

Please include an executive summary narrative:

Identify 3-5 grant project goals and justify each goal in terms of its value in supporting the planning and implementation of your proposed school or expansion. Be sure to align your budget to your project and ensure that all planned grant spending, including future revisions to your budget, fit clearly within one of your stated project goals. Please include performance measures, and rationale and approach to meeting those goals with CSP funding.

- The Executive Summary must outline how the CSP subgrant goals are aligned to INCS' CSP grant goals. These goals are:
- Increase the number of high-quality charter schools in Illinois educating traditionally underserved students; and,
- Improve the overall quality of Illinois' charter sector

Established in 2014, Great Lakes Academy's mission is to prepare all our students with the fundamental academic skills, critical thinking ability, and strength of character to excel in high school, college, and a career of their choice. We empower all of our students with the education today that they will need to change the world tomorrow. Every decision GLA makes is grounded in how to support our students best as they grow and prepare to compete with their peers in college preparatory high schools and four-year colleges, ambitiously pursue career opportunities, and positively impact their communities.

Great Lakes Academy's subgrant goals of expanding access to high-quality education, enhancing academic achievement for all students, and fostering a supportive learning environment directly align with the objectives outlined in the Charter Schools Program Request for Applications (CSP RFA).

Expanding Access to High-Quality Education: GLA is committed to providing a rigorous, college preparatory education to all students, regardless of their background or circumstances. By offering a diverse range of enrichment programs, implementing smart technology use, and focusing on early college readiness starting from kindergarten, GLA ensures that every student has the opportunity to excel academically and prepare for future success.

Enhancing Academic Achievement For All Students: GLA's dedication to academic excellence is evident in its track record of student achievements. With a focus on data-driven decision-making, personalized learning through technology, and a structured school culture that encourages student engagement and risk-taking, GLA consistently strives to enhance academic outcomes for all students, ensuring they are well-prepared for high school, college, and beyond.

Fostering a Supportive Learning Environment: GLA places a strong emphasis on creating a positive and structured

school culture that supports student success. By prioritizing social and emotional skill development, engaging parents and the community through various partnerships and programs, and offering after-school enrichment opportunities, GLA ensures that students have the necessary support systems in place to thrive academically and personally.

In conclusion, Great Lakes Academy's unwavering commitment to these three key goals not only aligns with the CSP RFA's objectives but also exemplifies its dedication to providing high-quality education, promoting academic achievement, and fostering a supportive learning environment for all students.

	Goal:	Performance Measures:	Rationale:
Goal 1	Expand Access to High-Quality Education.	<p>Increase in Enrollment: Measure the percentage increase in student enrollment from the previous academic year. Target: 15% increase within the first year of implementation.</p> <p>Demographic Representation: Track the enrollment of traditionally underserved student populations, such as English language learners and students with special educational needs, to ensure equitable access.</p>	By expanding access to high-quality education, we aim to address the educational disparities faced by traditionally underserved students in Illinois. This goal directly contributes to the INCS' objective of increasing the number of charter schools serving these student populations.
Goal 2	Enhance Academic Achievement For All Students.	<p>Standardized Test Scores: Measure the improvement in standardized test scores in ELA and math across all grade levels. Target: 10% increase in average scores by the end of the grant period.</p> <p>Transition to High Schools: Track the percentage of graduating students who successfully matriculate to high schools rated commendable or exemplary. Target: Ensure that 100% of graduates are accepted to high schools with commendable or exemplary ratings, while maintaining the focus on literacy proficiency.</p> <p>Literacy Proficiency: Measure the percentage</p>	Focusing on academic outcomes, particularly for English language learner students and those with special educational needs, is crucial in enhancing the overall quality of Illinois' charter sector. Through this targeted approach, we aim to demonstrate the effectiveness of our educational model and contribute to the broader goal of elevating the quality of education in the state.

