CIRRUS ACADEMY
CHARTER SCHOOL

EDCI REVIEW

PREPARED BY
Dr. Tony Lamair Burks II
with assistance from
Dr. Rodney L. Boone
Kelly R. Nance
Anthony D. Nelson

LEAD*right*

50 Sunset Avenue NW #92383
Atlanta, Georgia 30314
619-796-6463

www.LEADrightToday.com
lead@LEADrightToday.com

CIRRUS ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL
EDCI Review and Report

THE CONTENTS

THE TEAM

DR. TONY LAMAIR BURKS II heads LEADright as its Chief Learning Officer. He is an award-winning education expert who helps individuals and organizations as a thought partner and coach. A Fulbrighter and fellow of the British-American Project, he was recognized by NU·tribe Magazine as one of Six HBCU Grads You Should Know. He was honored with the Phaedra Parks S.O.S. Save Our Sons Award for Empowerment and Service. He is the founding principal-director of North Carolina's first early college high school, The Early College at Guilford. He was the Superintendent-in-Residence with the National Center for Urban School Transformation from 2011 to 2015. While in San Diego he had responsibilities for California's second largest portfolio of charter schools. He founded LEADright in 2006 where he coaches and trains leaders for excellence. For more about Dr. Burks, go to www.leadrighttoday.com/about-dr-burks

LEADright capitalizes on the skills of a cadre of Senior Associates to provide differentiated services through strategic partnerships. LEADright's Chief Learning Officer and team of Senior Associates bring decades of valuable experience facilitating adult learning from Cultural Courageous Leadership and executive coaching to mathematics instruction and marketing and communications. For more about our Senior Associates, go to www.leadrighttoday.com/our-team

CIRRUS ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL
EDCI Review and Report

THE REVIEW

Purpose
A periodic Review is critical to the development of high-quality schools and districts. A systematic review of practices, processes, and systems assists school and district leadership in determining needs, examining their nature and causes, and setting priorities for future action. The Review consequently guides the development of a meaningful improvement plan and suggests targets and action items to guide improvement and evaluation.

The careful analysis of data and information in making better decisions about what to change coupled with how to institutionalize systemic change are supported by a strong body of research. This Review offers a framework for conducting such a process. The Review is designed to support continual improvement efforts by providing schools and districts with a clear view of areas of strength, areas for growth, what is working, and what is not working.

LEADright's conception of the Review embraces key elements of Appreciative Inquiry. Appreciative Inquiry is a strengths-based, positive approach to leadership development and organizational change. LEADright supports leaders and members of the community with discovering, dreaming, designing, and deploying:

> In the Discovery phase, LEADright looks for promising and best practices in action. The team listens for stories of excellence, innovation, and peak performance noting the common factors in these stories.

> Next, in the Dream phase, LEADright helps leaders and members of the community with envisioning their desired future. They ask themselves, "How would leaders, learners, resources, behaviors, the physical space, organizational processes, and more need to change?" This phase is about creating a shared vision for excellence, innovation, and peak performance.

> Next, in the Design phase, LEADright helps leaders and members of the community with determining which approaches and strategies will lead the organization creatively and decisively in the right direction and yield the best, most sustainable results.

> Finally, in the Deploy phase, LEADright helps leaders and members of the community with putting approaches and strategies in action to make the vision a reality.

CIRRUS ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL
EDCI Review and Report

Processes and Tools
The Chief Learning Officer identified several processes and tools for use throughout the site visits:

> **Environmental Scans:** This process provides an objective review of the current and anticipated environmental factors that impact a school or district. It involves walking throughout the physical plant noticing the environment from the perspectives of scholars and adults, internal community and external community.

> **Instructional Leader Calibration Walkthrough Observation:** The aim of this process is to calibrate and develop a common understanding of instructional excellence and to hone coaching skills. The Chief Learning Officer and Senior Associates conducted this walkthrough with members of the CACS leadership team.

