

Ensuring a Sound Basic Education for All Students

The Supreme Court of North Carolina, in its landmark *Leandro v. State of North Carolina* decision, affirmed the fundamental right of every child to have access to a sound basic education. The Courts also ruled that North Carolina was not meeting this constitutional requirement.

The *Leandro* Comprehensive Remedial Plan, which the State submitted to the Court on March 15, 2021, outlines the actions the State must take to meet its constitutional obligation of ensuring every student has access to a sound basic education. The Plan is based on the recommendations from Governor Cooper's Commission on Access to Sound Basic Education and from the Court's independent consultant, WestEd.

The Governor is committed to pursuing the policy and programmatic changes outlined in the Plan and to providing the resources necessary to achieve the actions in the Plan over the next biennium and in future fiscal years. To do this, the Governor's Recommended Budget includes \$585.6 million in funding for FY 2021-22 and \$1.0 billion for FY 2022-23 to improve teacher quality and support, provide additional resources for students with the greatest need, increase Local Education Agency (LEA) budgetary flexibility, ensure students are college and career ready, and strengthen early childhood education and supports.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated many of the inequities and challenges that are the focus of the *Leandro* case. These initial state investments are in addition to the more than \$5.5 billion in combined federal COVID-19 relief funds allocated by Congress to school districts and charter schools through the CARES Act, CRRSAA, and the American Rescue Plan over the past year. These federal funds can help school districts and charter schools to address some of these challenges. However, unlike the recurring state investments envisioned in the Plan and included in the Governor's recommended budget, these federal funds are not intended to address the significant and recurring needs that school districts face in providing a sound basic education to all students.

Increasing Compensation for School Personnel

(\$289.4M in FY 2021-22, \$478.1M in FY 2022-23)

Invests \$268.9 million in FY 2021-22 and \$439.3 million in FY 2022-23 in teacher compensation to decrease pay disparity between educators and similarly credentialed and experienced professionals in other fields. Provides \$20.5 million in FY 2021-22 and \$38.8 million in FY 2022-23 to increase compensation for principals and assistant principals. Average pay for existing educators increases by 10% over the biennium.

Increasing Funding to Equitably Serve All Students

(\$116.5M in FY 2021-22, \$222.0M in FY 2022-23)

- Invests additional funding for the Disadvantaged Student Supplemental Funding (DSSF) allotment, transfers the At-Risk Student Services/Alternative Schools allotment funding into the DSSF allotment, and expands allowable uses of the DSSF allotment to incorporate activities allowed under the current at-risk allotment.

- Removes funding caps and increases funding for the children with disabilities and Limited English Proficiency allotments to increase the number of students receiving supplementary funding and address differential costs of serving specific populations.
- Increases low wealth funding to provide eligible counties additional supplemental funding to address gaps in local revenue per student.
- Provides funding for comprehensive assistance to improve low-performing and high poverty schools and districts, and expands funding to make access to NC Virtual Public School more affordable for low-wealth districts.

Strengthening the Educator Workforce (\$51.1M in FY 2021-22, \$91.4M in FY 2022-23)

Invests \$50.9 million in FY 2021-22 and \$91.2 million in FY 2022-21 to recruit, retain, and support North Carolina's educator workforce.

- Establishes a DPI Office of Equity Affairs to direct recruitment and retention of a diverse workforce.
- Increases the pipeline of diverse, well-prepared teachers by providing funding to support up to 90 additional Teaching Fellows for the 2021-22 academic year and 445 additional Fellows for 2022-23, expanding eligible institutions for the program, broadening eligible certification areas, extending the reduced payback period to Fellows who teach in high-poverty schools, improving opportunities for talented minority candidates, and expanding program support and enhancement. Also expands funding for the NC Principals Fellows Program to prepare up to 360 new principals annually.
- Expands support and mentoring for first-year teachers, focusing on beginning teachers in low-performing schools, high-poverty schools, and districts, and establishes a Professional Development allotment to provide funding for expanding professional learning for all personnel.
- Supports teachers pursuing National Board Certification, expands the Advanced Teaching Roles and "Grow Your Own" programs, and establishes recruitment and residency pilots for high-need districts.
- Expands funding to hire more teacher assistants to support early-grades literacy and math.

Supporting Student Well-Being (\$41.5M in FY 2021-22, \$89.9M in FY 2022-23)

Provides \$40 million in FY 2021-22 and \$80 million in FY 2022-23 to help school districts hire more nurses, counselors, psychologists, and social workers to support student physical and mental health. Invests \$3.9 million to provide free school meals for up to 97,500 students and \$6 million for schools to adopt a community schools model to address out-of-school barriers to learning.

Strengthening Career and College Pathways (\$11.6M in FY 2021-22, \$21.9M in FY 2022-23)

Provides funding to support the Career and College Ready Graduate program that seeks to ensure high school students are prepared for college-level coursework at NC Community Colleges prior to graduation. Provides \$6.5 million for credentials and certifications for Career and Technical Education students. Invests \$10 million to expand the number of school-based Career Development Coordinators focused on career planning for grades 6-12. Provides \$2.95 million in matching funds over the biennium to the College Advising Corps to expand the placement of college advisers in low wealth districts in North Carolina public schools.

Supporting a High-Quality System of Early Education (\$75.3M in FY 2021-22, \$123.4M in FY 2022-2023)

Invests \$26.5 million in FY 2021-22 and \$45.4 million in FY 2022-23 to increase NC Pre-K reimbursement rates by almost 16% and to serve an additional 1,500 eligible four-year-olds. Provides \$20 million in FY 2021-22 and FY 2022-23 to Smart Start and \$10 million in FY 2021-22 and FY 2022-23 to add 1,700 additional child care subsidy slots for children in low-income working families. Invests \$8.2 million in FY 2021-22 and \$10.2 million in FY 2022-23 in high-quality early intervention services. Provides \$1.5 million to decrease the impact of implicit bias on children of color and children with disabilities. Strengthens the early childhood educator pipeline by providing workforce development and compensation strategies, including \$10 million in FY 2021-22 and \$26 million in FY 2022-23 to expand the Child Care WAGE\$ salary supplement program statewide.