

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

IN THE GENERAL COURT OF JUSTICE
SUPERIOR COURT DIVISION
95-CVS-1158

COUNTY OF WAKE

HOKE COUNTY BOARD OF
EDUCATION; HALIFAX COUNTY BOARD
OF EDUCATION; ROBESON COUNTY
BOARD OF EDUCATION; CUMBERLAND
COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION;
VANCE COUNTY BOARD OF
EDUCATION; RANDY L. HASTY,
individually and as Guardian Ad Litem of
RANDELL B. HASTY; STEVEN R.
SUNKEL, individually and as Guardian Ad
Litem of ANDREW J. SUNKEL; LIONEL
WHIDBEE, individually and as Guardian
Ad Litem of JEREMY L. WHIDBEE;
TYRONE T. WILLIAMS, individually and
as Guardian Ad Litem of TREVELYN L.
WILLIAMS; D.E. LOCKLEAR, JR.,
individually and as Guardian Ad Litem of
JASON E. LOCKLEAR; ANGUS B.
THOMPSON II, individually and as
Guardian Ad Litem of VANDALIAH J.
THOMPSON; MARY ELIZABETH
LOWERY, individually and as Guardian Ad
Litem of LANNIE RAE LOWERY, JENNIE
G. PEARSON, individually and as
Guardian Ad Litem of SHARESE D.
PEARSON; BENITA B. TIPTON,
individually and as Guardian Ad Litem of
WHITNEY B. TIPTON; DANA HOLTON
JENKINS, individually and as Guardian Ad
Litem of RACHEL M. JENKINS; LEON R.
ROBINSON, individually and as Guardian
Ad Litem of JUSTIN A. ROBINSON,

Plaintiffs,
and
CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG BOARD
OF EDUCATION,
Plaintiff-Intervenor,
and
RAFAEL PENN; CLIFTON JONES,
individually and as Guardian Ad Litem
of CLIFTON MATTHEW JONES;
DONNA JENKINS DAWSON,
individually and as Guardian Ad Litem
of NEISHA SHEMAY DAWSON and
TYLER ANTHONY HOUGH-JENKINS,
Plaintiff-Intervenors,
v.
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA and the
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION,
Defendants,
and
CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG BOARD
OF EDUCATION,
Realigned Defendant.

ORDER

Over seventeen years ago, Justice Orr, on behalf of a unanimous Supreme Court, wrote:

The world economy and technological advances of the twenty-first century mandate the necessity that the State step forward, *boldly and decisively*, to see that all children, without regard to their socio-economic circumstances, have an educational opportunity and experience that not only meet the constitutional mandates set forth in *Leandro*, but fulfill the dreams and aspirations of the founders of our

state and nation. Assuring that our children are afforded the chance to become contributing, constructive members of society is paramount. *Whether the State meets this challenge remains to be determined.*

Hoke County Bd. of Educ. v. State, 358 N.C. 605, 649 (2004) (“*Leandro II*”) (emphasis added). As of the date of this Order, the State has not met this challenge and, therefore, has not met its constitutional obligation to the children of North Carolina.

The orders of our Supreme Court are not advisory. This Court can no longer ignore the State’s constitutional violation. To do so would render both the North Carolina State Constitution and the rulings of the Supreme Court meaningless.

This Court, having held a hearing on October 18, 2021 at which it ordered Plaintiffs and Plaintiff-Intervenors to submit proposed order(s) and supporting legal authorities by November 1, 2021 and Defendants State of North Carolina (“State”) and State Board of Education (“State Board,” and collectively with the State, “State Defendants”) to respond by November 8, 2021, finds and concludes as follows¹:

I. Findings of Fact

1. In its unanimous opinion in *Leandro II*, the Supreme Court held, “an inordinate number” of students had failed to obtain a sound basic education and that the State had “failed in [its] constitutional duty to provide such students with the opportunity to obtain a sound basic education.” In light of that holding, the Supreme Court ordered that “the State must act to correct those deficiencies that were deemed by the trial court as contributing to the State’s failure of providing a Leandro-comporting educational opportunity.” *Id.* at 647-48.

2. Since 2004, this Court has given the State Defendants countless opportunities, and unfettered discretion, to develop, present, and implement a *Leandro*-compliant remedial plan. For over eleven (11) years and in over twenty (20) compliance hearings, the State Defendants demonstrated their inability, or unwillingness, to develop, implement, and maintain any kind of substantive structural initiative designed to remedy the established constitutional deficiencies.

3. For more than a decade, the Court annually reviewed the academic performance of every school in the State, teacher and principal population data, and the programmatic resources made available to at-risk students. This Court concluded from over a decade of undisputed evidence that “in way too many school

¹ The findings and conclusions of the Court’s prior Orders—including the January 21, 2020 Consent Order (“January 2020 Order”), September 11, 2020 Consent Order (“September 2020 Order”), June 7, 2021 Order on Comprehensive Remedial Plan (“June 2021 Order”), September 22, 2021 Order (“September 2021 Order”), and October 22, 2021 Order (“October 2021 Order”)—are incorporated herein.

districts across this state, thousands of children in the public schools have failed to obtain and are not now obtaining a sound basic education as defined and required by the *Leandro* decision.” March 17, 2015 Order.

