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INTERNATIONAL

EDUCATION CASE STUDY



APRIL 2018

# “I’m a Better Instructional Leader Now.”

CASE STUDY

## Schools For Rigor: George Washington Carver High School

Muscogee County School District, Georgia

By Learning Sciences International

Christopher Lindsey, Principal  
George Washington Carver High School

# Quick View

## George Washington Carver High School

Muscogee County School District, GA

In 2016, George Washington Carver High School in Muscogee County, Georgia, was struggling to break out of a half-decade slump. This rural high school of 1,200 students in grades 9-12 had faced some serious challenges. A hundred percent of students were classified as economically disadvantaged. Scores for math, science, English, history, and economics had plateaued at well below the state average. In Georgia's school rating system, Carver had toggled between Ds and Fs since 2012. Although Carver had a dynamic principal in Christopher Lindsey and a committed staff, including some award-winning teachers, Carver couldn't seem to budge its low numbers.

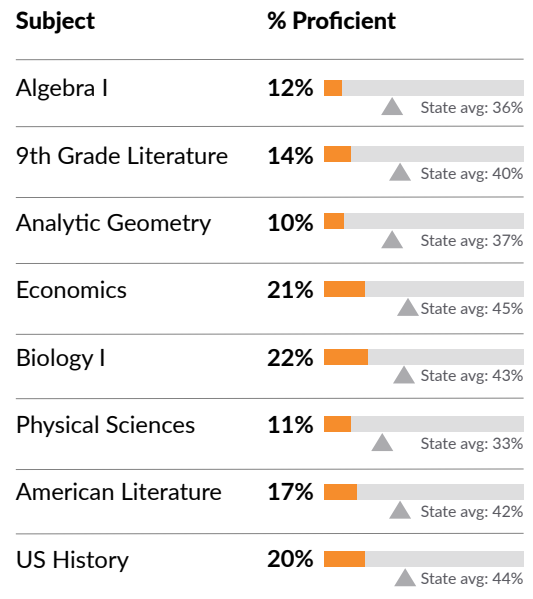
To lead this effort, Lindsey, with support from Muscogee County School District leadership, partnered with LSI in the 2016-2017 school year to achieve three goals: deepen teacher practice in standards-based lessons, foster a common language of instruction at all levels, and achieve sustainable growth in student learning.

## The Results

In the spring of 2017, ACT college entrance exam scores at Carver showed a 0.7 increase, the largest increase of all nine Muscogee County high schools.

Lindsey was all smiles when he reported the jumps in Carver's ACT scores.

ACT Exam Scores			
School	2016	2017	+/-
Carver	16.6	17.3	+0.7



*Caption: In 2016, Carver's math, English, history, and science scores were well below state averages.*

### Challenges

- Pulling out of a half-decade slump as a D- and F-rated school
- Improving the school-wide level of classroom rigor
- Using learning targets and success criteria to drive standards-based instruction

### The Approach

- Intensive coaching on core instruction
- One-on-one consultation for school leaders
- A new vision of PLCs for lesson planning and monitoring student progress

### The School Is Now:

- Strengthened by deep support, coaching, and committed staff members
- Continuing on a path to deeper student learning and further growth for educators and leaders

# The Partnership

Drawing on research-based approaches, tested and proven in real schools, LSI worked with Muscogee district and regional leaders to create customized solutions for Carver. School and curriculum leaders were equipped to coach their peers toward rigorous classroom instruction. Teachers received training and job-embedded coaching with real-time support focused on research-based instructional strategies applicable to their classrooms.

The project began with classroom observations using LSI's RigorWalk® protocol and teacher focus groups. The actionable data collected during the first RigorWalk provided the basis for customized professional development and coaching strategies targeting Carver's specific challenges. Teachers received professional development to learn proven strategies for deepening student cognitive and conative skills. Regional chiefs, superintendents, principals, building-level school leadership teams, and classroom teachers also received individualized coaching focused on cultivating leadership through application and implementation of the core concepts.

At Carver, administrators and teachers used three technology-based tools: RigorWalk, to collect actionable data on levels of classroom rigor; LSI Standards Tracker, to collect data on student achievement of standards-based learning targets; and LSI Growth Tracker, to support continuous improvement of pedagogy.

One of the biggest shifts teachers and students made was a move away from traditional "stand and deliver" lecture and practice to truly student-centered learning, where students worked in teams and took responsibility for meeting their learning goals. It was a leap of faith for many of Carver's seasoned teachers.