		<p>of students exceeding national standards for literacy proficiency. Target: At least a 10% increase in the number of graduates that consistently meet or exceed national standards.</p>	
Goal 3	Foster a Supportive Learning Environment.	<p>Student Retention Rates: Measure the percentage of students who remain enrolled at Great Lakes Academy from year to year. Target: Increase student retention rate by 10% annually.</p> <p>Student Satisfaction Surveys: Administer surveys to students to gauge their satisfaction with the school environment, support services, and extracurricular activities. Target: Maintain or increase overall satisfaction ratings.</p> <p>Parent and Community Feedback: Solicit feedback from parents, guardians, and community members through surveys or focus groups to assess perceptions of the school's supportiveness and inclusivity. Target: Maintain or increase positive feedback scores.</p> <p>Staff Satisfaction with Professional Development: Conduct surveys or evaluations to assess staff</p>	<p>Creating a supportive learning environment is essential for student success and overall school quality. By prioritizing student well-being and engagement, we aim to establish a school culture that promotes holistic development and aligns with the values of the CSP grant program.</p>

		<p>satisfaction with professional development opportunities provided by the school. Target: Achieve a satisfaction rating of at least 80% among staff members.</p> <p>Staff Retention Rates: Measure the percentage of staff members who remain employed at Great Lakes Academy from year to year. Target: Maintain a minimum retention rate of 75%.</p>	
Goal 4			
Goal 5			

Section 2: Educational Philosophy, Key Design Elements, and School Culture

Fully describe and justify the design of the academic program in terms of the educational philosophy, key elements of the program, and how school culture is developed. Be sure to include key design elements, and rationale for why this education model was chosen and how it will produce strong outcomes for the unique community and student population the school will be located within. Describe how the applicant will use the autonomy and flexibility granted to it, and how that is consistent with the definition of a charter school in ESEA § 4310 (2).

(This value must be between 1 and 1500 words)

In alignment with the grant requirements, our school, a tuition-free public charter school, has a clear educational philosophy centered around preparing students to pursue a future of their choice. At Great Lakes Academy, our educational model prioritizes fundamental academics with intensive intervention, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills alongside the development of character and social-emotional strengths. We cultivate a positive school culture guided by our playbook, student voice, and values, integrating them into all aspects of school life. We also prioritize access and inclusion in all programming and effective communication systems to cultivate strong relationships with families, ensuring a supportive learning environment.

Founded in 2014 to address the community's need for high-quality elementary education, Great Lakes Academy is proudly recognized as a commendable-rated school, ranking within the top 20% of schools in Illinois in 2023. Our commitment to excellence is reflected in our students' achievements, with the most recent graduating class of 2024 boasting an impressive 40% acceptance rate to the most selective schools and magnet programs within the Chicago Public School system. Additionally, we take pride in our graduates' literacy proficiency, with over 53% of last year's graduates meeting proficiency standards on state assessments, a mark 15% higher than the state average.

As a charter school, we leverage our autonomy to create a dynamic learning environment tailored to the unique needs of our students, ensuring flexibility and adaptability in our educational approach. We recently completed a \$15 million state-of-the-art campus renovation project that doubled our facility size. This expansion has significantly increased the number of families we can serve and the seats we can offer, allowing us to fulfill further our commitment to providing high-quality education to more students in our community.

Every decision GLA makes is grounded in how to support our students best as they grow and prepare to compete with their peers in college preparatory high schools and four-year colleges, ambitiously pursue career opportunities, and positively impact their communities. The following principles are GLA's "anchors" for success, associated with activities that have measurable intended outcomes.

1. Game-Changing Teachers: Recruiting and retaining highly invested, skilled classroom

teachers is key to student achievement. Most recently, we retained 79% of our SY23 staff for SY24.

2. A Fiercely Positive School Culture: We believe that a positive and structured environment allows students to fully engage in their learning and take academic risks, all leading to student success. We foster a joyful school culture anchored in MTSS and enrichment programming that centers student voice, leadership, and community engagement, such as our Student Government Association and instructor-led clubs and activities.

3. College Success Begins in Kindergarten: We believe a rigorous, college preparatory education must start early, promoting the development of skills and aptitudes that lead to success in college and careers. This is reflected in our school day structure and departmentalization of core subjects across grade levels.