4. At that time, North Carolina was replete with classrooms unstaffed by qualified, certified teachers and schools that were not led by a well-trained principals. Districts across the State continued to lack the resources necessary to ensure that all students, especially those at-risk, have an equal opportunity to receive a *Leandro*-conforming education. In fact, the decade after *Leandro II* made plain that the State’s actions regarding education not only failed to address its *Leandro* obligations, but exacerbated the constitutional harms experienced by another generation of students across North Carolina, who moved from kindergarten to 12th grade since the Supreme Court’s 2004 decision.

5. This Court examined the record again and in 2018 found that “the evidence before this court . . . is wholly inadequate to demonstrate . . . substantial compliance with the constitutional mandate of *Leandro* measured by applicable educational standards.” See March 13, 2018 Order. The State Board did not appeal the ruling. Consequently, the Court ordered the parties to identify an independent, third-party consultant to make detailed comprehensive written recommendations for specific actions necessary to achieve sustained compliance with the constitutional mandates articulated in the holdings of *Leandro v. State*, 346 N.C. 336, 357 (1997) (“*Leandro I*”) and *Leandro II*. The State, along with the Plaintiffs and Penn Intervenors, recommended WestEd to serve in that capacity. The Governor also created the Commission on Access to a Sound Basic Education (the “Commission”) at that time “to gather information and evidence to assist in the development of a comprehensive plan to address compliance with the constitutional mandates.” Governor Roy Cooper Exec. Order No. 27 (Nov. 15, 2017).

6. By Order dated March 13, 2018, the Court appointed WestEd to serve as the Court’s consultant, and all parties agreed that WestEd was qualified to serve in that capacity. See January 2020 Order at 10. In support of its work, WestEd also engaged the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation at North Carolina State University and the Learning Policy Institute (LPI), a national education policy and research organization with extensive experience in North Carolina. WestEd presented its findings and recommendations to the Court in December 2019 in an extensive report entitled, “*Sound Basic Education for All: An Action Plan for North Carolina*,” along with 13 underlying studies (collectively, the “WestEd Report”). The WestEd Report represents an unprecedented body of independent research and analysis of the North Carolina educational system that has further informed the Court’s approach in this case.

7. The WestEd Report concluded, and this Court found, that the State must complete considerable, systematic work to deliver fully the opportunity to obtain a sound basic education to all children in North Carolina. See January 2020 Order at 2-3. The WestEd Report found, for example, that hundreds of thousands of North Carolina

children continue to be denied the opportunity for a sound basic education. Indeed, the State is in many ways further away from constitutional compliance than it was when the Supreme Court issued its *Leandro I* decision almost 20 years ago. (WestEd Report, p. 31). Minimal progress has been made, as evidenced by multiple data sources on two of the primary educational outputs identified in *Leandro*: (i) the proficiency rates of North Carolina’s students, especially at-risk students, in core curriculum areas, and (ii) the preparation of students, especially at-risk students, for success in postsecondary degree and credential programs. (Report, p. 31).

8. Based on the WestEd Report, the Court found that due to the increase in the number of children with higher needs, who require additional supports to meet high standards, the State faces greater challenges than ever before in meeting its constitutional obligations. January 20 Order at 15. For example, North Carolina has 807 high-poverty districts schools and 36 high-poverty charter schools, attended by over 400,000 students (more than a quarter of all North Carolina students). *Id.* The Court also found that state funding for education has not kept pace with the growth and needs of the PreK-12 student body. *Id.* at 17. And promising initiatives since the *Leandro II* decision were neither sustained nor scaled up to make a substantial impact. *Id.*

9. Based on the WestEd Report and the findings and recommendations of the Governor’s Commission, Plaintiffs and Penn Intervenors (collectively, “Plaintiffs”) as well as State Defendants all agreed that “the time has come to take decisive and concrete action . . . to bring North Carolina into constitutional compliance so that all students have access to the opportunity to obtain a sound basic education.” January 2020 Order at 3. The Court agreed and, therefore, ordered State Defendants to work “expeditiously and without delay” to create and fully implement a system of education and educational reforms that will provide the opportunity for a sound basic education to all North Carolina children.

10. The parties submitted a Joint Report to the Court on June 15, 2020 that acknowledged that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated many of the inequities and challenges that are the focus of this case, particularly for students of color, English Language Learners, and economically-disadvantaged students. The Joint Report set forth specific action steps that “the State *can and will* take in Fiscal Year 2021 (2020-21) to begin to address the constitutional deficiencies previously identified by this Court” (the “Year One Plan”). The parties all agreed that the actions specified in the Year One Plan were necessary and appropriate to remedy the constitutional deficiencies in North Carolina public schools.

