Leandro: Providing a sound, basic education to all NC children

What is Leandro v State?

In 1994, parents, students and school districts in low-wealth, rural NC counties filed a lawsuit (L*eandro v. State cases)* alleging that students in these counties were denied their right to a sound basic education under the NC constitution. NC's constitution clearly states that it is the state's responsibility to provide a sound, basic education for all children. Many states in the US do not have such a mandate in their constitution. The Leandro case affirmed that inequitable and inadequate school funding bars access to a sound, basic public education, particularly for students of color and those from families with low incomes.

The NC Supreme Court allowed the case to go to trial in 1997. In 2002, the court found that there was a violation of the students' rights to a sound, basic education and ordered the State to remedy this violation by providing:

- A "competent, certified, well-trained teacher who is teaching the standard course of study" in every classroom;
- A "well-trained, competent principal with the leadership skills and ability to hire and retain competent, certified and well-trained teachers" in every school; and
- The "resources necessary to support the effective instructional program" in every school "so that the educational needs of all children, including at-risk children, to have an equal opportunity to obtain a sound basic education, can be met."

While some efforts were made by state lawmakers to comply with the 2002 ruling, plaintiffs maintain that over the last nearly two decades, NC has still not met its constitutional requirements for a sound, basic education for all. In 2018 a NC judge, responsible for oversight of the state's implementation of the Leandro decision, appointed a nonpartisan, nonprofit research agency, **WestEd**, to conduct a review and submit recommendations by March 2019.

The report was submitted to the court in June 2019 and released to the public in December 2019. It includes eight recommendations for how NC can comply with the directive to provide a sound, basic education to all NC children. (Read here: https://www.publicschoolsfirstnc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Sound-Basic-Education-for-All.pdf).

The 8 recommendations from the 2019 report:

1. Revise the current state funding model to provide adequate, efficient and equitable resources.
2. Provide a qualified, well-prepared and diverse teaching staff in every school.
3. Provide a qualified and well-prepared principal in every school.
4. Provide all at-risk students with the opportunity to attend high-quality early childhood programs.
5. Direct resources, opportunities and initiatives to economically disadvantaged students.
6. Revise the student assessment system and school accountability system.
7. Build an effective regional and statewide system of support for the improvement of low-performing and high poverty schools.
8. Convene an expert panel to assist the Court in monitoring state policies, plans, programs and progress.

Next Steps:

On January 21, 2020, Judge David Lee issued a consent order requiring the State of NC and the State Board of Education to **develop a plan of action within 60 days**. Included were seven components that any plan of action must include. These are:

- A system of teacher development and recruitment that ensures each classroom is staffed with a high-quality teacher who is supported with early and ongoing professional learning and provided competitive pay.
- A system of principal development and recruitment that ensures each school is led by a high-quality principal who is supported with early and ongoing professional learning and provided competitive pay.
- A finance system that provides adequate, equitable, and predictable funding to school districts and, importantly, adequate resources to address the needs of all North Carolina schools and students, especially at-risk-students as defined by the Leandro decisions.
- An assessment and accountability system that reliably assess multiple measures of student performance against the Leandro standard and provides accountability consistent with the Leandro standard.
- An assistance and turnaround function that provides necessary support to low-performing schools and districts.
- A system of early education that provides access to high-quality pre-kindergarten and other early childhood learning opportunities to ensure that all students at-risk of educational failure, regardless of where they live in the State, enter kindergarten on track for school success.
- An alignment of high school to postsecondary and career expectations, as well as the provision of early postsecondary and workforce learning opportunities, to ensure student readiness to all students in NC.

Key for state lawmakers is identifying specific resources needed to help address: overall funding, the teacher pipeline, principal training, low-income students, lack of sufficient Pre-K programs, stresses on high-poverty schools, the lack of helping professionals in every school, the need for teaching assistants in every K-3 classroom, and more. **Central to all of these issues is adequate funding.**

WestEd estimates that the General Assembly needs to appropriate an additional **$4.3 billion dollars to public schools over the next 8 years and another $1.2 billion for early childhood investments.**

The Governor and the NC General Assembly must work together to develop a remedial plan for the State to ensure that all schools have the resources they need to provide all children a sound, basic education and they must establish firm accountability measures to ensure our public schools remain aligned with Leandro requirements for years to come.

Selected Resources:

Leandro. https://www.publicschoolsfirstnc.org/know-the-issues/sound-basic-education-leandro/

WestEd, Sound Basic Education for All: An Action Plan for North Carolina, 2019, https://www.publicschoolsfirstnc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Sound-Basic-Education-for-All.pdf

Ed Law Center, North Carolina, 2019, https://edlawcenter.org/states/northcarolina.html

NC Policy Watch, The Leandro report is out. The future of public education in North Carolina starts this week. Zack Kaplan, Dec 12, 2019, http://www.ncpolicywatch.com/2019/12/12/the-leandro-report-is-out-the-future-of-public-education-in-north-carolina-starts-this-week/

Public School Forum of North Carolina, A State at Risk: Critical Investments in North Carolina's Public Schools Are Urgently Needed to Ensure Each Child Receives a Sound Basic Education, Dec 11, 2019 https://www.ncforum.org/a-state-at-risk-critical-investments-in-north-carolinas-public-schools-are-urgently-needed-to-ensure-each-child-receives-a-sound-basic-education/

Judge says NC is leaving too many students behind, orders state leaders to act. https://www.newsobserver.com/news/local/education/article239490688.html

At long last, a plan to comply with Leandro education mandate takes shape. http://www.ncpolicywatch.com/2020/01/22/at-long-last-a-plan-to-comply-with-leandro-education-mandate-takes-shape/

Judge agrees with consultant on North Carolina public education. https://apnews.com/1d440a83b070cf85171727366c74710a

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