4. Every Minute Matters: We believe instructional time is sacred, and lessons and transitions should be planned and paced to maximize every minute.

5. Smart Technology Use: We believe technology should be embraced as a tool for more efficient and effective individualized, mastery-based skill acquisition by students. We are 1:1 on Chromebooks for students grades 2nd-8th and have made curricular investments in iReady for math and reading. Additionally, we use Performance Matters, an online assessment platform that gives staff the ability to collect and analyze assessment data instantly.

6. Data Drives Our Decisions: We believe consistent data analysis allows us to assess our effectiveness and test new initiatives. We have built a fully customized SIS that provides a dynamic profile of each student to support their progress. Additionally, we have invested in tools like Possip to do bi-weekly pulse checks with parents regarding their experience of GLA.

7. Parent and Community Partnerships are Vital to Student Achievement: We believe family support and partnership are vital and key to student success. This is reflected in our approach to providing community programming open to the public, such as our SEL parent development workshops in partnership with a local therapy practice, our high school and community resource fair, and our annual back-to-school festival.

8. Strong Social/Emotional Skills Drive Lifelong Success: We believe successful students also possess exceptional strength of character. We utilize data-driven tools like Panorama to gain insight and create action plans for student

engagement; we employ two full-time social workers to meet the needs of upper and lower-school students; and we provide virtual 1:1 emotional wellness coaches. We are also a Franklin Covey Leader In Me school, offering an SEL curriculum with the highest CASEL designation to all of our students.

9. Learning Doesn't Stop at the Final Bell: Every GLA student can access after-school enrichment programming that supports their holistic growth and development. GLA provides many opportunities outside the classroom through enrichment programming, supporting diverse student interests, such as coding classes for lower school students or a partnership with a local youth theater and dance academy.

We believe that access to grade-level content that supports students in meeting grade-level standards is a major equity issue. At GLA, all students have daily periods where they work on grade-level content and tasks, and teachers design instruction to support students in reaching this bar without over-scaffolding learning. COVID learning loss has been well-documented nationally, and our students, on average, like students in schools across the country, have developed learning gaps that have made mastering grade-level content more challenging. However, we have been, and remain, committed to ensuring that we do not unintentionally widen learning gaps by barring students from grade-level content and skills.

Frequent and layered assessment is essential to supporting student learning. Our academic program for English Language Arts and Mathematics employs a quarterly interim assessment system to gauge student learning of the core grade level curriculum. We have correlated benchmarks for these assessments with the Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR) to predict student performance on this state assessment. For English Language Arts, we use interim assessments from the Achievement Network. For Mathematics, we use interim assessments adopted from Achievement First, a school network with a track record of excellent student results in math. After administration, instructional staff analyze interim data and evaluate the effectiveness of instruction and how it impacted learning for different groups of students. With the support of instructional leaders in the school, teachers adjust long-term instructional plans to address gaps in learning that the interim assessment reveals.

At the classroom level, we use curriculum-based unit assessments, biweekly quizzes (in math), and daily exit tickets to evaluate student learning within a unit and lesson, respectively. Teachers use these more frequent assessments to differentiate processes and content and to determine which students might receive additional small-group support in our daily intervention block. For all assessments, students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) receive appropriate assessment accommodations as prescribed in their IEP. English learners (ELs) may receive language accommodations based on language proficiency scores on ACCESS.

The reality of COVID learning loss has also made the need to provide strategic, timely instructional adjustments and intervention more critical than ever. We use a developmental literacy assessment (i.e. University of Chicago's STEP assessment in previous years; American Reading Company's Independent Reading Literacy Assessment currently) to accurately determine what literacy skills students have mastered and which are still emerging. These assessments determine tiered instructional groupings for students in our daily Literacy Rotation block for K-4th grades. Student groups receive targeted instruction grounded in the "science of reading" in two different groups from co-teachers based on what assessment data shows are emerging skills.