11. On September 11, 2020, the Court ordered State Defendants to implement the actions identified in the Year One Plan. September 2020 Order, Appendix A. The Court further ordered State Defendants, in consultation with Plaintiff parties, to develop and present a Comprehensive Remedial Plan to be fully implemented by the end of 2028 with the objective of fully satisfying State Defendants’ *Leandro* obligations by the end of 2030. Lastly, to assist the Court in entering this order and to promote transparency, the Court

ordered State Defendants to submit quarterly status reports of progress made toward achieving each of the actions identified in the Year One Plan.

12. State Defendants submitted their First Status Report on December 15, 2020. The Court was encouraged to see that some of the initial action items were successfully implemented, however there were several shortcomings noted and the State Defendants admitted that they had failed to implement the Year One Plan as ordered. For example, House Bill 1096 (SL 2020-56), which was enacted by the General Assembly and signed into law by the Governor on June 30, 2020, implemented the identified action of expanding the number of eligible teacher preparation programs for the NC Teaching Fellows Program from 5 to 8. Increased funding to support additional Teaching Fellows for the 2021-22 academic year, however, was not provided. Similarly, Senate Bill 681 (SL 2020-78) was enacted by the General Assembly and signed into law by the Governor on July 1, 2020 to create a permanent Advanced Teaching Roles program that would provide grants and policy flexibility to districts seeking to implement a differentiated staffing model. Senate Bill 681, however, did not provide any new funding to provide additional grants to school districts, as required by the Year One Plan.²

13. The State Defendants submitted their Comprehensive Remedial Plan on March 15, 2021. As represented by State Defendants, the Comprehensive Remedial Plan identifies the programs, policies, and resources that “are necessary and appropriate actions that must be implemented to address the continuing constitutional violations and to provide the opportunity for a sound basic education to all children in North Carolina.” Specifically, in *Leandro II*, the Supreme Court unanimously affirmed the trial court’s finding that the State had not provided, and was not providing, competent certified teachers, well-trained competent principals, and the resources necessary to afford all children, including those at-risk, an equal opportunity to obtain a sound basic education, and that State Defendants were responsible for these constitutional violations. *See* January, 2020 Order at 8; 358 N.C. at 647-48, 599 S.E.2d at 396. Further, the trial court found, and the Supreme Court unanimously affirmed, that at-risk children require more resources, time, and focused attention in order to receive a sound basic education. *Id.*; *Leandro II*, 358 N.C. 641, 599 S.E.2d at 392. Regarding early childhood education, the Supreme Court affirmed the trial court’s findings that the “State was providing inadequate resources” to “‘at-risk’ prospective enrollees” (“pre-k” children), “that the State’s failings were contributing to the ‘at-risk’ prospective enrollees’ subsequent failure to avail themselves of the opportunity to obtain a sound basic education,” and that “State efforts towards providing remedial aid to ‘at-risk’ prospective enrollees were inadequate.” *Id.* at 69, *Leandro II*. 358 N.C., 641-42, 599 S.E.2d at 392-33. Consequently, the Comprehensive Remedial Plan addresses each of the

² The First Status Report also detailed the federal CARES Act funds that the Governor, the State Board, and the General Assembly directed to begin implementation of certain Year One Plan actions. The Court notes, however, that the CARES Act funding and subsequent federal COVID-related funding is nonrecurring and cannot be relied upon to sustain ongoing programs that are necessary to fulfill the State’s constitutional obligation to provide a sound basic education to all North Carolina children.

“*Leandro* tenants” by setting forth specific actions to be implemented over the next eight years to achieve the following:

- 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 assesses 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; and
- 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 the State.

January, 2020 Order at 4-5.

14. The Appendix to the Comprehensive Remedial Plan identifies the resources necessary, as determined by the State, to implement the specific action steps to provide the opportunity for a sound basic education. This Court has previously observed “that money matters provided the money is spent in a way that is logical and the results of the expenditures measured to see if the expected goals are achieved.” Memorandum of Decision, Section One, p. 116. The Court finds that the State Defendants’ Comprehensive Remedial Plan sets forth specific, comprehensive, research-based and logical actions, including creating an assessment and accountability system to measure the expected goals.

15. WestEd advised the parties and the Court that the recommendations contained in its Report are not a “menu” of options, but a comprehensive set of fiscal, programmatic, and strategic steps necessary to achieve the outcomes for students required by our State Constitution. WestEd has reviewed the Comprehensive Remedial Plan and has advised the Court that the actions set forth in the Plan are necessary and appropriate for implementing the recommendations contained in WestEd Report. The Court concurs with WestEd’s opinion and also independently reaches this conclusion based on the entire record in this case.

16. The Supreme Court held in 1997 that if this Court finds “from competent evidence” that the State is “denying children of the state a sound basic education, a denial of a fundamental right will have been established.” *Leandro I*, 346 N.C. at 357. This Court’s finding was upheld in *Leandro II* and has been restated in this Court’s Orders in 2015 and 2018. It is, therefore, “incumbent upon [the State] to establish that their actions denying this fundamental right are ‘necessary to promote a compelling government interest.’” *Id.* The State has not done so.