"My main stumbling block was my desire to tell students what they needed to know," says 11th grade advanced

## GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER HIGH SCHOOL DEMOGRAPHICS

Student Population	1,200
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Number of Teachers	74
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Low Income Students	100%
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Black	93%
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Hispanic	3%
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White	2%
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Two or more races	2%
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Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	<1%
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American Indian or Alaska Native	<1%
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## The Partnership (continued)

placement U.S. history teacher Asheeka Branscomb. “I still catch myself sometimes. So now when students ask me a question, I try to stop and think before I open my mouth. I’ll say, ‘Did you ask the people next to you? And have you thought about this? I want you to think to answer this question.’ And I try to include in my planning different ways students can look at things when they have questions.”

With LSI coaches, Lindsey and his staff conducted four RigorWalks during the year with randomly selected classrooms. This RigorWalk data helped Lindsey and Carver’s teacher leaders identify red flags and ensured that they could provide targeted feedback to improve teacher performance. This data, in turn, made it possible for all staff to monitor student learning and make “on the spot” decisions about how to improve planning and delivery of instruction.

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) were reorganized and reenergized around a common focus: to plan standards-based lessons and to monitor student learning. Collegiality improved school-wide, and even students—though somewhat reluctant at first—were enthusiastic about the new student-centered approach in their classrooms.

“When I first got to U.S. history class, I wasn’t into working in groups. I felt like I didn’t need to hear other people’s opinions. But as we got into it, I realized that I am not always right. I realized that my peers could help me get the right idea about the concept at hand. Doing the group work has made me more open-minded.”

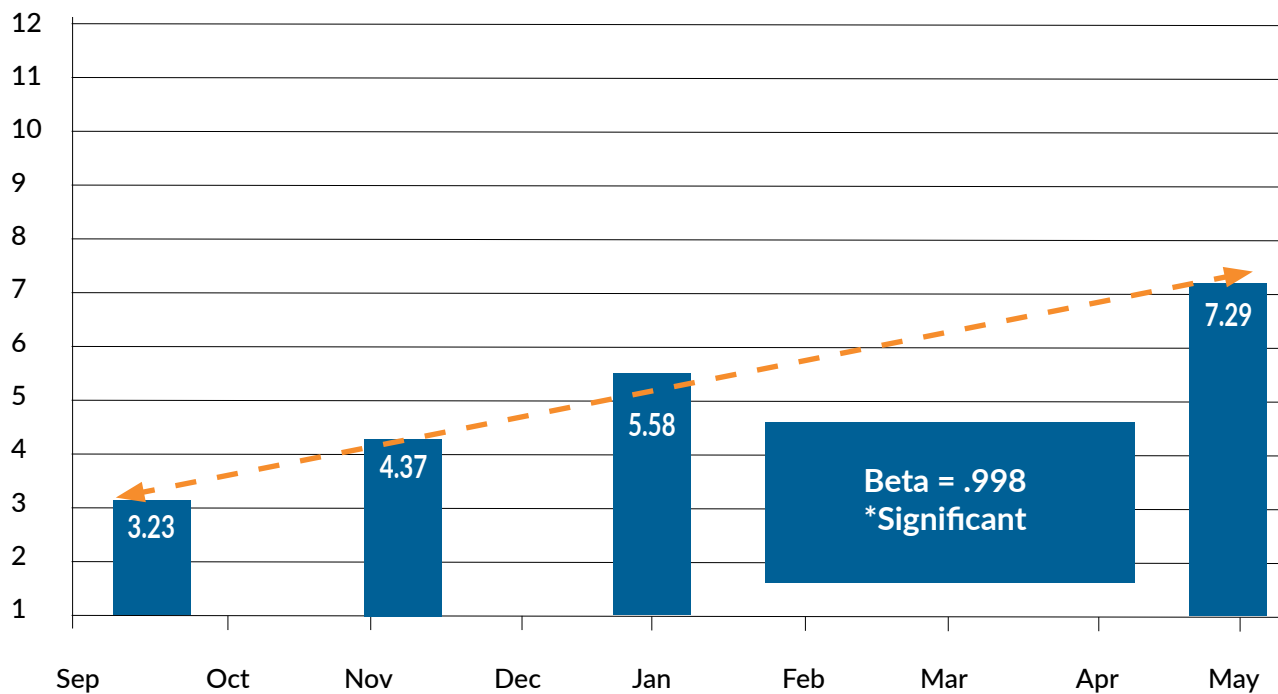
– Destiny Hudson, 11th grade

## The Schools for Rigor partnership at Carver was built on three pillars:

1. **An evidence-based model** of instruction that established a system-wide instructional model designed to ensure rigorous pedagogy and learning aligned to standards in every classroom
2. **Professional development** for school leaders and classroom staff to help them successfully make the shift to a new model of teaching and learning
3. **Intensive coaching and technologies**—RigorWalk, LSI Standards Tracker, and LSI Growth Tracker—to support a school-wide cultural shift that embraces second-order change and develops the growth mindset necessary to achieve deep and sustained results

# Growth Trajectory Site Visit Mean Scores

Carver's RigorWalk scores had also steadily and significantly improved. RigorWalk scores for randomly selected classrooms jumped from a mean score of 3.23 to 7.29. Rigorous instruction increased from 10% of classrooms at the start of the year to 67% at year's end.



