



April 8, 2024

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Senator Mary K. Kunesh, Chair
Attention: Rajab Sami: sami.rajab@senate.mn
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Re: SF 3860

Chair and Education Finance Committee Members:

Please accept and distribute the following written testimony supporting SF 3860 section 4 subdivision 2, and its supporting components.

Testimony of Gerald Von Korff

As a former 15-year St. Cloud School Board member (2004-2019) and a longtime advocate¹ for bold reforms in Minnesota's education of students of color, emerging bilingual learners and lower income student, I am pleased to offer this testimony in support of SR 3860's English learner pilot program and to offer suggestions on how to structure the legislation to make it as effective as possible.

Subdivision 2 of SR 3860 provides:

“for a pilot program to fully fund English learner programming that implements best practices in class instructional strategies, staffing, and curriculum during regular and extended day, week, and year programs.”

Despite one of the nation's most progressive English learner legislation, the LEAPS Act, Minnesota has failed to make necessary advances in EL education for two reasons: lack of adequate funding and the consequent failure to implement transformational improvements. Small and insufficient increments in revenue typically result in districts continuing what has been done before, but at a slightly higher price. This pilot concept, if adequately funded and subjected to rigorous accountability, offers a rare opportunity to demonstrate what might be accomplished with truly adequate funding provided in return for strategic excellence.

Inadequate Funding: Unquestionably, EL education in Minnesota is impaired by inadequate funding. Appendix A to my testimony provides MDE's own graphic

¹My background includes Masters of Teaching, teaching in Washington, DC and New York, service on the State and district Curriculum Advisory Committees, and years of work on school finance and educational adequacy.

presentation of inflation adjusted funding of two Minnesota school districts, my own St. Cloud District, and Worthington School district. Each graph begins in the year I was elected to St. Cloud's school board, and each spans my entire 15 years, and beyond to new law 2025 funding. During this period, both districts' total inflation-adjusted general fund revenues per student remained essentially constant. In St. Cloud, during this period, our EL enrollment rose from nominal to 20 percent. Non-white enrollment rose from 12 percent to 60 percent, and low-income enrollment more than quadrupled from 15 to 69 percent. Worthington experienced similar changes while its inflation adjusted revenues remained nearly constant. Thus both Districts are being asked to students with higher educational needs, yet at the same inflation-adjusted price

How Much will it Cost—to afford EL's an Adequate Education?

Last year, [MPR summarized](#) a report by the Shanker Foundation and Rutgers Graduate School of Education. As to Minnesota the report shows that:

The least adequately funded districts in Minnesota include both Minneapolis Public Schools and St. Paul Public Schools, which is consistent with national patterns of below adequate funding in large, diverse, urban school districts. But the list also includes many districts outside of the Twin Cities, like Worthington, St. Cloud, Chisholm and Mabel-Canton—and suburban districts, including Columbia Heights and Brooklyn Center. What these districts have in common is that they have a higher proportion of students who need the most from public schools, in combination with local factors that increase the costs of school districts. These local factors include local wages and geographic sparsity².

Summarizing leading K-12 education costing research, the [Education Trust](#) estimated that for EL's and other students with high educational needs, it will require two to three times base revenue per student:

“Studies that use statistical methods to estimate how much additional funding it would cost to help close opportunity gaps and the resulting achievement gaps between students with and without additional needs consistently estimate that systems should provide 100% to 200% **more** funding for students with additional needs than for students without additional needs.[in other words two to three times the funding].” (See also [Duncome & Yinger](#), *How Much*

² Analysis: How Minnesota's school funding leaves the most in-need districts behind. February 2023) See Also [Minneapolis School Voices](#).

*More Does a Disadvantaged Student Cost? (2004); [Baker](#), *The Real Shame of the Nation, The Causes and Consequences of Interstate Inequity in Public School Investments*.)³*

Applying these principles to districts like St. Paul, Minneapolis, Worthington, would likely require an increase of revenue in the range of two to four thousand dollars per EL student, to be allocated without supplanting to a real expansion of the programs and services of the kind described by SF 3860 section 4 . **However, it is unthinkable that this additional funding could be appropriated without a concrete plan, budget and a rigorous accountability system.**

Pilots are cost-effective ways of establishing the effectiveness of a transformational but costly strategy. The approach proposed by SF 3860 section 4, -- a fully funded, best practices based, pilot program -- could lead to revolutionary reforms in Minnesota's efforts to deliver an adequate education to emerging bilingual learners. By funding pilots, the legislature could test the effectiveness without spending the far greater statewide cost, and at the same time establish what actually works. Currently, there are few if any examples of fully funded EL schools or districts in the United States. The Department of Defense operates a reputedly highly successful K-12 education system, spending about \$25,000 per student.⁴ Pilots would provide the legislature with evidence on which to base future funding decisions.

