

Global Leadership Academy Charter School (GLA), a nonprofit Philadelphia-based school, has submitted a proposal to the Chester Upland School District, to reconfigure and operate Toby Farms and Stetser Elementary as two public schools operating under a charter granted by the CUSD. The schools would open in Fall 2021, admitting all eligible students who are residents of the City of Chester in grades K through 8. All students who reside in the City of Chester would be eligible to apply for admission to the schools, and there would be a lottery selection process if there are more applicants than seats available.

Global Leadership Academy presented a detailed, replicable, systematic K-8 model which has already proven successful in transforming two Philadelphia schools. This experience has prepared GLA to manage the (1) instructional program, (2) financial responsibility, and (3) operational functions of the proposed schools in Chester Upland School District.

In their presentation and proposal, GLA used data, description and videos to document daily life at schools they operate in Philadelphia, which are now achieving academic and operational success. Both schools were once described as “dangerous” and “difficult.” Before implementing GLA’s turnaround model, one of the schools was ranked 137th out of 138 Philadelphia schools in academic achievement; the other was beset with serious operational and facilities-based problems. Both schools now receive respect and admiration from students, parents, and the communities they serve. Both have waitlists of more than a thousand children.

Global Leadership Academy’s management team presented ample evidence of their schools’ success via positive growth and achievement data, glowing narrative reports, Annual Charter Evaluations, and numerous videos featuring parent and student testimony and engaged, prideful, healthy children at GLA schools. The team presented high-quality curricula, Special Education policies and practices (stressing that at GLA, “special education is a service, not a place”), and an academic program designed to be flexible and responsive to 21st century learning conditions and opportunities, including the well-attended and engaging Virtual GLA program.

Global Leadership Academy takes a whole-child approach. Core elements of the model include high academic and behavioral expectations, a globally-focused curriculum which integrates the arts and is brought to life through local, national, and international excursions for all students, health and wellness, data-based instruction and intervention, a multi-tiered system of student-centered support responsive to all students’ learning needs, an extended day and year-round calendar, students grouped into grade-band small learning communities within the school, single gender instructional practices, and a welcoming, open school environment that is built upon strong family involvement.

GLA is proposing to operate Stetser and Toby Farms independently and convert both schools to K-8 enrollment. With a consistent schooling experience through 8th grade, CUSD students at both schools would be able to rely on familiar, coherent, and successful systems of social-emotional and academic support throughout their childhoods. The 3 -year growth plan for both schools addresses CUSD’s short-term needs for improved attendance and academics by beginning with a focus on family relationships, creating safe, positive school cultures conducive to learning, and increasing attendance. From there, steps will be taken to strengthen student academic support, increase teacher capacity through professional development, institute programs and incentives for students to reward academic and character excellence, and intensify data use for academic goal setting and associated school-wide intervention and programmatic support. In the long term, GLA

keeps the focus on accelerating student growth and increasing student achievement by engaging in a continuous cycle of reflection, evaluation and programmatic development. As GLA schools develop over the years, they pour resources into local partnerships, prep for high school and college, mentors for students, and alumni networks and services.

Global Leadership Academy uses research-based curricula developed both internally and externally to be high-quality, flexible, and fully aligned with Pennsylvania Department of Education Academic Standards. Instruction at GLA is active, standards-based, engaging, student-centered, data-driven and differentiated. Teachers are certified; they and non-instructional staff tend to stay at the school for years because of the collegial and supportive professional culture. The presenting team made clear that students learn by doing, and shared evidence of clear data-based protocols used by teachers to constantly improve and guide instruction. Global Leadership Academy schools are set up to affirm students' cultures and teach specific, age-appropriate pro-academic norms and values through Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) and Restorative Justice programs. In addition to academic excursions, students enjoy a multitude of extracurricular activities including sports, arts, and academic enrichment. Global Leadership Academy schools are community schools, with deep ties, strong programs, and strong incentives for parents and families, led by a dedicated Family Life Coordinator. Every child is valued. Every family relationship matters.

Global Leadership Academy's strong record of transformational, deeply caring, efficient, and ethical school management was apparent throughout their presentation. Their annual financial audits and financial reports are spotless, and all policies regarding employee, student, administrative, financial, and other compliance issues are codified and in compliance with all legal requirements. As a nonprofit entity devoted first and foremost to children, GLA uses funds from federal and state grants, as well as private fundraising, so that no child is left out of any school programming, including cultural arts, healthy eating, and overseas excursions. Global Leadership Academy's K-8 model works to create joy-filled, culturally rich affirming learning environments which create a sense of family, health, and global awareness in students, smooth their transition from elementary to middle school, and prepare them for excellence in high school and beyond.