We have invested in iReady to support the improvement of our MTSS process. iReady is used as a universal screening and progress-monitoring tool in conjunction with the school's other assessments. The platform's diagnostic tools will support decision-making about what skills to target in Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention groups. Additionally, its adaptive learning platform allows teachers to personalize learning and practice for students when not receiving additional instruction directly from a teacher.

In summary, Great Lakes Academy is dedicated to providing a comprehensive and innovative educational experience that prepares students for academic success, personal growth, and future opportunities. Through our commitment to excellence, data-driven decision-making, and a supportive school community, we strive to empower every student to reach their full potential and positively impact their communities.

Section 3: Curriculum, Instructional Strategies, and Technology

Fully describe and justify the instructional practices and curriculum that will be utilized to meet the school's performance objectives, while also demonstrating alignment to state and Federal requirements. Be sure to include the use of technology and how it will assist with producing strong outcomes for the unique community and student population the school will be located within.

(This value must be between 1 and 750 words)

We place the highest priority on teaching and learning to achieve our mission. Foundational to reaching that mission is ensuring that students have equitable access to rigorous grade-level curricula, teachers are equipped to deliver instruction that supports students in achieving grade-level standards and academic support systems are implemented to catch students with learning gaps.

To drive high-quality instruction, the school's instructional leaders developed a Vision of Instruction to define excellence in each classroom. Leaders created a rubric aligned with each vision area, which is used to collect data on classroom instruction in monthly walkthroughs. Leaders discuss data from monthly walkthroughs, and action plans are created to build teacher capacity in instructional delivery. Typically, these action plans include professional development that is differentiated by subject, teacher proficiency level, or both. Teachers are also observed weekly or biweekly and provided feedback on their instruction according to this rubric.

In choosing curricula for each subject, we considered a variety of factors:

Alignment with school mission and goals

Grade-level standards alignment

Student assessment data

Accessibility and usability for teachers

Cultural relevance

Instructional leaders work over the summer to update curricula scope and sequences annually based on student assessment data and teacher feedback. This ensures students receive equitable access to grade-level standard instruction that will prepare them for the next grade. We strategically create our daily schedule to ensure that instructional staff can fully deliver their curriculum as designed.

Our core subject area curricula are as follows:

ELA (K-5)

Curriculum

American Reading Company: This curriculum progresses students through a literacy continuum that includes all components of literacy instruction that research says students need.

For Tier 2 small group instruction, the curriculum has foundational literacy toolkits that target teaching skills that students have not mastered based on progress monitoring

Instructional Strategies

K-5 Daily reading and writing blocks

K-4 Daily Literacy Rotations with targeted “science of reading” skill instruction based on student assessment data

In all literacy blocks, teachers maximize the time students spend reading, writing, and discussing the meaning of texts. When needed, teachers use the workshop model to support students with acquiring concrete strategies or skills..

ELA (6-8)

Curriculum

Internally created curriculum - This Common Core standard-aligned curriculum draws from the Achievement First and Uncommon school networks. It focuses on students analyzing and evaluating a variety of fiction and non-fiction texts.

This curriculum is supplemented with iReady lesson modules that are part of students’ personalized learning pathways.

Instructional Strategies

Daily reading and writing blocks

In all literacy blocks, teachers maximize the time students spend reading, writing, and discussing the meaning of texts

Math

Curriculum

Achievement First Math - This standards-based curriculum prioritizes students utilizing mathematical mindsets and practices to develop deep conceptual knowledge of math content that supports math algorithmic fluency.

This curriculum is supplemented with iReady lesson modules that are part of students’ personalized learning pathways.

Instructional Strategies

Daily math block

In all math blocks, students engage in problem-solving exercises centered around discourse that sequentially and intentionally supports student skill development.

Social Science (K-4)

Curriculum

Inquiry Journeys - This curriculum is aligned with state social science standards.

Instructional Strategies

Daily social studies block

Social Science (5-8)

Curriculum

Achievement First - This curriculum aligns with the College Board's Advanced Placement skill and content strands in World History and US History. Historical thinking skills and disciplinary literacy are central to the curriculum design as content and skill learning is driven through reading, discussing, and writing about primary and secondary historical sources.