> **Student Observations and Engagement**: The Chief Learning Officer and Senior Associates observed the level of scholar engagement in lessons. They also talked with scholars around the school to assess their understanding and knowledge of various aspects of study, their attitudes towards their schoolwork, and their general feelings about how well the school helps them achieve.

> **LEADright Instructional Observation on Effective Instructional Practices:** The purpose of this process is to identify which effective instructional practices are evident in classrooms. These short visits were about five minutes each. The effective instructional practices are those found in America's top performing schools.

> **Observations of meetings and professional learning sessions**: The Chief Learning Officer attended meetings with the faculty, staff, and administrators. In some cases, just-in-time coaching feedback was shared.

> **Governing Board Self-Assessment:** The Chief Learning Officer requested that board members complete a self-assessment about the elements of effective boards and progress on the board's Core Responsibilities. The self-assessment asked board members to choose those areas of potential board focus that are most needed over the next two to three years to ensure that the school succeeds.

School Context
Before the first visit and after each subsequent visit, the LEADright team spent time learning about CACS to understand the context of the school. Its mission is to develop and implement a comprehensive educational program that prepares students to meet and exceed world class standards, and prepare them to compete in the global market.

www.LEADrightToday.com

Its vision is for scholars to be well rounded, civic-minded individuals who graduate with a firm foundation of knowledge and skills in STEAM that enables them to build and sustain quality lives, contribute to the economic vitality of the United States of America, and to be globally competitive in the worldwide marketplace.

According to its website:

> *"Cirrus Academy Charter School cultivates the academic and artistic talents of our students through an integrated, hands-on curriculum based on Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math (STEAM). Our goal is to ensure all students have access to the tools and knowledge they need in order to exceed world-class standards. As a charter school we have our own board of directors and are not governed by the county school board, giving us the autonomy and flexibility to make decisions based on our students' needs."*

CACS exists in a caring family-oriented community of adults. The deep, abiding love the adults have for each other and each scholar is evident. Leaders from the Chief Officers and the Assistant Principal to the Academic Deans are passionate and committed to building and sustaining CACS as a learning organization where adults hone their craft and work collaboratively to improve the educational outcomes of students. Teachers and staff are determined to give their best to meet the wide-ranging academic, social, and emotional needs of the scholars they serve. The parents send their very best "gifts" to CACS each day and they entrust the CACS team with the important work of teaching and learning. The CACS curriculum is based on Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math for scholars grades kindergarten through eight.

CIRRUS ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL

EDCI Review and Report

THE DATA AND RECOMMENDATIONS

LEADright Instructional Observation Walkthrough Snapshot: The LEADright team and the CACS Leadership team completed 83 observations using the Evident/Not Evident Observation tool:

EFFECTIVE PRACTICES	**EVIDENT** *(I see or notice)* **% then #**	**NOT EVIDENT** *(I don't see or notice)* **% then #**
Essential question, lesson target, or learning objective POSTED	**69.88%** **58**	*30.12%* *25*
Essential question, lesson target, or learning objective in STUDENT- FRIENDLY language	**55.42%** **46**	*44.58%* *37*
HANDS-ON learning by students	*28.92%* *24*	**71.08%** **59**
MINDS-ON learning by students	*49.40%* *41*	**50.60%** **42**
Students MAKING MEANING of learning	**51.81%** **43**	*48.19%* *40*
WHOLE GROUP learning by students	**55.42%** **46**	*44.58%* *37*
COOPERATIVE learning by students	*19.28%* *16*	**80.72%** **67**
INDIVIDUAL learning by students	**59.04%** **49**	*40.96%* *34*
Students SELF-ASSESSING their progress	*32.53%* *27*	**67.47%** **56**
Students EXPLAINING lesson target or learning objective	**54.22%** **45**	*45.78%* *38*
Teacher CUSTOMIZING (or differentiating) learning for gifted and talented students	*10.84%* *9*	**89.16%** **74**
Teacher CUSTOMIZING (or differentiating) learning for special education students	*8.43%* *7*	**91.57%** **76**