Bold Measures Required. Appendix B to this testimony lists and links a series of reports from 2004 through 2022 each decrying Minnesota's persistent failure to address the needs of students of color and EL's. It is now twenty years since the Governor's Education Finance Task Force urged that Minnesota take decisive action to pair enhanced "full-dollar" cost funding with accountability to assure that funding achieves results⁵. To close Minnesota's persistent opportunity gap for ELL's, students of color and lower income students, Minnesota must initiate bold measures.

³ In Equal is not Good Enough (Education Trust 2022)

⁴ [Who Runs the Best U.S. Schools?](#) It May Be the Defense Department. NY Times, October 10, 2023.

⁵ [Investing in Our Future](#): (As good as our schools have been, we are leaving too many children behind. And the sad reality is, they tend to be poor, disabled or children of color--calling for for "rationally determined, learning-linked, student-oriented and cost-based Instructional Services Allocation,"and urging that students receive extended learning time and early childhood education

Strengths of SF 3860 Section 4. Properly funded and effectively implemented, SF 3860 Section 4 combines many excellent concepts. It will offer an opportunity for one or more school districts to show what can be accomplished when a program is designed around fully funding. A successful program will serve as a model for future funding and future accountability system. Unlike our current finance system, it will require the pilot districts to earn public dollars by implementing a reformed and improved programming with extended learning built into the delivery system. It will require adequate funding of professional development, collaboration time mentorship and constructive pedagogical observation. Have said that, I have the following recommendations for strengthening the pilot program.

Recommendations for Strengthening Section 4

- (1) Determine the permanent level of funding in the 2025 legislative Session based on Pilot Proposals.** If your intent is genuinely to offer full funding, I recommend that the pilot participants be selected by September of 2024. Consider appropriating now a smaller per-student allocation to compensate the selected district to conduct to conduct strategic planning, then to submit and their plans and budgets to MDE in January 2025. Respectfully, it would be a mistake to determine the amount of funding first, and then instruct pilots to build their programs with the pre-determined funding in mind. Pilots districts should be asked to design transformational plans and budgets to implement those plans. MDE should then submit these full dollar cost budgets for inclusion in the 2025 education budget.
- (2) Outside Independent WIDA Evaluation** Require successful applicants to conduct an outside audit-review of their EL programming, including observations and interviews with students, teachers, administrators and parents.
- (3) Recognize that Successful Reformed Programs should not Sunset.** Do not launch these pilots based on the assumption that they will last for several years and then sunset. Although there may be initial one-time only startup costs, the vast majority of the costs will be permanent. Extended learning time, staff development, increases in the quantity and quality of EL instructional staff, tutoring, none of these costs can be sunset in 2027. Convincing new qualified staff to join a temporary experiment, and convincing existing staff to implement transformational improvements, with a two-year lifespan will doom the pilot idea to failure. Moreover, a strategic plan designed to last several years is not really a strategic plan. The pilot is valuable, because it will point the way to a permanent improvement in EL education, and that permanent improvement will necessarily cost more.

(4) Consider phasing in plans and funding Increases. A successful transformational EL plan will likely have multiple challenging components: a plan for SLIFE students, accelerating long term EL's and reforms in elementary, middle and secondary reforms, coordinating with the resto of the district's programs. Attempting to transform all these at once may prove counter-productive. If, for example, the pilot proposes an ultimate annual budget, the program could be phased in over three years with phased increases as the project scales up.

(5) Recognize that Results May Take Time: It may be unreasonable to expect MDE's objective measures of success to register immediate stellar changes. A student who is three years behind in reading or math proficiency, but make significant gains, will still appear as not meeting proficiency standards. Even a single year's exceptionally successful reforms will not be sufficient to transform the objective statistical measures. Proficiency is the cumulative product of a series of educational inputs. The Department should develop sophisticated objective measures to assure accountability.

(6) Go Big, and Demand a Transformative Plan. A review of Minneapolis funding under the 2023 budget seems to show that an EL student who is also eligible for compensatory education, would earn the Minneapolis District about \$700 new dollars for 2024 (Compensatory plus EL increase). That increase will not require, nor will it buy, any transformative changes in EL programming. If Minneapolis makes improvements, they will be in spite of the lack of adequate funding. This illustrates the common research inclusion that small increases in funding at most layer minor incremental changes on top of existing practices.

