

TO: Eric C. Davis

FROM: Western Region Education Service Alliance

DATE: February 4, 2020

The member districts of the Western Region Education Service Alliance (WRESA) appreciate the opportunity to express our priorities related to the WestEd Report and the Leandro Case. Our WRESA collaborative consists of eighteen school systems which range in size from our largest system with 44 schools to our smallest systems with 3 schools. We have 4 tier one counties along with 9 tier two counties, and 3 tier three counties in our membership. (Asheville City is included in Buncombe County and Cherokee Central is a federal entity.) The collaborative consists of Asheville City Schools, Buncombe, Cherokee, Cherokee Central, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Swain, Transylvania, and Yancey County Schools. Our responses are categorized by the seven components written in the “Consent Order Regarding Need for Remedial, Systemic Actions for the Achievement of *Leandro* Compliance” pages 4-5.

1. 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 systemic and cooperative effort is required to remove barriers and create incentives for recruitment and retention of highly effective educators.

- Teachers must receive competitive pay in order to attract the best and brightest to the profession. Guaranteed benefits such as retirement plans and health insurance are important considerations when competing with the private sector for quality candidates.
- Along with competitive pay, we believe the full restoration of the NC Teaching Fellows Program is vital. Encouraging young people to locate in rural systems is largely dependent on “grow your own” programs. Assistance with college funding is an attractive offer for many of our students that would like to enter the teaching profession.
- Restoring pay for advanced degrees is an important piece of compensation. Honoring the advancement of life long learning is the heart of education. It addresses the goal of having a high-quality educator in each classroom.
- Restoring funding for professional development can also address the insurance of a high-quality educator in each classroom. When new initiatives and legislative requirements are introduced, stakeholder input, professional development, and time to implement with fidelity are essential for success.
- Additional funding, not reallocated funding, is required to address some of these issues.

2. 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.

Many of the aforementioned ideas related to teachers apply to principals as well.

- The Principals' Preparation Program created by the General Assembly has proven to assist with recruitment and preparation. The WCU NCSELP Program has greatly increased the principal pipeline in Western North Carolina by providing well-prepared administrators.
- A comprehensive compensation schedule for principals must address the responsibilities associated with the position. The base pay must be competitive enough to attract principals to smaller schools and to high-need schools while also factoring in considerations for administrators at larger schools. Oftentimes, smaller schools lack assistant principals which results in the principal assuming all administrative responsibilities.
- Professional development focused on strong leadership practices, culture development, communication, equity practices, and other relevant topics must be provided and funded in order to encourage continued growth.

3. 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.

In order to meet adequate and equitable funding, we emphasize the need for additional state funding and resources, as opposed to reallocated funding.

- Funding flexibility is required to ensure we can meet the specific needs of students due to the uniqueness of each school system.
- Resources required for meeting needs of at-risk students is an annual concern due to limited allocations for this population.
- Explore effective funding practices that other states use such as base and base-plus funding to address the varied students' needs across school systems.

4. An assessment and accountability system that reliably assesses multiple measures of student performance against the *Leandro* standard and provides accountability consistent with the *Leandro* standard.

- Accountability systems should highlight measures of growth and proficiency.
- Incorporate an alternative measure for OCS students instead of using the ACT.
- Schools need to be equipped to support students with an infrastructure that provides necessary scaffolding and resources to help them succeed.
- Social-Emotional / Resiliency measures need to be considered in order to provide the necessary support for students and families.
- Assess students on measures that directly affect their future aspirations and goals.

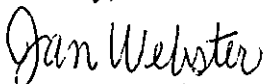
5. An assistance and turnaround function that provides necessary support to low-performing schools and districts

- Encourage the strengthening of collaboratives to address and to provide support for all school systems.
- Encourage the partnering of regional collaboratives with regional NCDPI staff to create regional hubs of support for school systems. This would allow school personnel a centralized location that could provide support and improve communication channels between schools and NCDPI.
- Provide human resources to provide support with literacy, mathematics, social-emotional development, accountability, at-risk students, and other areas as specified by school systems within the region. Many larger systems are able to provide literacy and math coaches, whereas, it is cost prohibitive for smaller systems.

- Regions, as with schools, have unique needs. Addressing these differences can improve equity based upon the premise that equity does not mean equal, but rather meeting the individual needs of students.
- 6. 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.**
- Expand Pre-K so every child can attend. Unfortunately, the achievement gap is created before students enter the public schools. Students enter the public schools at widely different levels. Many students already know the alphabet and basic numbers and have experienced opportunities that increase their foundation for learning. Other students, for various reasons, have not been afforded these opportunities. As with any opportunity, those who start behind have difficulty advancing to the level of their peers without strong support systems at school and at home. Extra efforts and opportunities must be afforded to these students to encourage their needed growth. By expanding the Pre-K program, more students will be afforded an opportunity to begin at the starting line, rather than behind the pack. As the economic gap widens, so does the gap in academic attainment.
 - Allow NCDPI to assume the support and supervisory role of Pre-K programs with the goal of increasing consistency.
- 7. 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 for all students in the state.**
- Allow school systems to have calendar flexibility so that they can align school calendars to community college calendars. Partnerships with community colleges and other schools of higher education are consistently challenged with calendar issues.
 - Remove obstacles to apprenticeships and internships by allowing sixteen-year-old students the option of participating in these programs.
 - Collaborate with businesses and higher education, as with the MyfutureNC initiative, to encourage attainment of certifications and degrees that provide students with beneficial employment opportunities while also meeting the needs of the regional and state workforce.
 - Strengthen regional collaboratives that address partnering opportunities and facilitate networking among the business and school communities to provide apprenticeships and internships for students.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to express our priorities related to the WestEd Report and the Leandro Case. We believe with collaboration, cooperation, and a strategic approach, the future of public school education in North Carolina can be strengthened to provide an exceptional educational opportunity for all students and families.

Sincerely,



Jan Webster EdD

Director

Western Region Education Service Alliance

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