www.LEADrightToday.com

For the majority of the class sessions observed (69.88%), the LEADright team noted that essential questions, lesson targets, or learning objectives were posted in locations visible to scholars. Observers found students making meaning of content (49.40% of class sessions observed) through minds-on (or mental) learning experiences. Nearly a third of students (32.53%) were observed self-assessing their work. Essential questions, lesson targets, or learning objectives were not consistently written in student-friendly language. There was little to no evidence of teachers customizing or otherwise differentiating learning for students who receive either special education services or gifted and talented services.

CIRRUS ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL

EDCI Review and Report

CACS Governance Board Self-Assessment Snapshot: The Chief Learning Officer shared a board member self-assessment that included eight Core Responsibilities:

- Clarifying mission or vision
- Resolving key strategic or policy issues
- Developing the financial resources needed to support the strategy
- Providing expertise or access to support organizational priorities
- Building/enhancing reputation within community
- Overseeing financial performance and ensuring adequate risk management
- Assessing performance against mission and key program priorities
- Improving board performance

The board prioritized its eight Core Responsibilities as follows:

CORE RESPONSIBILITIES	RANKING
Assessing performance against mission and key program priorities	5.38
Overseeing financial performance and ensuring adequate risk management	5.23
Resolving key strategic or policy issues	5.15
Clarifying the mission and/or vision	4.85
Developing the financial resources needed to support the strategy	4.15
Building/enhancing reputation within community	4.15
Improving board performance	3.85

Providing expertise or access to support organizational priorities	3.23

Both academic and financial performance are at the heart of the work of the board as evidenced by its self-assessment (*Assessing performance against mission and key program priorities* and *Overseeing financial performance and ensuring adequate risk management*). A critical next step for the board is professional learning to support its capacity with doing the aforementioned work of monitoring performance.

CIRRUS ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL

EDCI Review and Report

The Essential Dimensions of Continual Improvement (EDCI) Snapshot

Dimensions	Initiating	Developing	Demonstrating	Refining
Learning Expectations		✓		
Assessment Use	✓			
Professional Learning Groups	✓			

Understanding EDCI Ratings

- A rating of **Initiating** for any dimension is characterized by areas for growth that have an impact on the school or district and might warrant immediate action to include short- and long-term action planning. There may be some areas of strengths, but they are overshadowed by the areas for growth. A leader or a teacher might say, *"I am learning about this and I am initiating use of it in my school or district."*

- A rating of **Developing** for any dimension is characterized by some strengths and it indicates some important areas for growth that have an impact on the school or district . In general, a rating of Developing for any dimension warrants intervention and adjustment by the school or district. Schools and districts characterized as Developing for any dimension are invited to actively address areas for growth through short- and long-term action planning to ensure improvement. *A leader or a teacher might say, "I am developing my skills with this, and I am successfully using aspects of this in my school or district."*

- A rating of **Demonstrating** for any dimension is characterized by a number of strengths which are embedded throughout the school or district. While there are areas for growth, they do not adversely impact the school or district. Schools and districts characterized as Demonstrating for any dimension are invited to address areas for growth, and continue taking advantage of opportunities to improve. *A leader or a teacher might say, "I am demonstrating effective use and integration of this in my school or district."*

- A rating of **Refining** for any dimension is characterized by major strengths which have a significant impact. There may be areas for growth; however, they do not adversely impact the school or district. While an evaluation of Refining represents a high standard, it is a standard that should be achievable in all schools and districts. It implies that a school or district should continue its work without significant adjustment and continue to take advantage of opportunities

www.LEADrightToday.com

to improve. *A leader or a teacher might say, "I am integrating and refining my use of this in my school or district. I can model this and coach others in its use."*

CIRRUS ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL
EDCI Review and Report

Dimension: Learning Expectations

Rating: Developing

Observations: The school and its leaders have set high expectations for students. Students tend to be engaged in time-consuming, discrete skill-based activities that do not reach the level of rigor associated with the grade level or class content. Students are challenged to achieve at high academic levels, but may not be systematically supported in the development of academic behaviors. Some teachers are collaborating to develop learning experiences that lead to opportunities for students to demonstrate their ability to meet the school's expectations. There are "pockets" of effective practices in use at the school; working as a professional learning group (or community) would ensure such effective practices are widespread.