To follow on with this example, under the new budget, Minneapolis expects to make major cuts, deferring additional cuts by drawing from reserves. In contrast, if Minnesota were to increase a district's EL funding by \$2,000 - \$4,000 per EL student, (perhaps phased in as the district implements WIDA consistent real transformational improvements), without supplanting, Minnesota would have a right to demand accountable transformations in return for those increases.

Conclusion

Thank you so much for considering my testimony. In 2004, a blue-ribbon panel operating under Governor Pawlenty's charge urged the legislature to (1) conduct research to determine the cost of providing an adequate education to all students, (2) to provide considerable increases for students of color, lower income students and EL's, based on the full dollar cost of providing that education, and (3) to make districts accountable for using that increased revenue to produce an outstanding education to those students. Since

that time, most school districts' total revenues per student, inflation adjusted, has stayed constant, or nearly so. During that same time, Districts like St. Cloud, Worthington and many others have experienced dramatic changes in the percentage of their students with higher and more costly educational needs. Also during that same time, state expectations for an adequate education of increased.

More money is required to address Minnesota's opportunity gap, but more money is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition of success. The pilot projects will offer the legislature the ability to pair adequate funding with guardrails to demonstrate the in-district transformative changes necessary to deliver an adequate education to English language learners.

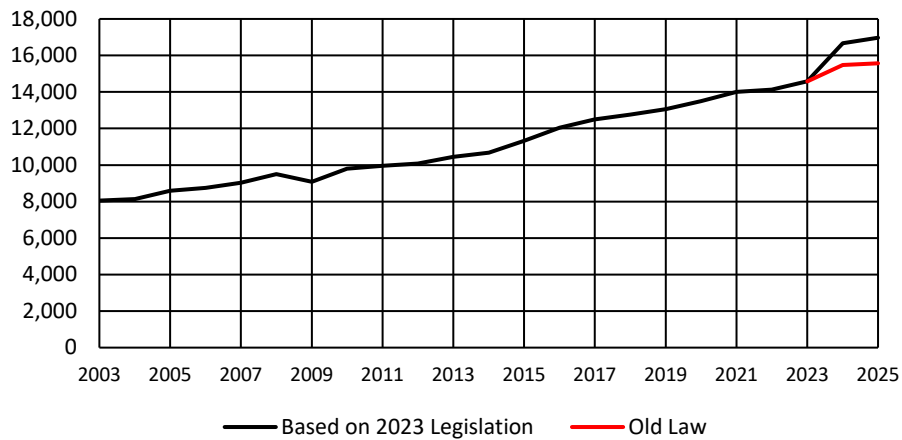
Sincerely,

/s/ Gerald W. Von Korff

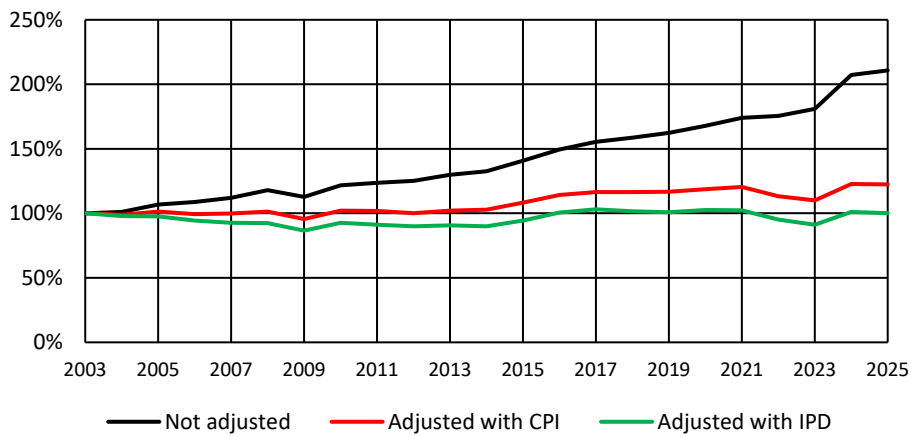
Gerald W. Von Korff

St. Cloud Trends

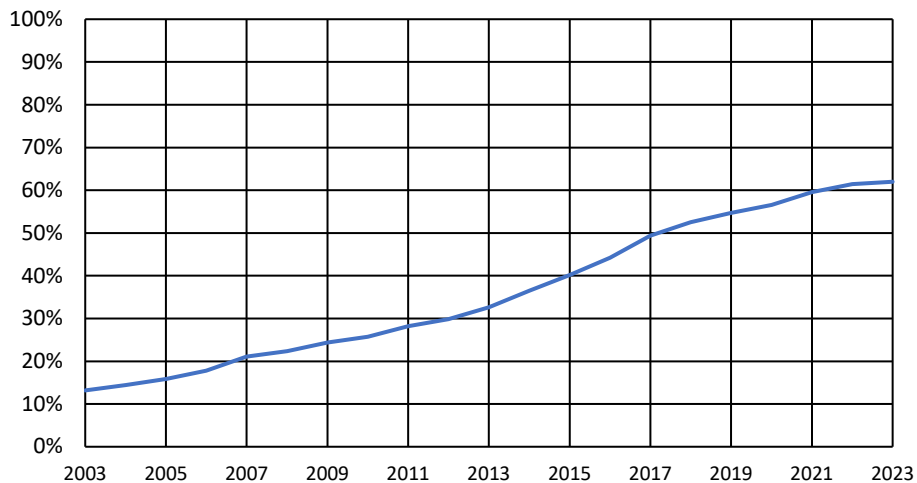
I. Revenue/Pupil Showing Effect of 2023 Legislation -- Not Adjusted for Inflation



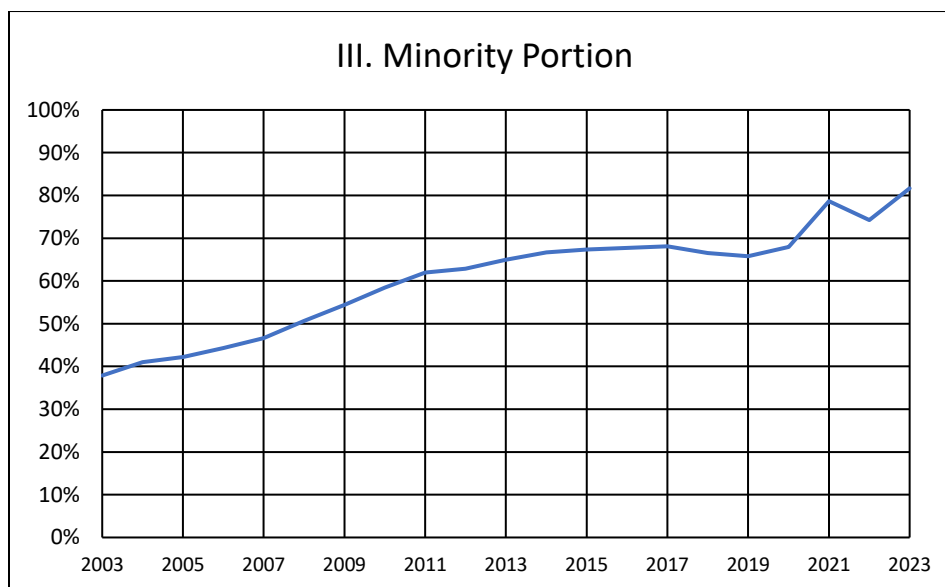
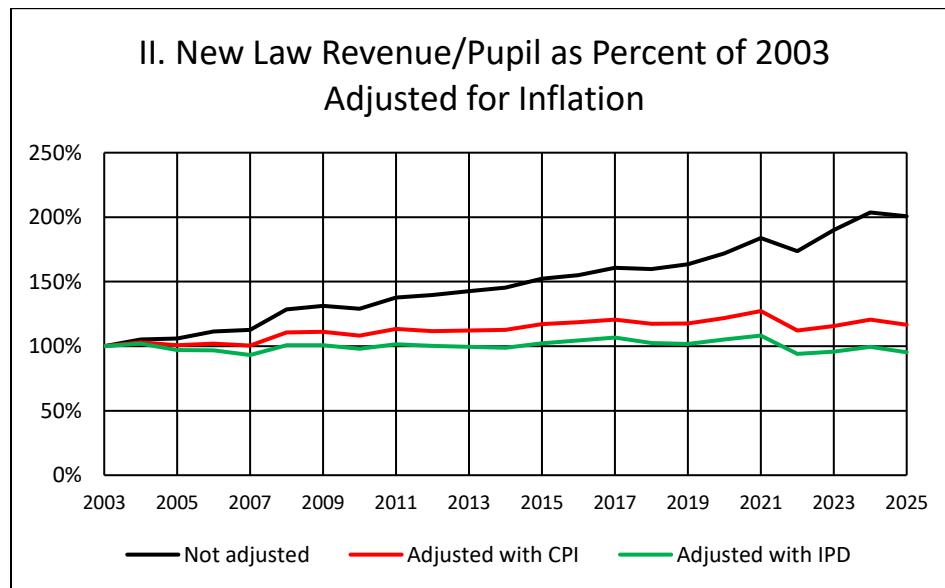
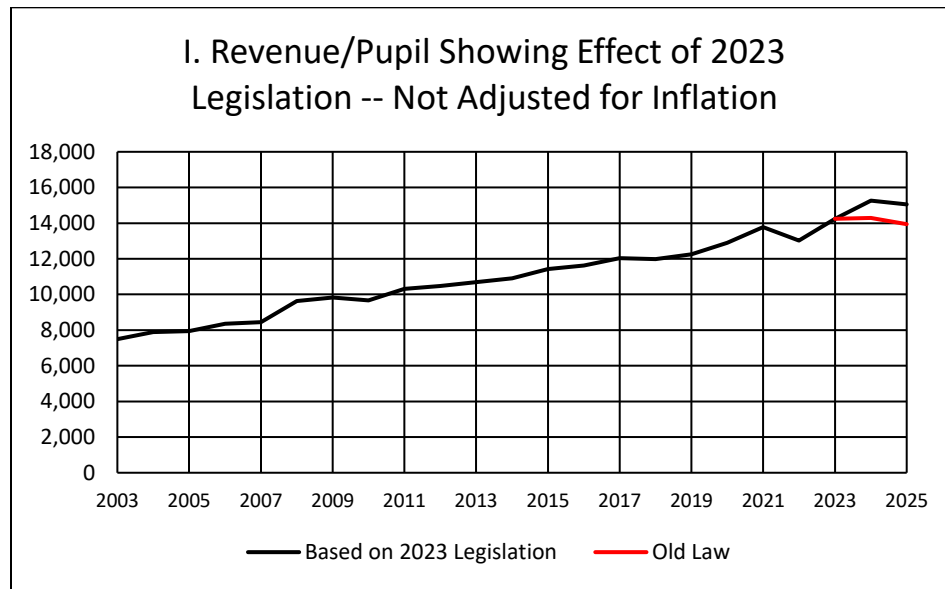
II. New Law Revenue/Pupil as Percent of 2003 Adjusted for Inflation