17. To the contrary, the State has repeatedly acknowledged to the Court that additional State actions are required to remedy the ongoing denial of this fundamental right. *See, e.g.*, State’s March 15, 2021 Submission to Court at 1 (State acknowledging that “this constitutional right has been and continues to be denied to many North Carolina children”); *id.* (“North Carolina’s PreK-12 education system leaves too many students behind, especially students of color and economically disadvantaged students.”); *id.* (“[T]housands of students are not being prepared for full participation in the global, interconnected economy and the society in which they will live, work, and engage as citizens.”); State’s *August 16, 2021* Submission to Court at 1 (acknowledging that additional State actions are required to remedy the denial of the constitutional right). *See also, e.g.*, January 2020 Order at 15 (noting State’s acknowledgment that it has failed to meet its “constitutional duty to provide all North Carolina students with the opportunity to obtain a sound basic education.”); *id.* (“[T]he Parties do not dispute [] that many children across North Carolina, especially at-risk and economically-disadvantaged students, are not now receiving a *Leandro*-conforming education.”); *id.* at 17 (State has “yet to achieve the promise of our Constitution and provide all with the opportunity for a sound basic education”); June 2021 Order at 6 (“State Defendants have acknowledged that additional State actions are required to remedy the denial of this fundamental right.”).

18. After seventeen years, State Defendants presented to the Court a Comprehensive Remedial Plan outlining those additional State actions necessary to comply with the mandates of the State Constitution.

19. The Comprehensive Remedial Plan sets out the “nuts and bolts” for how the State will remedy its continuing constitutional failings to North Carolina’s children. It sets out (1) the specific actions identified by the State that must be implemented to remedy the continuing constitutional violations, (2) the timeline

developed by the State required for successful implementation, and (3) the necessary resources and funding, as determined by the State, for implementation.

20. The Comprehensive Remedial Plan is the *only* remedial plan that the State Defendants have presented to the Court in response its January 2020, September 2020, and June 2021 Orders. The State Defendants have presented no alternative remedial plan.

21. With regard to the Comprehensive Remedial Plan, the State has represented to this Court that the actions outlined in the Plan are the “necessary and appropriate actions that must be implemented to address the continuing constitutional violations.” *See* State’s March 2021 Submission at 3, 4 (emphasis added). The State further represented to the Court that the full implementation of each year of the Remedial Plan was required to “provide the opportunity for a sound basic education to all children in North Carolina.” *Id.* at 3. The State assured the Court that it was “committed” to fully implementing its Comprehensive Remedial Plan and within the time frames set forth therein. *Id.*

22. The State has represented to the Court that more than sufficient funds are available to execute the current needs of the Comprehensive Remedial Plan. *See, e.g.,* State’s August 6, 2021 Report to Court. The State of North Carolina concedes in its August progress report to the Court that the State’s reserve balance included \$8 billion and more than **\$5 billion** in forecasted revenues at that time that exceed the existing base budget. Yet, the State has not provided the necessary funding to execute the Comprehensive Remedial Plan.

23. The Court understands that those items required by the Year One Plan that were not implemented as ordered in the September 2020 Order have been included in, or “rolled over” to, the Comprehensive Remedial Plan. The Court notes that the WestEd Report contemplated that its recommendations would be implemented gradually over eight years, with later implementation building upon actions to be taken in the short term. Failure to implement all of the actions in the Year One Plan will necessarily make it more difficult for State Defendants to implement all the actions described in the Comprehensive Remedial Plan in a timely manner. The urgency of implementing the Comprehensive Remedial Plan on the timeline currently set forth by State Defendants cannot be overstated. As this Court previously found:

[T]housands of students are not being prepared for full participation in the global, interconnected economy and the society in which they live, work and engage as citizens. The costs to those students, individually, and to the State are considerable and if left unattended will result in a North Carolina that does not meet its vast potential.

January 2020 Order.

24. Despite the urgency, State Defendants have failed to implement most actions in the Comprehensive Remedial Plan and have failed to secure the resources to fully implement the Comprehensive Remedial Plan.

25. The Comprehensive Remedial Plan would provide critical supports for at-risk students, such as:

- comprehensive induction services for beginning teachers in low performing, high poverty schools;
- costs of National Board certification for educators in high need, low-performing schools;
- critical supports for children with disabilities that could result from increasing supplemental funding to more adequate levels and removing the funding cap;
- ensuring greater access to key programs for at-risk students by combining the DSSF and at-risk allotments for all economically disadvantaged students; and
- assisting English learner students by eliminating the funding cap, simplifying the formula and increasing funding to more adequate levels.

26. As of the date of this Order, therefore, the State's implementation of the Comprehensive Remedial Plan is already behind the contemplated timeline, and the State has failed yet another class of students. Time is of the essence.

27. The Court has granted "every reasonable deference" to the legislative and executive branches to "establish" and "administer a system that provides the children of the various school districts of the state a sound basic education," 346 N.C. at 357, including, most recently, deferring to State Defendants' leadership in the collaborative development of the Comprehensive Remedial Plan over the past three years.