Instructional Strategies

Daily social studies block

Science (5-8)

Curriculum

OpenSciEd—This curriculum aligns with the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). It engages students in critical thinking driven by science phenomena and simulations.

Instructional Strategies

Daily science block

To support curricular implementation, we strategically use technology devices and software platforms. We use the assessment platform Performance Matters to administer unit and interim assessments. This tool gives our teachers and leaders the ability to analyze unit and interim assessment data by item, standard, and student groups to make instructional and curricular adjustments that better serve our students. Our 2nd-8th grade classrooms are "1:1" with

each student accessing a Chromebook (2:1 in K-1st grades). Students use iReady on Chromebooks during literacy and math intervention blocks to practice skills using their personalized learning pathway when not in teacher-led small groups. In middle school ELA classrooms, students share their thoughts about texts by posting answers in Socrative. This program allows teachers to see student answers in aggregate live and determine the next steps to drive student discourse and improve comprehension within a lesson.

Section 4: Assessment and Data

Fully describe and justify how your school will have rigorous goals and adequate performance management to ensure students' academic success. Describe your assessment choices, data collection and analysis, and use of data to inform instruction, differentiate and evaluate the school as a whole.

(This value must be between 1 and 750 words)

One of our data north stars is student achievement on the Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR). Over the next five years, GLA's goal is to continue to increase proficiency in ELA and math until we are one of the top performing schools in Illinois. Our goal this year is to achieve 40% proficiency in ELA and 30% proficiency in math on the Illinois Assessment of Readiness, and increase that by 5% in each subsequent year. We set other goals related to each assessment.

We use a variety of large-scale assessments to progress monitor students' academic development. To ensure that our K-4th students are developing foundational literacy skills, we use the Independent Reading Literacy Assessment (IRLA). This assessment provides a baseline score at the start of the year and allows the school to continually monitor student literacy growth. Our school wide goal on this assessment is for 70% of students to reach the grade level benchmark or grow 1.5 points. In 2nd-8th grades, we assess students' growth and achievement on ELA grade level standards through quarterly interim assessments from the Achievement Network. In all grades for math, we assess students' growth and achievement on grade level standards through interim assessments tied to our math curriculum from Leap Education (formerly the Navigator program from Achievement First). To better understand skill growth, we also administer iReady's benchmark assessment at the start, middle, and end of the year. Like our goal for IRLA, schoolwide iReady goals are focused primarily on student growth with at least 60% of students reaching grade level proficiency or achieving their "stretch goal" for the year.

To monitor student mastery of content skills, knowledge, and standards, teachers use a variety of formative and summative assessments. In K-4 literacy classrooms, teachers use a combination of tools including comprehension exit tickets, progress checks, and writing samples to evaluate student mastery. In upper grades, teachers use daily exit tickets, writing samples, and unit assessments. In math classes, every class ends with an exit ticket assessment which teachers review daily to inform adjustments to the next day's instruction. Additionally, teachers administer unit assessments as a means to check student progress between interim assessments. In both subjects, instructional coaches support teacher review of assessment data and the development of next steps instructionally.

Each of these assessments has a reporting engine that allows staff to analyze student data at the item, student, class, grade, and subgroup level. After each of these assessments, our teachers and leaders engage in a process of data analysis to determine student strengths and gaps in learning. Teachers use the data to adjust scope and sequences and core instructional practices. Additionally, student intervention groups are adjusted based on the

data.

ELA

Tier 1

Adjust core content instructional practices

Tier 2

K-4

Adjust literacy block small group to target skill gaps + additional small group instruction (2-4x per week)

5-8

Targeted small group instruction in literacy intervention block (2x per week)

Tier 3

Additional targeted small group instruction from a literacy coach and interventionist

Math

Tier 1

Adjust core content instructional practices

Tier 2

K-4

Adjust math blast small group to target skill gaps + additional small group instruction (2-4x per week)

5-8

Targeted small group instruction in math intervention block (2x per week)

Tier 3

Additional targeted small group instruction from a math coach and interventionist

GLA has developed a performance management system where teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators are accountable for the academic performance of our students. Teacher and administrator evaluations include measurement on student achievement and growth and execution of quality instruction as determined from instructional observations tied to our Vision of Instruction. Staff not making adequate progress are given extra coaching supports to improve practices that will improve student outcomes.