Recommended Actions:
- Collaboratively review student work samples and agree upon exemplars that illustrate quality learning. Share these exemplars with students so that they have a clear understanding of expectations.
- Explicitly teach and provide feedback to students on learning strategies, habits of work, and social/emotional skills.
- Revisit the "LEADright Instructional Observation on Effective Instructional Practices" tool and build capacity for implementing two to four practices each month from January to May 2023:

  1. Essential question, lesson target, or learning objective POSTED
  2. Essential question, lesson target, or learning objective in STUDENT-FRIENDLY language
  3. HANDS-ON Learning by students
  4. MINDS-ON Learning by students
  5. Students MAKING MEANING of learning
  6. WHOLE GROUP learning by students
  7. COOPERATIVE learning by students
  8. INDIVIDUAL learning by students
  9. Students SELF-ASSESSING their progress
  10. Students able to EXPLAIN lesson target or learning objective
  11. Teacher CUSTOMIZES learning for gifted and talented students
  12. Teacher CUSTOMIZES learning for special education students

Recommended Readings: Johnson, J., Uline, C. &, Perez, L. (2012). Teaching Practices in America's Best Urban Schools A Guide for School and Classroom Leaders. New York, NY: Routledge. Carver, J. (2006). Boards That Make a Difference: A New Design for Leadership in Nonprofit and Public Organizations 3rd Edition. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

CIRRUS ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL

EDCI Review and Report

Dimension: Assessment Use

Rating: Initiating

Observations: The school primarily uses a "one-size-fits-all" approach to assessment, and many assessments employ fixed-response, selected-response, and multiple-choice questions that primarily measure recall. When students struggle to demonstrate what they have learned, assessment practices do not appear to change when students are retested. Teachers provide feedback; however, students may not fully recognize and understand their learning needs and progress toward mastering content and skills. Results from assessments are reviewed and analyzed to inform instructional practices; however, assessment practices are unevenly applied across the school and do not consistently result in personalized instructional modifications. Teachers do not have a common set of tools and protocols to use when discussing assessments and determining next steps.

Recommended Actions:
- Provide professional development that is focused on building assessment literacy among teachers.
- Utilize professional learning groups to create opportunities for teachers to research and apply proven assessment strategies and create, tune, and score common assessments together. Use results to collaboratively refine and adjust instruction, assessments, interventions and curriculum decisions.
- Communicate learning expectations to all students at the beginning of lessons and help students understand the assessment methods used by teachers.
- Provide specific, timely, and actionable oral and written feedback to students on their learning strengths and weaknesses to give them ample opportunity to exhibit learning using multiple approaches.

Recommended Reading: Cox, J. B. (2006). Finding the Story Behind the Numbers: A Tool-Based Guide for Evaluating Educational Programs. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

CIRRUS ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL

EDCI Review and Report

Dimension: Professional Learning Groups

Rating: Initiating

Observations: Teachers are mostly collegial and seem to genuinely like working with each other; however, teaching practice is largely individualistic work by teachers even if it is informed by current research, collegial feedback, formative assessments, or student data. Classroom doors are generally closed and faculty members do not have enough opportunities to observe each other's teaching or have focused discussions about specific instructional strategies or student needs. The leadership team is largely focused on managerial responsibilities. Limited time is devoted to investigating proven best practices, analyzing student-performance trends, and participating in professional learning. Time for planning is provided to teachers during the school day, but this time could benefit from more structure and better facilitation to improve classroom instruction across the school. Some tensions among the faculty may go unresolved for long periods of time; the same is at times true for faculty and leadership team tensions.

