K-14 Plan
Study Proposal 08.09

1. Describe your project idea, including clearly defining the problems and specific policy questions to be addressed.

Develop a Minnesota plan for a K-14 system in which secondary school students (grades 9-12) have an easier time transitioning to technical training at an earlier age instead of being forced either (1) to do conventional academic work through grade 12, or (2) drop out for lack of interest, motivation, skills, availability of other options, or knowledge of how to gain access to other options.

2. Why is this problem important?

The present K-12 system, reinforced by relentless public rhetoric asserting that “everyone should go to college,” promotes too many dropouts before grade 12 by young people who do not wish to prepare for college or experience obstacles to doing so, yet there are few other legible options offered to them.

3. How could the Citizens League make a unique contribution?

Education in Minnesota is a traditional line of CL business. Established interests dominate the analysis of and support for Minnesota's educational and training needs. The creation of MnSCU pulled area vocational-technical schools out of local school districts and added them to the new system. Their agendas have been routinely pushed aside by the agendas of the state universities and community colleges. The League can address educationbal and training needs in a non-partisan fashion, and provide a voice for the needs of the state's economy and for the technical-vocational agenda, which the state sorely needs.

4. What are prospects that project would yield recommendations that could be implemented and have a major impact on the problem?

As Minnesota businesses point out, there are many jobs across the state that go unfilled for want of appropriately trained skilled workers, while at the same time we have deplorable high school graduation rates because many students are not provided with options other than the conventional path to conventional college.

5. Explain how this problem can be addressed by data, research, and reason? Identify probable sources for data and research.

Advocates for private career schools and for Minnesota's public technical colleges within MnSCU are numerous. They have plenty of data on what they are doing and what they are trying to do, but information about their programs is slow to reach the very students who would be most interested in them.

6. Explain how this proposal can be framed without partisan bias.

I cannot see that this is a partisan issue. The business community needs skilled workers, and it not getting them. Young people and their parents are often over-sold on the payoffs from conventional college educations, which are not for everyone.

7. Why would this project be attractive to members?

Any program that's seen as good for young people, good for business, good for the education industry, and which pays for itself with higher lifetime earnings and higher state revenues would be hard to oppose. The central problem continues to be a bias against technical-vocational training, which (following

traditions established by the 18th-century British landed aristocracy and transmitted to the colonies...) remains pervasive among the general population. It is also an attitude that seems to be picked up by some immigrant spokespersons.

8. How would this project reach out to under-represented segments of the community?

See #7. Vocational/technical training—too often seen as “low class” by the effete chattering classes–is denigrated by almost all parties in the K-12 and post-secondary systems EXCEPT those who actually teach in the technical colleges and their students. It’s a reflection of what some have called “the British Disease"–that is, a disdain for the doing of useful work!

9. What is the potential for making this issue visible to a broader public? Why?

Given the fact thatgood, high-paying jobs are leaving Minnesota because skilled employees are not being trained, that our high school graduation rates are unacceptably low, that sufficient schooling and career options are often unknown and/or unavailable, and that poverty and unemployment lead to other social problems, I would think that this issue could and should have higher visibility.

10. What resources—funding, experts, etc. might be available to support this project?

Foundations in the area seem often inclined to deal with vivid symptoms of societal problems and failures than to get out in front of them and address the sources of the problems. Education Minnesota as an important political force has not been an effective advocate for educating and training ALL Minnesota young people. There is no reason why a K-14 school system for ALL of Minnesota young people could not present several paths for secondary and post-secondary schooling and training, and that the post-secondary option concept could not be developed further to dissolve the outdated bounday between 12th grade and what follows.