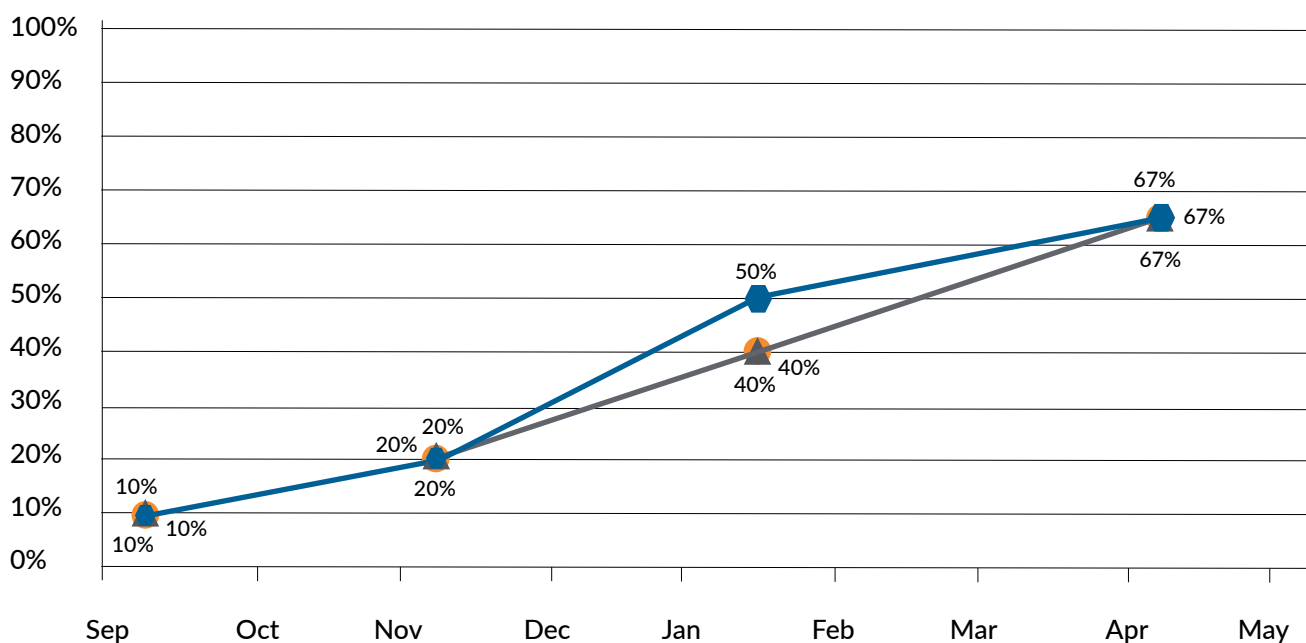
*Carver's rigor scores increased significantly.*

- The mean score for RigorWalk 1 was 3.23
- The mean score for RigorWak 4 increased to 7.29
- The school showed growth with a statistically significant beta score of .998

# Frequency of Rigorous Instruction

By the end of Year 1, teachers were organizing students in effective teams, collecting evidence of standards-based learning, and monitoring for student learning in the moment.

## Percent Observed During Each RigorWalk



CRITERIA	
▲	Teachers Organizing Students to Achieve the Standard
●	Teachers Using Standards-Based Student Evidence
⬡	Teachers Monitoring to Take Action Within a Lesson