28. Indeed, in the seventeen years since the *Leandro II* decision, this Court has afforded the State (through its executive and legislative branches) discretion to develop its chosen *Leandro* remedial plan. The Court went to extraordinary lengths in granting these co-equal branches of government time, deference, and opportunity to use their informed judgment as to the "nuts and bolts" of the remedy, including the identification of the specific remedial actions that required implementation, the time frame for such implementation, the resources necessary for the implementation, and the manner in which to obtain those resources.

29. On June 7, 2021, this Court issued an Order cautioning: “If the State fails to implement the actions described in the Comprehensive Remedial Plan—actions which it admits are necessary and which, over the next biennium, the Governor’s proposed budget and Senate Bill 622 confirm are attainable—it will then be the duty of this Court to enter a judgment granting declaratory relief and such other relief as needed to correct the wrong.” June 2021 Order (quoting *Leandro I*, 346 N.C. at 357).

30. The 2021 North Carolina legislative session began on January 13, 2021 and, as of the date of this Order, no budget has passed despite significant unspent funds and known constitutional violations.

31. The failure of the State to provide the funding necessary to effectuate North Carolina’s constitutional right to a sound basic education is consistent with the antagonism demonstrated by legislative leaders towards these proceedings, the constitutional rights of North Carolina children, and this Court’s authority.

32. This Court has provided the State with ample time and every opportunity to make meaningful progress towards remedying the ongoing constitutional violations that persist within our public education system. The State has willfully failed to act to fulfill its constitutional obligations.

33. In the seventeen years since the *Leandro II* decision, a new generation of school children, especially those at-risk and socio-economically disadvantaged, were denied their constitutional right to a sound basic education. Further and continued damage is happening now, especially to at-risk children from impoverished backgrounds, and that cannot continue. As Justice Orr stated, on behalf of a unanimous Supreme Court, “the children of North Carolina are our state’s most valuable renewable resource.” *Leandro II*, 358 N.C. at 616. “If inordinate numbers of them are wrongfully being denied their constitutional right to the opportunity for a sound basic education, our state courts cannot risk further and continued damage. . . .” *Id.* (emphasis added).

II. Conclusions of Law

1. The people of North Carolina have a constitutional right to an opportunity to a sound basic education. It is the duty of the State to guard and maintain that right. N.C. Const. art. 1, sec. 15 (“The people have a right to the privilege of education, and it is the duty of the State to guard and maintain that right.”); *id.* art. IX, sec. 2(1) (“The General Assembly shall provide by taxation and otherwise for a general and uniform system of free public schools, which shall be

maintained at least nine months in every year, and wherein equal opportunities shall be provided for all students.”); *Leandro v. State*, 346 N.C. 336, 345 (1997) (holding that the Constitution guarantees the “right to a sound basic education”).

2. The “State” consists of each branch of our tripartite government, each with a distinctive purpose. *State v. Berger*, 368 N.C. 633, 635 (2016) (citations and internal quotation marks omitted) (“The General Assembly, which comprises the legislative branch, enacts laws that protect or promote the health, morals, order, safety, and general welfare of society. The executive branch, which the Governor leads, faithfully executes, or gives effect to, these laws. The judicial branch interprets the laws and, through its power of judicial review, determines whether they comply with the constitution.”). Here the judicial branch, by constitutional necessity, exercises its inherent power to ensure remedies for constitutional wrongs and compels action by the two other components of the “State”—the legislative and executive branches of government. *See Leandro II*, 358 N.C. at 635, 599 S.E.2d at 389 (“[B]y the State we mean the legislative and executive branches which are constitutionally responsible for public education . . .”).

3. The Court concludes that the State continues to fail to meet the minimum standards for effectuating the constitutional rights set forth in article I, section 15 and article IX, section 2 of our State constitution and recognized by our Supreme Court in *Leandro I* and *II*. The constitutional violations identified in *Leandro I* and *II* are ongoing and persist to this day.

4. The General Assembly has a duty to guard and maintain the right to sound basic education secured by our state constitution. *See* N.C. Const. art. 1, sec. 15. As the arm of the State responsible for legislation, taxation, and appropriation, the General Assembly’s principal duty involves adequately funding the minimum requirements for a sound basic education. While the General Assembly could also choose to enact new legislation to support a sound basic education, the General Assembly has opted to largely ignore this litigation.

5. Thus, the General Assembly, despite having a duty to participate in guarding and maintaining the right to an opportunity for a sound basic education, has failed to fulfill that duty. This failure by one branch of our tripartite government has contributed to the overall failure of the State to meet the minimum standards for effectuating the fundamental constitutional rights at issue.

6. “[W]hen inaction by those exercising legislative authority threatens fiscally to undermine” the constitutional right to a sound basic education “a court may invoke its inherent power to do what is reasonably necessary for the orderly and

efficient exercise of the administration of justice.” See *In re Alamance County Court Facilities*, 329 N.C. 84, 99 (1991) (citation and internal quotation marks omitted).

