildings were constructed in the 1880's and average at least 70 years of age, and that about half of all the school buildings are 50 or more years old.

The consultants' study has convincingly demonstrated that there is a substantial backlog of school building needs in Minneapolis which must be met through an aggressive, accelerated school construction program in the immediate future. Such a program is necessary if Minneapolis is to continue to provide an attractive home for young families with children. Failure to undertake such a program can only mean that the city increasingly will become the home of only the old and the childless and those too poor to live elsewhere. We urge the Board of Education to present to the voters, as soon as possible, a school construction program developed from the survey team's recommendations.

2. We are pleased that the consultants have chosen to recommend the replacement of schools in Minneapolis instead of a continuing rehabilitation of old and obsolete structures. We concur with the consultants in their findings that many Minneapolis schools have reached the point where they should be replaced, and that replacement is a better educational and financial investment than rehabilitation.

3. We concur with the consultants' recommendations (Item H on Page 25 of Volume I of the consultants' report) that the Minneapolis School District should hire on a permanent basis and at a high level within the school administration an outstanding educational facilities planner to carry out a continuing program of educational facilities planning for Minneapolis. We consider this to be an essential part of a school building program, and we urge the Board of Education to implement this recommendation as soon as possible. Among his other responsibilities, the planner should be responsible for a continuous updating of the Michigan State survey team's report and for providing the staff work necessary to develop and revise annually the 15-year comprehensive long-range building plan required by state statute.

4. We strongly approve of the survey team's approach to the elimination of whatever de facto segregation may exist in the Minneapolis public schools and the prevention of further concentrations of minority group students in individual schools. As outlined by the consultants in Item E on Pages 17-20 of Volume I, the recommendations for action by the Board of Education include:

- (a) "Active support of all neighborhood, city, state and national efforts designed to reduce segregated housing and resultant segregated educational facilities."
- (b) "Redistricting of school attendance areas when consistent with good planning practices to disperse the Negro enrollment."
- (c) "The development of a policy on open enrollments containing adequate controls permitting and encouraging children in overcrowded schools to attend those schools outside of their community area which are under-utilized. These controls should assist in achieving racially balanced schools."

- (d) "The planning of new schools and additions to existing schools designed to disperse concentrations of Negro enrollment."

5. We strongly favor increased flexibility of school attendance area boundaries, as suggested by the consultants, and urge that these boundaries be reviewed and revised annually to assure maximum utilization of the District's educational facilities. We urge the Board of Education to implement the survey team's recommendations on this matter by:

- (a) Developing an open transfer policy which would permit students in crowded schools to transfer to under-utilized facilities.
- (b) Establishing optional areas which would permit transfer from overcrowded schools to adjacent under-utilized schools, and
- (c) Making every reasonable attempt to use under-utilized school buildings for those students presently receiving school transportation services.

6. We accept the consultants' recommendation that the District continue its policy of using the Kindergarten to 6th grade, junior high school, senior high school (K-6-3-3) form of school organization, and we believe it should be followed throughout the District, except in the most unusual circumstances. As yet, we have not had sufficient time to evaluate the recommendation that Minneapolis should establish a Community College in Phase II of the program, but we believe this recommendation is deserving of further consideration.

7. We accept the consultants' recommended size for elementary schools of 540-655 students, and we agree with the principle of locating elementary schools within reasonable walking distance of students' homes unless there are unusual circumstances making this impractical.

8. We seriously question the consultants' recommended optimum sizes for secondary schools of 1,000-1,500 students for senior high schools and 800-1,000 students for junior high schools. In our report of May, 1962, we stated that each school should have a sufficient minimum enrollment to enable the offering of a comprehensive curriculum at an economical cost. At that time we cited standards that junior high schools should have an enrollment of between 700-1,200 students and that senior high school enrollment should be between 1,000 and 1,800, with an optimum size of 1,500. Our studies since then indicate that the standards we cited in 1962 are probably too low, particularly with respect to senior high schools. We have found that:

- (a) The prevailing practice in other Minnesota school systems with sufficient total enrollments appears to be to build senior high schools for 1,800-2,200 students.
- (b) Senior high school buildings apparently are most economical and efficient from the standpoint of building utilization when they are designed for about 2,000 students.
- (c) The per student cost of school construction and operation generally is higher for smaller schools, if comparable facilities are provided.
- (d) A much wider range of courses can be offered economically at a large school than at a small school.

There is similar evidence that the most desirable size for junior high schools would be 1,000-1,400 students.

We believe that at the secondary school level, particularly the senior high school, it is more important to have schools of an adequate size than it is that the schools be located within a particular community or within walking distance of the students' homes.

9. While we agree that some Minneapolis school sites are too small and should be enlarged, we do not consider the need for expanded sites to be as critically urgent as other school needs. While the minimum site standards recommended by the consultants may be desirable, they appear to be unrealistically high for a built-up city, such as Minneapolis, where school sites can be enlarged only at the expense of dislocating families, demolishing homes, removing property from the tax rolls, and large expenditures of tax funds. We believe that:

- (a) The minimum site size standards recommended by the consultants should be revised to a more attainable level.
- (b) The School District should continue its policy of developing joint school-park sites in cooperation with the Minneapolis Park Board. However, the School District should recognize that it will not be possible to follow this policy in all cases.
- (c) Even when schools are not located immediately adjacent to a park, the minimum site standards adopted for Minneapolis schools should give full recognition to the City's extensive system of local parks and athletic fields.
- (d) Before it embarks on a program of site expansion, the School District should develop a "priority list of site expansion needs" as outlined in Item C-6 on Page 11 of Volume I. More specifically, the Board of Education should not include in the forthcoming bond program any funds for the expansion of existing school sites, unless the land to be acquired is necessary for the construction of an addition to the school.

10. We reject the survey team's standard with respect to rooms with the floor more than 30 inches below ground level. The survey team considered all such pupil spaces to be substandard and automatically discounted them when computing the capacities of the Minneapolis schools. We believe that each space located more than 30 inches below ground level should be considered individually, and that they should not be discounted unless they have a lighting, ventilating, moisture or heating problem which cannot be rectified economically.

11. Information we have obtained indicates that the survey team's estimates are considerably above the cost of comparable schools recently built in near-by school districts. We urge the Board of Education and the administration to analyze carefully these estimates before submitting a proposal to the voters. We believe that such a review will make it possible to reduce the total cost of the program recommended by the consultants without curtailing the program. We further believe that the costs which the voter is asked to approve should be set at a realistic level, in order that the voter may feel confident that the schools will be built for as low a cost as is possible, consistent with good construction practices, ease of maintenance, student safety and educational efficiency.