In addition to our assessment systems to evaluate student progress, we use student survey tools during the year to learn more about the student experience in classrooms and other parts of the school. We administer Panorama well-being surveys 2x per year and administered the University of Chicago's Cultivate survey this year for the first time. The School Leadership Team and Culture and Climate Team reviews this data to determine school culture change and support priorities. Previous surveys have led to changes in classroom management practices and our menu of intervention supports.

Section 5: Effectively Serving All Students

Charter schools are obligated to take specific actions to ensure an open, fair, non-selective method of attracting and enrolling students, and all charter schools need to be ready to serve the group of students that choose to attend. Fully describe and justify your plan to offer a continuum of services for all types of students, including those that are educationally disadvantaged (such as low-income, special education, English learners, homeless, migrant and other at-risk students) and gifted and talented.

(This value must be between 1 and 1500 words)

Reflective of the communities we serve, GLA currently serves a student population that is 91% African-American, 7% Hispanic, and 2% Multiracial/Native-American, with 86% of scholars qualifying for free and reduced lunch. 15% of our scholars are diverse learners who qualify for special education services. All scholars, regardless of background, are held to the same high expectations and have access to high-quality instruction, additional academic support, and a rigorous learning environment. At GLA, additional academic support is provided through our four instructional coaches who conduct small academic intervention groups daily.

Economically Disadvantaged Students: Great Lakes Academy exists to provide students of the South Shore and South Chicago communities access to high-quality education. Understanding that the majority of our students come from economically disadvantaged families, GLA provides low-cost enrichment programming for all students. GLA partners with local vendors to provide students access to free dental cleaning, vision screenings, physicals and immunizations. GLA also provides wrap-around services including access to counseling through Open Seat and Touch of Wholeness, social services, and other social-emotional support services that can have an impact on a student's holistic development. These services are also available to our families through monthly parent workshops hosted at GLA or virtually.

To further promote equity, GLA provides a hot breakfast and lunch to all students through our vendor, Just A Dash. Students who are enrolled in GLA's after-school programming also receive free supper. Additionally, GLA's technology model ensures that all students from 2nd grade onward have access to their own Google Chromebook.

Homeless/Migrant Students: For GLA students in temporary living situations (STLS) or in state custody, we provide the same services our economically disadvantaged students receive. In partnership with our two social workers, students experiencing homelessness and migrant students receive GLA uniforms, waived school fees, and other material and service supports as needed. GLA social workers also work to cultivate and maintain relationships with our families experiencing homelessness and migrant families.

Diverse Learners: Great Lakes Academy prioritizes providing a differentiated learning environment that caters to all students, especially those with individualized needs. To achieve this, we have assembled a robust support team. This team consists of 5 Learning Behavior Specialists who can develop targeted interventions, 6 paraprofessionals who offer individualized instruction and classroom support, and therapists specializing in social work (2), speech-

language pathology (2), and occupational therapy (1). This comprehensive team works collaboratively to ensure the success of 71 students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and 23 students with 504 plans.

Furthermore, Great Lakes Academy leverages a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework to proactively identify and address student needs. This MTSS program provides a layered approach to intervention. The first tier consists of high-quality core instruction designed to benefit all students. For students who require additional support, Tier 2 offers targeted interventions delivered in small groups or individually by the Learning Behavior Specialists and paraprofessionals. Finally, Tier 3 provides the most intensive support, drawing on the expertise of the social workers, therapists, and Learning Behavior Specialists to develop highly individualized plans for students with IEPs. This comprehensive approach ensures that all students at Great Lakes Academy receive the support they need to thrive.