7. Indeed, in *Leandro II* a unanimous Supreme Court held that “[c]ertainly, when the State fails to live up to its constitutional duties, a court is empowered to order the deficiency remedied, and if the offending branch of government or its agents either fail to do so or have consistently shown an inability to do so, a court is empowered to provide relief by imposing a specific remedy and instructing the recalcitrant state actors to implement it.” 358 N.C. at 642.

8. Article I, section 18 of the North Carolina Constitution’s Declaration of Rights—which has its origins in the Magna Carta—states that “every person for an injury done him in his lands, goods, person, or reputation shall have remedy by due course of law; and right and justice shall be administered without favor, denial, or delay.” N.C. Const. art. I, § 18; see *Lynch v. N.C. Dept. of Justice*, 93 N.C. App. 57, 61 (1989) (explaining that article I, section 18 “guarantees a remedy for legally cognizable claims”); cf. *Craig ex rel. Craig v. New Hanover Cty. Bd. of Educ.*, 363 N.C. 334, 342 (2009) (noting the Supreme Court of North Carolina’s “long-standing emphasis on ensuring redress for every constitutional injury”).

9. Article I, section 18 of the North Carolina Constitution recognizes the core judicial function to ensure that right and justice—including the constitutional right to the opportunity to a sound basic education—are not delayed or denied.

10. Because the State has failed for more than seventeen years to remedy the constitutional violation as the Supreme Court ordered, this Court must provide a remedy through the exercise of its constitutional role. Otherwise, the State’s willful failure to meet the minimum standards for effectuating the constitutional right to obtain a sound basic education will threaten the integrity and viability of the North Carolina Constitution by:

- a. nullifying the Constitution’s language without the people’s consent, making the right to a sound basic education merely aspirational and not enforceable;
- b. ignoring rulings of the Supreme Court of North Carolina setting forth authoritative and binding interpretations of our Constitution; and
- c. violating separation of powers by preventing the judiciary from performing its core duty of interpreting our Constitution. *State v.*

Berger, 368 N.C. 633, 638 (2016) (“This Court construes and applies the provisions of the Constitution of North Carolina with finality.”).

11. If its leadership speaks for the entire legislative body, as recounted above, it appears that the General Assembly believes the Appropriations Clause, N.C. Const. art. V, section 7, prevents any court-ordered remedy to obtain the minimum amount of State funds necessary to ensure the constitutionally-required opportunity to obtain a sound basic education.

12. Our Supreme Court has recognized that the appropriations clause ensures “that the people, through their elected representatives in the General Assembly, ha[ve] full and exclusive control over the allocation of the state’s expenditures.” *Cooper v. Berger*, 376 N.C. 22, 37 (2020).

13. If the General Assembly’s willful failure to meet the minimum standards for effectuating the constitutional right to obtain a sound basic education goes unchecked, then this matter would merely be a political question not subject to judicial enforcement. Such a contention has been previously considered—and rejected—by our Supreme Court. *Leandro I*, 346 N.C. at 345. Accordingly, it is the Court’s constitutional duty to ensure that the ongoing constitutional violation in this case is remedied. N.C. Const. art. I, § 18.

14. Indeed, the State Budget Act itself recognizes that it should not be construed in a manner to “abrogate[] or diminish[] the inherent power” of any branch of government. N.C. Gen. Stat. § 143C-1-1(b). The inherent power of the judicial branch to ensure and effectuate constitutional rights cannot be disputed. *Cf. Ex parte McCown*, 139 N.C. 95, 51 S.E. 957, 959 (1905) (“[L]aws without a competent authority to secure their administration from disobedience and contempt would be vain and nugatory.”).

15. “It is axiomatic that the terms or requirements of a constitution cannot be in violation of the same constitution—a constitution cannot violate itself.” *Leandro I*, 346 N.C. at 352; accord *Stephenson v. Bartlett*, 355 N.C. 354, 397 (2002). As a result, the appropriations clause cannot be read to override the people’s right to a sound basic education.

16. This Court cannot permit the State to continue failing to effectuate the right to a sound basic education guaranteed to the people of North Carolina, nor can it indefinitely wait for the State to act. Seventeen years have passed since *Leandro II* and, in that time, more than an entire generation of children have been denied a fundamental constitutional right. Years have elapsed since this Court’s first

remedial order. And nearly a year has elapsed since the adoption of the Comprehensive Remedial Plan. This has more than satisfied our Supreme Court's direction to provide "every reasonable deference to the legislative and executive branches," *Leandro I*, 346 N.C. at 357, and allow "unimpeded chance, 'initially at least,' to correct constitutional deficiencies revealed at trial," *Leandro II*, 358 N.C. at 638 (citation omitted).

17. To allow the State to indefinitely delay funding for a *Leandro* remedy when adequate revenues exist would effectively deny the existence of a constitutional right to a sound basic education and effectively render the Constitution and the Supreme Court's *Leandro* decisions meaningless. The North Carolina Constitution, however, guarantees that right and empowers this Court to ensure its enforcement. The legislative and executive branches of the State, as creations of that Constitution, are subject to its mandates.