Recommended Actions:
■ Deprivatize and demystify teaching and learning in the classroom by launching a peer observation or student shadowing program.
■ Require all educators to participate in a structured professional learning group that meets at least once a week for at least one hour. Ensure that these sessions are well facilitated and follow a purposeful agenda focused on instructional improvement and student performance.
■ Create time in the schedule for professional learning groups to meet regularly during the school day.
■ Regularly use protocols to examine student work and discuss how and why students do or do not acquire new knowledge and skills.
■ Establish a set of school-wide norms that encourage open conversation within and outside of the school regarding student performance results and other data.
■ Adopt a set of shared expectations and norms—aligned with the school's vision and mission—for staff meetings, professional conduct, and adult-student relationships.

Recommended Readings: DuFour, R. & Marzano, R. J. (2011). Leaders of Learning: How District, School, and Classroom Leaders Improve Student Achievement. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree. Browne, J. R. (2012). Walking the equity talk : a guide for culturally courageous leadership in school communities. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

CIRRUS ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL

EDCI Review and Report

LEADRIGHT RECOMMENDED CAP ADJUSTMENTS

Given the number of months remaining in this academic year, the analysis of the data from the school level, and this EDCI review of CACS, it is worth revisiting the CAP to strongly consider adjusting or otherwise prioritizing items as follows:

ONE: Build teacher capacity in all subject areas with a focus on literacy and numeracy
- Enroll Lead teachers and instructional support staff in the MidGA RESA for the Reading and Math Endorsement.
- Facilitate professional learning on the Five essential components of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) for K-3 teachers and evaluate each professional learning session using The Kirkpatrick Model (i.e., Reaction, Learning, Behavior, Results).
- Facilitate professional learning on the Georgia Numeracy Project for K-8 teachers and evaluate each professional learning session using The Kirkpatrick Model (i.e., Reaction, Learning, Behavior, Results).

TWO: Ensuring high quality instruction in all classrooms
- Facilitate weekly collaborative teacher planning sessions to ensure Teacher Clarity, fully implement ongoing professional learning, and fulfill *The Cirrus Guarantee*.
- Conduct data-driven instructional walks determined through data analysis, previous class observations, and the current professional learning calendar grounded in TKES and The Kirkpatrick Model (i.e., Reaction, Learning, Behavior, Results).
- Implement a peer observation program wherein K-8 teachers support each other through ongoing cycles of observations and feedback to fulfill *The Cirrus Guarantee*.
- Establish and lead professional learning communities using protocols to provide feedback aimed at improving program design, quality of instruction, and deeper learning experiences for students to fulfill *The Cirrus Guarantee*.

THREE: Monitoring student progress
- Revise professional learning community/collaborative teacher planning session meeting protocols to include rating student work, item analysis, and identifying misconceptions to improve instructional delivery and reduce reteaching.
- Facilitate professional learning on Formative Instructional Practices for K-8 teachers and evaluate each professional learning session using The Kirkpatrick Model (i.e., Reaction, Learning, Behavior, Results).

SIX Building Governing Board Capacity
- Analyze self-assessment data on the elements of effective boards and to drive ongoing governing board professional learning and development.

www.LEADrightToday.com

- Deepen the ongoing stewardship work of the existing academic committee and governance   committee to include monthly Corrective Action Plan Monitoring.
- Aggressively monitor the Corrective Action Plan by reframing and restructuring board committee structure.

Furthermore, it is imperative that the school and its leadership team aggressively address noncompliance on the part of its teaching staff with respect to the CAP implementation. Teachers simply cannot be allowed to refuse to do the work required of them in their job description and outlined for them in the CAP.