ELL: Great Lakes Academy supports English language learners through its Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework. Student academic progress is monitored on GLA's standard school assessments and through their ACCESS scores. Tier 1 instruction incorporates research-based sheltered instruction strategies that include visuals, graphic organizers, and scaffolded activities to build language skills and make core content more accessible. In Tier 2, the bilingual instructor can provide targeted small group instruction focused on language acquisition and vocabulary development specific to the subject matter. Tier 3 offers the most intensive support, with the bilingual instructor potentially co-teaching alongside the classroom teacher and developing individualized learning plans for students with IEPs or 504 plans who are also English language learners.

By combining the expertise of the bilingual instructor, the ML coordinator, and the MTSS framework, Great Lakes Academy ensures that English language learners receive the support they need to not only acquire English proficiency but also excel academically.

Section 6: Staffing and Professional Development Plan

Fully describe and justify your approach to staffing, inclusive of ratios, positions, etc. required for effective implementation of the chosen education model. Further, describe the process in which all staff will be supported in their ongoing professional development.

(This value must be between 1 and 800 words)

Our teachers are the center of our staffing structure from which all other decisions flow. Grades 1-4 have three teachers for every two homerooms, allowing content specialization and highly effective collaboration among grade-level teams. Kindergarten is flexibly designed to function the same way as grades 1-4 OR to be led by a single teacher in a smaller self-contained classroom, depending on the needs of each year's students. Grades 5-8 have one teacher for each content area: English Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies. All grades are additionally served by Specials Teachers (Physical Education/Health, plus Visual Arts in K-4 and Music in 5-8) and Special Education Teachers, with support from Paraeducators, ESL and Bilingual Teachers, and Teacher Assistants. Great Lakes Academy employs at least two in-house substitute teachers to help minimize disruptions to instruction when teachers are absent. Two School Social Workers and three Behavior Specialists all support our students' social and emotional development.

Directly supporting the teachers are instructional leadership roles, including four instructional coaches for SY 2024. The school's leadership team includes our Principal, Assistant Principal, and five deans focused on different aspects of the school (culture and climate; student and family engagement; specialized services; operations; and student life/enrichment). The school's Executive Director, Director of Development and External Affairs, and Director of Talent support the school leadership team with behind-the-scenes and external facing work, including fundraising, brand awareness, human resources, and staff recruitment.

In order to recruit and select outstanding staff, Great Lakes Academy has identified the non-negotiable and ideal competencies for any GLA staff member and for each specific role. These qualities inform our job descriptions, which we post on a variety of job sites for year-round recruitment. A large portion of highly qualified candidates find GLA through paid job sponsorships on Indeed. We also attend education job fairs, maintain an active social media presence, and offer an employee referral bonus. Given the well-documented national teacher shortage, GLA uses creative strategies to find talent, including partnering with ConnectUS to source highly qualified international teachers and secure their visas. Great Lakes Academy additionally offers incentives such as relocation stipends, signing bonuses, and tuition reimbursement for candidates earning their PEL, LBS1, or ESL endorsement, including through several partner alternative certification programs (Relay, National Louis University, and Lewis University).

The hiring process includes a resume submission with short answer questions, phone screen with our Director of Talent, sample lesson or other hiring tasks, final interview with the hiring manager(s), conversation with our

Executive Director, and thorough reference check. Throughout the process, our team uses rubrics to mitigate bias and select the strongest candidates. We give priority to teacher candidates who have their PEL with endorsement in the appropriate grade/subject. However, when fully certified teachers are not available, GLA utilizes charter school license flexibility to ensure that every classroom has a committed, mission-aligned teacher, with or without the PEL. We provide robust professional development and coaching along with tuition reimbursement to ensure teachers have the knowledge and skills to drive student growth and achievement. Great Lakes Academy remains compliant with Charter Law staffing requirements which stipulate that at least 75% of staff must be certified.