18. Accordingly, this Court recognizes, as a matter of constitutional law, a continuing appropriation from the State Treasury to effectuate the people's right to a sound basic education. The North Carolina Constitution repeatedly makes school funding a matter of constitutional—not merely statutory—law. Our Constitution not only recognizes the fundamental right to the privilege of education in the Declaration of Rights, but also devotes an entire article to the State's education system. Despite the General Assembly's general authority over appropriations of State funds, article IX specifically directs that proceeds of State swamp land sales; grants, gifts, and devises made to the State; and penalties, fines, and forfeitures collected by the State shall be used for maintaining public education. N.C. Const. art. IX, §§ 6, 7. Multiple provisions of article IX also expressly require the General Assembly to adequately fund a sound basic education. *See* N.C. Const. art. IX, §§ 2, 6, 7. When the General Assembly fulfills its constitutional role through the normal (statutory) budget process, there is no need for judicial intervention to effectuate the constitutional right. As the foregoing findings of fact make plain, however, this Court must fulfill its constitutional duty to effect a remedy at this time.

19. The right to a sound basic education is one of a very few affirmative constitutional rights that, to be realized, requires the State to supply adequate funding. The State's duty to carry out its obligation of ensuring this right has been described by the Supreme Court as both "paramount" (*Leandro II*, 358 N.C. at 649,, 599 S.E.2d at 397) and "sacred." *Mebane Graded Sch. Dist. v. Alamance Cty.*, 211 N.C. 213, 189 S.E. 873, 880 (1937). Presently, the State's ability to meet this constitutional obligation is not in question. The unappropriated funds in the State Treasury greatly exceed the funds needed to implement the Comprehensive

Remedial Plan. Consequently, there is no need to make impossible choices among competing constitutional priorities.

20. The Court further concludes that in addition to the aforementioned constitutional appropriation power and mandate, the Court has inherent and equitable powers that allow it to enter this Order. The North Carolina Constitution provides, “All courts shall be open; every person for an injury done him in his lands, goods, person, or reputation *shall have remedy by due course of law*; and right and justice shall be administered without favor, denial, or delay.” N.C. CONST. art. I, § 18 (emphasis added). The North Carolina Supreme Court has declared that “[o]bedience to the Constitution on the part of the Legislature is no more necessary to orderly government than the exercise of the power of the Court in requiring it when the Legislature inadvertently exceeds its limitations.” *State v. Harris*, 216 N.C. 746, 764, 6 S.E.2d 854, 866 (1940). Further, “the courts have power to fashion an appropriate remedy ‘depending upon the right violated and the facts of the particular case.’” *Simeon v. Hardin*, 339 N.C. 358, 373, 451 S.E.2d 858, 869 (1994) (quoting *Corum v. Univ. of N.C.*, 330 N.C. 761, 784, 413 S.E.2d 276, 291, *cert. denied*, 506 U.S. 985 (1992)).

21. As noted above, the Court’s inherent powers are derived from being one of three separate, coordinate branches of the government. *Ex Parte McCown*, 139 N.C. 95, 105-06, 51 S.E. 957, 961 (1905) (citing N.C. Const. art. I, § 4). The constitution expressly restricts the General Assembly’s intrusion into judicial powers. *See* N.C. Const. art. IV, § 1 (“The General Assembly shall have no power to deprive the judicial department of any power or jurisdiction that rightfully pertains to it as a co-ordinate department of the government...”); *see also Beard v. N. Carolina State Bar*, 320 N.C. 126, 129, 357 S.E.2d 694, 695 (1987) (“The inherent power of the Court has not been limited by our constitution; to the contrary, the constitution protects such power.”). These inherent powers give courts their “authority to do all things that are reasonably necessary for the proper administration of justice.” *State v. Buckner*, 351 N.C. 401, 411, 527 S.E.2d 307, 313 (2000); *Beard*, 320 N.C. 126, 129; 357 S.E.2d at 696.

22. In fact, it is the separation of powers doctrine itself which undergirds the judicial branch’s authority to enforce its order here. “Inherent powers are critical to the court’s autonomy and to its functional existence: ‘If the courts could be deprived by the Legislature of these powers, which are essential in the direct administration of justice, they would be destroyed for all efficient and useful purposes.’” *Matter of Alamance Cty. Ct. Facilities*, 329 N.C. 84, 93–94, 405 S.E.2d 125, 129 (1991) (“*Alamance*”) (citing *Ex Parte Schenck*, 65 N.C. 353, 355 (1871)). The Supreme Court’s analysis of the doctrine in *Alamance* is instructive:

An overlap of powers constitutes a check and preserves the tripartite balance, as two hundred years of constitutional commentary note. “Unless these [three branches of government] be so far connected and blended as to give to each a constitutional control over the others, the degree of separation which the maxim requires, as essential to a free government, can never in practice be duly maintained.”

Id. at 97, 405 S.E.2d at 131 (quoting *The Federalist* No. 48, at 308 (J. Madison) (Arlington House ed. 1966)).