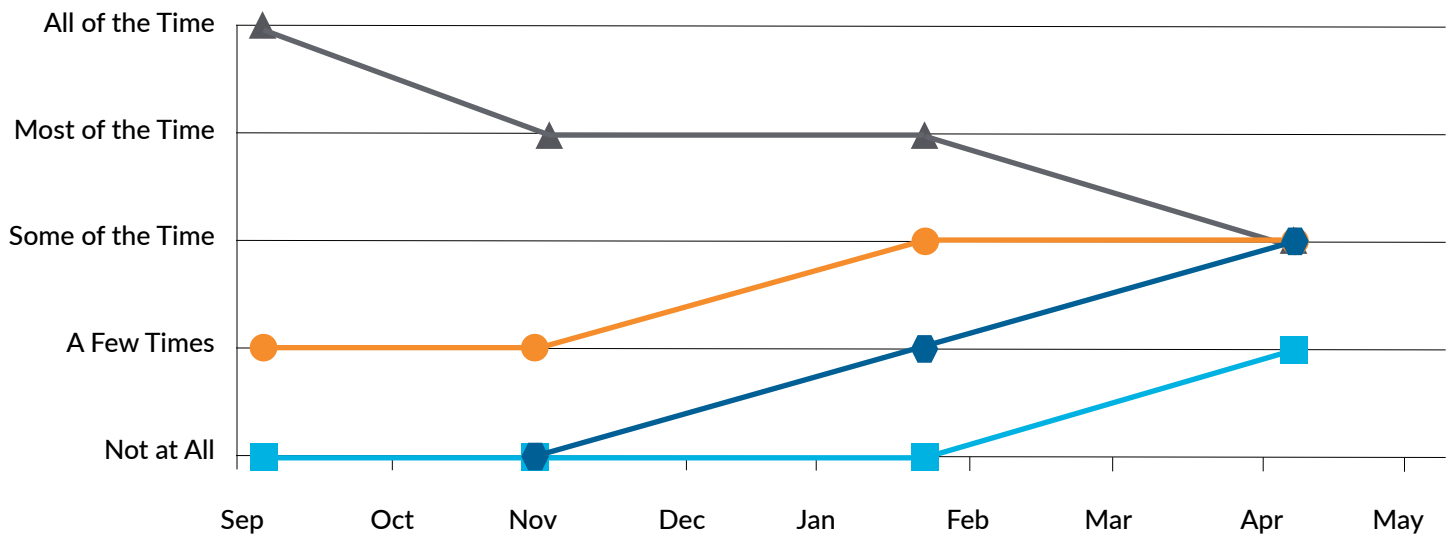
During the fourth RigorWalk,

- The percent of teachers using rigorous instruction increased for all criteria since the first RigorWalk
- All criteria for rigorous instruction were observed equally

# Observed Taxonomy Levels

Students were also working at increasingly higher levels of the taxonomy. Classrooms at Carver were routinely observed engaged in lessons at the level of Analysis and Knowledge Utilization, and much less often at the level of Retrieval and Comprehension. This shift indicated that lessons were standards-based and that students were engaged in higher-level thinking.

## Observed Taxonomy Level Frequency for Each RigorWalk



TAXONOMY LEVEL			
▲	Retrieval	◆	Analysis
●	Comprehension	■	Knowledge Utilization

During the fourth RigorWalk,

- Retrieval, Comprehension and Analysis were observed some of the time
- Knowledge Utilization was observed a few times

# Results

By the end of the school year, Carver was in the news. The *Columbus Ledger-Enquirer* reported that Carver had shown the greatest improvement on ACT college entrance exams among the county's nine high schools.

"Carver increased its composite score by 0.7 points, from 16.6 in 2016 to 17.3 in 2017, according to the data released by the Georgia Department of Education," the *Ledger-Enquirer* reported.

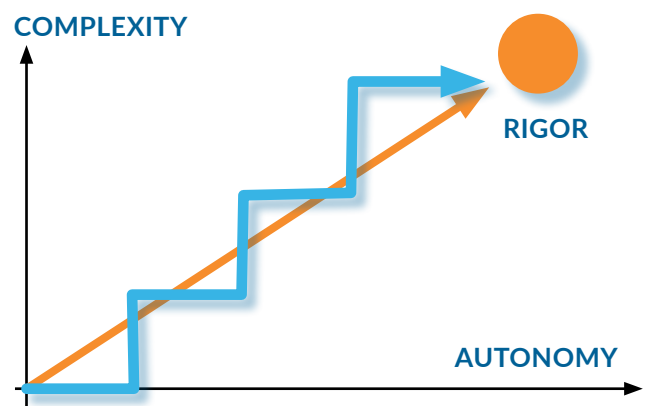
Lindsey told the *Ledger-Enquirer*, "Our reaction is a smile of validation. Last year, we implemented a series of professional learning [opportunities] for our teachers. This professional learning was geared toward creating rigorous classrooms and independent student thinkers. [Schools for Rigor] has had a positive impact on both our teachers and our students."

Reflecting on his first year of the initiative, Lindsey notes that working with LSI in a Schools for Rigor partnership has developed his own practice as a school leader. He says, "The work with LSI has definitely grown me as a leader. I've always been told that I have expertise in regards to discipline, but that I need help in raising my expertise in instruction. This has opened my eyes. I'm a better instructional leader now. I will become a continuous learner and not let my teachers down."

"Our teachers were ready for something different; they were looking for a way to engage students in learning. Teachers have seen these ideas work, so they have made them their own. It's amazing to see a seasoned teacher grasp onto these new ideas and put them into place in their classrooms. It can't help but inspire the others."

– Christopher Lindsey, Principal  
George Washington Carver High School

## Scaffolding to Rigor



*Classroom rigor is defined as the sweet spot where cognitive complexity intersects with student autonomy.*

To learn more about Schools for Rigor, call us at 877.411.7114  
or visit us online at [learningsciences.com](http://learningsciences.com)