III. Minority Portion



Von Korff Testimony Appendix A page 2
MDE Funding Trends 2003-2023 Worthington



From 2003-2025 Inflation Adjusted funding per pupil is flat while nonwhite enrollment doubled.

Appendix B

Reports on Minnesota's Persistent Failure to Close the Achievement Gap

- **Investing in Our Future**: Seeking a fair, understandable and accountable, twenty-first century education finance system for Minnesota (Acknowledging that “Minnesota has one of the largest achievement gaps in the nation”)(Governor’s Task Force July 2004 P11)
- **Funding Education for the Future**, (MDE May 2011) (“There are wide gaps in reading and math proficiency by race and by economic status. Little progress was made in closing these achievement gaps between 2006 and 2010.”) Education Finance Working Group Recommendations and Report p 5 (Nov 2012)
- **80-20-10 Bringing Equity to Minnesota’s School Finance System** (School Finance Working Group, November 2020) (Over the past 20 years, educational outcomes measured by state accountability tests have stagnated with a large, persistent achievement gap while the percentage of children of color has more than doubled from 16% to 34%)
- **Office of Legislative Auditor A Minnesota Department of Education’s Role in Addressing the Achievement Gap** (2022) p 3 (“Minnesota has had long-standing academic achievement gaps, despite efforts by MDE, school districts, and charter schools to implement policies designed to close them.)
- **Wilder Foundation “Tackling the achievement gap head-on” (2006)** (A wide gulf divides public school classrooms throughout the Twin Cities region. It closely follows the lines of family income and of race and ethnicity. This achievement gap persists throughout the school years, from grade-school test scores through high school graduation rates.
- **Minnesota’s Educational Achievement Gaps: A Statewide Crisis.** (Federal-Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, 2019 (Minnesota’s education achievement gaps have persisted for decades despite implementing policies designed to close them.)
- **Educational Outcomes and Minnesota’s Economy, Minnesota Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, 2022** (“Data show that Minnesota’s public schools consistently underserve students from low-income families, Indigenous students, and students of color”.)