23. The Supreme Court has recognized that courts should ensure when considering remedies that may encroach upon the powers of the other branches, alternative remedies should be explored as well as minimizing the encroachment to the extent possible. *Alamance*, 329 N.C. at 100-01, 405 S.E.2d at 133. The relief proposed here carefully balances these interests with the Court’s constitutional obligation of affording relief to injured parties. First, there is no alternative or adequate remedy available to the children of North Carolina that affords them the relief to which they are so entitled. State Defendants have conceded that the Comprehensive Remedial Plan’s full implementation is necessary to provide a sound basic education to students and there is nothing else on the table. *See, e.g.*, March 2021 Order.

24. Second, this Court will have minimized its encroachment on legislative authority through the least intrusive remedy. Evidence of the Court’s deference over seventeen years and its careful balancing of the interests at stake includes but is not limited to:

- a. The Court has given the State seventeen years to arrive at a proper remedy and numerous opportunities proposed by the State have failed to live up to their promise. Seventeen classes of students have since gone through schooling without a sound basic education;
- b. The Court deferred to State Defendants and the other parties to recommend to the Court an independent, outside consultant to provide comprehensive, specific recommendations to remedy the existing constitutional violations;
- c. The Court deferred to State Defendants and the other parties to recommend a remedial plan and the proposed duration of the plan, including recommendations from the Governor’s Commission on Access to Sound Basic Education;
- d. The Court deferred to State Defendants to propose an action plan and remedy for the first year and then allowed the State Defendants

additional latitude in implementing its actions in light of the pandemic's effect on education;

- e. The Court deferred to State Defendants to propose the long-term comprehensive remedial plan, and to determine the resources necessary for full implementation. (*See* March 2021 Order);
- f. The Court also gave State discretion to seek and secure the resources they identified to fully implement the Comprehensive Remedial Plan. (*See* June 2021 Order);
- g. The Court has further allowed for extended deliberations between the executive and legislative branches over several months to give the State an additional opportunity to implement the Comprehensive Remedial Plan;
- h. The status conferences, including more recent ones held in September and October 2021, have provided the State with additional notice and opportunities to implement the Comprehensive Remedial Plan, to no avail. The Court has further put State on notice of forthcoming consequences if it continued to violate students' fundamental rights to a sound basic education.

The Court acknowledges and does not take lightly the important role of the separation of powers. In light of the foregoing, and having reviewed and considered all arguments and submissions of Counsel for all parties and all of this Court's prior orders, the findings and conclusions of which are incorporated herein, it is hereby **ORDERED** that:

1. The Office of State Budget and Management and the current State Budget Director ("OSBM"), the Office of the State Controller and the current State Comptroller ("Controller"), and the Office of the State Treasurer and the current State Treasurer ("Treasurer") shall take the necessary actions to transfer the total amount of funds necessary to effectuate years 2 & 3 of the Comprehensive Remedial Plan, from the unappropriated balance within the General Fund to the state agents and state actors with fiscal responsibility for implementing the Comprehensive Remedial Plan as follows:

- (a) Department of Health and Human Services ("DHHS"): \$189,800,000.⁰⁰;
- (b) Department of Public Instruction ("DPI"): \$1,522,053,000.⁰⁰; and
- (c) University of North Carolina System: \$41,300,000.⁰⁰.

2. OSBM, the Controller, and the Treasurer, are directed to treat the foregoing funds as an appropriation from the General Fund as contemplated within N.C. Gen. Stat. § 143C-6-4(b)(2)(a) and to carry out all actions necessary to effectuate those transfers;

3. Any consultation contemplated by N.C. Gen. Stat. § 143C-6-4(b1) shall take no longer than five (5) business days after issuance of this Order;

4. DHHS, DPI, the University of North Carolina System, and any other State agent or State actor receiving funds under the Comprehensive Remedial Plan are directed to invest those funds in achieving the opportunity of a sound basic education consistent with, and under the time frames set out in, the Comprehensive Remedial Plan, including the Appendix thereto;

5. OSBM, the Controller, and the Treasurer are directed to take all actions necessary to facilitate and authorize those expenditures;

6. To the extent any other actions are necessary to effectuate the year 2 & 3 actions in the Comprehensive Remedial Plan, any and all other State actors and their officers, agents, servants, and employees are authorized and directed to do what is necessary to fully effectuate years 2 and 3 of the Comprehensive Remedial Plan;

7. To the extent the minimum funding levels required to effectuate the Comprehensive Remedial Plan have been overestimated such that the funds transferred by this Order remain available, OSBM, the Controller, and the Treasurer are directed to ensure such funds return to the unappropriated balance of the General Fund; and

8. This Order, except the consultation period set forth in paragraph 3, is hereby stayed for a period of thirty (30) days to preserve the *status quo*, including maintaining the funds outlined in Paragraph 1 (a)-(c) above in the State Treasury, to permit the other branches of government to take further action consistent with the findings and conclusions of this Order and /or to permit any Party to seek appellate review of its terms.

This Order may not be modified except by further Order of this Court upon proper motion presented. The Court shall retain jurisdiction over this matter.

This the ___ day of _____, 2021.

The Honorable W. David Lee
North Carolina Superior Court Judge