Professional development (PD) is one of Great Lakes Academy's highest priorities. Every school year begins with several weeks of full-day PD. The first week, just for new-to-GLA staff, provides a crash course in "The GLA Way," covering everything from behavior management to family communication to curriculum. The following two weeks provide all staff with continued training in key topics like supporting diverse learners, leading SEL, and analyzing student data to drive instruction. Both special education and general education teachers benefit from external consultants for specialized training, covering new initiatives like the Wilson Reading System, to support diverse learners and help close academic gaps. Additionally, our early dismissal Fridays carve out time for weekly PD sessions that deepen and expand on summer learning. Our "content" PDs, led by instructional coaches, separate teachers by grade band and subject area so that they have an opportunity to dive deeply into their specific academic focus. Finally, our annual calendar includes several full day PD sessions, typically after interim assessments to prioritize data analysis and action planning.

As part of our robust PD programming, our instructional coaches observe and meet with teachers weekly to provide individualized feedback, discuss any concerns, and generally offer support. Weekly feedback and action steps are recorded in Whetstone, allowing both coaches and senior leadership to track teachers' progress. Our school leaders' monthly school-wide walkthroughs allow them to look for trends to inform PD and to support coaches in their work with teachers. In addition, teachers receive formal midyear and end-of-year evaluations based on GLA's carefully designed instructional vision rubric; these evaluations synthesize and complement the coaches' weekly feedback.

Section 7: Financial Management and Monitoring Plan

As independently governed public schools, charters are fully responsible for ensuring quality financial management practices and ongoing financial stability. Fully describe your school's plan to be compliant, strategic, and responsible with finances and business services.

(This value must be between 1 and 1000 words)

Great Lakes Academy Charter School has established a comprehensive financial management plan to ensure compliance, strategic planning, and responsible handling of finances and business services. This plan, as detailed in our Financial-Fiscal Policies Handbook, emphasizes the importance of internal controls, fiscal responsibility, and accountability in accordance with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) and the Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB) regulations.

Key Components of the Financial Management Plan

1. Compliance with Laws and Regulations:

Great Lakes Academy commits to adhering to all relevant laws, regulations governing charter schools in Chicago and Illinois, and the terms of its charter contract.

Financial activities will align with GAAP, ensuring long-term financial stability and protecting the school's assets and reputation.

2. Financial Leadership and Management:

The financial management team, including the Board of Directors, Finance Committee, Executive Director, and operations staff, oversees the school's fiscal responsibilities.

The Board of Directors maintains ultimate fiduciary responsibility, while day-to-day management is executed by the Chief Operating Officer with oversight from the Executive Director. Policies are reviewed annually for amendments, emphasizing the safeguarding of the organization's assets through controlled procedures.

3. Internal Control Structure:

Great Lakes Academy employs a structured internal control environment to safeguard its assets, which includes cash, cash equivalents, and fixed assets.

Key elements include a solid internal control environment, a comprehensive accounting system, detailed internal control procedures, and a well-defined accounting cycle.

Policies ensure the separation of duties, restricted access to valuable assets, document control, records retention, and annual independent audits.

4. Processing Purchases and Cash Disbursements:

The school follows a stringent process for authorizing procurements, ensuring that purchases serve the school's

mission and fulfill genuine needs.

Competitive bidding procedures are in place for contracts over \$25,000, requiring at least three vendor quotes to ensure the best value.

5. Management of Cash and Investments:

Policies are established for opening new bank accounts, investment of funds, and managing cash holdings, with Board approval required for significant financial decisions.

6. Property and Equipment Management:

The school maintains accurate inventories and records of property and equipment, adhering to a capitalization and depreciation policy to safeguard and accurately report assets.

7. Borrowing Funds and Budgeting:

Any short-term or long-term borrowing requires Board approval, with loan agreements specifying terms clearly. An annual budget process, led by the Executive Director and involving key staff, is rigorously followed, with Board approval required for significant deviations.

8. Audits, Payroll, and Records Retention:

An annual independent audit is conducted to ensure financial statements are in accordance with GAAP. The payroll process is managed with external support, ensuring compliance with tax and employment regulations. A detailed records retention policy ensures that financial documents are securely maintained and appropriately destroyed when no longer needed.

9. Insurance, