



LEGION COLLEGIATE ACADEMY

November 10, 2021

Charter Institute at Erskine Board of Directors
1201 Main Street, Suite 300
Columbia, SC 29201

Dear Charter Institute at Erskine Board of Directors:

The Legion Collegiate Academy (“LCA”) Board of Directors (“LCA Board”) met on November 9, 2021, to discuss transferring our existing charter from the Charter Institute at Erskine (the “Institute”) to the Limestone Charter Association (“Limestone”). After careful consideration, the LCA Board voted unanimously to request a transfer of our charter to Limestone effective July 1, 2022. The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information about LCA and the reasons our Board voted unanimously to transfer our charter.

I. Legion Collegiate Academy

LCA opened in the fall of 2019 in Rock Hill, South Carolina and serves students in grades 9-12. Our mission is to offer high school students a safe and small family-like atmosphere, a rigorous curriculum, high academic standards, elite athletics, and the opportunity to earn up to two years of college credit through established dual enrollment programs. We offer students a unique split schedule, which allows students to attend classes in the morning or afternoon and participate in extracurricular activities, hold gainful employment, or tend to family responsibilities in the non-classroom portion of the day. LCA serves and fulfills its mission and the purpose of the South Carolina Charter Schools Act by improving student learning, assisting South Carolina in reaching academic excellence, and closing achievement gaps by creating new, innovative, and more flexible ways of educating children within the public school system.

Highlights from LCA’s first few years include the following:

(1) LCA’s students have a 100% graduation rate. In comparison, York County, where LCA is located, has a graduation rate of 82.1% and the State has a graduation rate of 83.3%. Of the 414 public high schools in South Carolina, only eight, including LCA, have a 100% graduation rate.

(2) LCA has a 100% graduation rate for African American students, compared to 80.7% for York County and 78.1% for the State.

(3) LCA has a 100% graduation rate for economically disadvantaged students, compared to 71.6% for York County and 75.5% for the State.

(4) LCA's 2021 graduating class earned over Three Million Dollars (\$3,000,000.00) in academic and athletic scholarships to dozens of prestigious colleges and universities across the country and state, including the US Naval Academy, Florida State University, the University of South Carolina, South Carolina State University, and Clemson University.

(5) LCA's students have earned over 1400 hours of college credit while enrolled at LCA. LCA's dual enrollment program saves LCA students and families an average of \$16,913.00 in higher education expenses.

(6) LCA students outperformed the District and the State on End-of-Course Assessments in English 1, Algebra 1, and Biology.

(7) LCA's girls softball and boys baseball teams each won the 2021 South Carolina High School League 2A State Championship.

(8) LCA was invited to and has partnered with the North Carolina Independent Schools Athletic Association, which will allow more LCA students to participate in interscholastic athletic activities, provide LCA students with competition in three states (South Carolina, North Carolina, and Georgia), and give LCA students greater exposure to coaches and recruiters from colleges and universities.

(9) LCA developed and opened a brand-new, state-of-the-art school facility in LCA's second year of operation. LCA's management company, Pinnacle Charter School Management Group ("Pinnacle"), helped LCA access affordable bond financing through the South Carolina Jobs-Economic Development Authority, which saved LCA and South Carolina taxpayers significant sums of money.

(10) LCA's most recent audit issued by a well-respected third-party CPA audit firm that performs audits on public school districts and public schools across the state was clean.

Despite these significant achievements, LCA strives to continuously improve its organization for the benefit of students and families in the Rock Hill community and surrounding areas.

II. Reasons for Transfer

LCA desires to transfer its charter from the Institute to Limestone effective July 1, 2022, for the following reasons:

(1) Partnership with Seasoned, Professional Educators.

Limestone's Board Chair, Dr. Darrell Parker, and Superintendent, Angel Malone, are experienced educators and will have a positive impact on LCA's school and students. Dr. Parker and Ms. Malone have helped students achieve personal and academic growth for over 50 years combined. Dr. Parker has been in leadership positions in higher education for several decades and understands the needs of high school students who seek to obtain college credit while enrolled at LCA and pursue post-secondary education thereafter. In meeting and getting to know Dr. Parker, it is apparent that he conducts himself in a firm, fair, honest, and professional manner. Superintendent Malone has established and served as the founding Principal of an extremely successful South Carolina charter school, the Orangeburg High School for Health Professions, which serves students interested in pursuing careers in the healthcare industry. Ms. Malone has also served as the Director of Career and Technical Education for the South Carolina Department of Education and overseen all secondary and post-secondary Career and Technology Education programs while managing a budget of over \$60,000,000.00. Ms. Malone's experience opening a charter school, working directly with charter high school students, and overseeing career and technology education for the entire state of South Carolina gives her extraordinary insight on how LCA can achieve and maintain success, overcome challenges, and positively impact the personal and academic endeavors of LCA's students and families.

(2) Limestone's Sponsorship Philosophy.

Limestone's mission is "to serve as the cornerstone of charter school authorizing in South Carolina and to facilitate a positive, educational environment that fosters autonomy through support and oversight to its member schools." LCA greatly appreciates Limestone's focus on facilitating a positive educational environment at the core of its mission. Limestone has pledged that it will create a positive educational environment by allowing charter schools the authority to govern without undue interference and by effectively communicating with schools in a respectful and compassionate manner without retaliation or threats. Limestone has even committed to hold two of its own board's seats open to former charter school board members and administrators who understand the challenges that charter schools face and how a sponsor can effectively communicate with and support schools in overcoming those challenges. LCA strongly believes that by focusing on the creation of a positive educational environment through respectful communications and supportive oversight, Limestone will provide LCA's Board, administration, families, students, and community the opportunity to concentrate their time, energy, talent, and resources on fulfilling LCA's mission and reaching LCA's potential.

(3) Limestone's Dual Enrollment Program.

Limestone University offers a dual enrollment program that is intended to complement the high school experience and to provide personal enrichment by allowing students to begin exploring new subject areas and earn college credit. At the core of LCA's mission is providing students with the opportunity to earn up to two years of college credit through established dual enrollment programs. Both Limestone University's main campus in Gaffney and satellite campus in Columbia are conveniently located within an hour of LCA's campus. The opportunity to partner with Limestone as our sponsor to provide dual enrollment opportunities to LCA's students is a wonderful and convenient opportunity that will mutually benefit Limestone, LCA, and our students and families.

(4) The Institute's Superintendent has been Unprofessional, Disrespectful, and Dishonest Toward LCA.

The Institute's Superintendent, Cameron Runyan, has communicated with LCA in a threatening and dishonest manner, both in-person and in written communications. For example, the first time Superintendent Runyan visited LCA in the last two years, he raised his voice and made threats to our Board members in presenting unsupported allegations that LCA's management company was fraudulently overcharging LCA. LCA has confirmed that all management fee payments made to its management company, Pinnacle Charter School Management Group ("Pinnacle"), were owed under the management agreement and there was no fraudulent overcharge. In fact, Pinnacle graciously deferred its management fee interest-free to allow LCA to establish cash reserves sufficient to qualify for bond financing through the South Carolina Jobs-Economic Development Authority, which allowed LCA to develop a state-of-the-art school facility to benefit our students and families. Ironically, at the time Superintendent Runyan alleged and threatened that LCA's management organization was fraudulently overcharging LCA, LCA had actually paid Pinnacle a total of Zero Dollars (\$0.00) in management fees. Superintendent Runyan never apologized for his behavior and has only visited LCA once since then – for a photo op celebrating the opening of LCA's brand new state-of-the-art school facility.

More recently, Superintendent Runyan, sent a letter through the Institute's legal counsel defaming LCA's Board Chair, Stephanie Burton. Superintendent Runyan's actions were intentional and in bad faith. Ms. Burton has been a leader and an asset in the Rock Hill community for decades. Ms. Burton's reputation in her community is outstanding, which is critical to her success as a real estate professional with Coldwell Banker who works directly with families in her community. Superintendent Runyan used the Institute's legal counsel to defame Ms. Burton, by publishing accusations to her fellow Board members that she held employment with a real estate firm that performed work for LCA while she was serving on the LCA Board. In sum, Superintendent Runyan falsely accused Ms. Burton of violating South Carolina ethics laws. In fact, Ms. Burton has never been affiliated with the real estate company (Rinehart Property Management) that performed work for LCA or violated her ethical duties. Superintendent

Runyan's accusations against Ms. Burton were false, defamatory, and completely unfounded.¹ On August 16, 2021, our Board asked in writing for the Institute to "provide an explanation as to why the Institute is making unfounded defamatory statements regarding LCA's Board Chair and the LCA Board." We never received any response from the Institute.

Further, the Institute's administration recently attempted to place LCA on "Fiscal Watch" without reason or authorization. LCA sent a detailed appeal letter to the Institute's Board nearly a month ago requesting an appeal hearing. LCA has not received any response from the Institute's Board. LCA had previously requested in writing that the Institute's administration withdraw its attempt to place LCA on "Fiscal Watch." LCA filed the appeal to the Institute Board after not receiving any response from the Institute's administration for two months. The Institute administration's unjustified and unauthorized attempt to place LCA on "Fiscal Watch" has caused LCA's auditor to withhold LCA's annual audit. A copy of LCA's appeal letter to the Institute Board is attached hereto. (**Exhibit A**, LCA Appeal Letter and Attachments.)

LCA's Board has never felt supported by Superintendent Runyan. Further, LCA has been required to expend significant time, energy, and financial resources to deal with Superintendent Runyan's bad faith actions and poor leadership. Because of Superintendent Runyan's repeated unprofessional, dishonest, and disrespectful conduct, LCA's Board of Directors does not trust Superintendent Runyan and looks forward to no longer being affiliated with him.

III. Conclusion

It is our understanding that the Limestone Board will consider LCA's request to transfer its existing charter from the Institute to Limestone in November 2021. Should the Limestone Board approve LCA's request and express its desire to work with LCA in partnership, the LCA Board respectfully requests that the Institute Board hear our request to transfer our existing charter to Limestone as soon as possible thereafter.

The LCA Board anticipates that the Institute's administration will attempt to retaliate against LCA for requesting a transfer of our charter to Limestone by communicating false messages about our school on the Institute's website and directly to LCA's parents, as the Institute's administration has done with several other schools seeking to move away from the Institute and establish a partnership with well-respected career educators. The Institute's Board has a duty to supervise the Institute's employees in a non-grossly negligent manner, and the Institute's Board should seek to fulfill that duty with diligence and fidelity.

Lastly, On October 4, 2021, we received notice from Superintendent Runyan that the Institute Board passed a policy in mid-August 2021 attempting to impose a deadline of September 1, 2021 on schools to request a transfer of an existing charter to a different sponsor. The Institute did not inform LCA of the policy change until October 4, 2021. Our Board has taken

¹ Superintendent Runyan has a long history of making unfounded allegations of financial improprieties, such as when he called a press conference in Columbia to accuse a political opponent of violating state ethics laws days before the election. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-G5ocQuaknU>. Superintendent Runyan lost the election by double digit percentage points. <https://www.wistv.com/story/8102450/final-columbia-city-council-election-results/>

time to meet Dr. Parker and Superintendent Malone, learn about their professional and personal backgrounds, and understand their values and philosophies before requesting a transfer of our charter to Limestone. Pursuant to Section 12.5 of the charter contract between our Board and the Institute, to terminate the charter contract before the end of the contract term, our Board is required to give the Institute written notice of at least ninety days before the end of the school year, which we have done via this letter. Additionally, pursuant to Section 1.2 of the Charter Contract, LCA is only required to comply with applicable and reasonable sponsor policies. We do not consider a transfer out policy imposing a notification deadline of September 1, 2021, that we were informed of on October 4, 2021, to be reasonable.

We look forward to the next steps in transitioning our charter to Limestone. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please feel free to contact us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Stephanie Burton". The signature is written in a cursive style.

The Legion Collegiate Academy Board of
Directors

Attachment

c: Legion Collegiate Academy Board of Directors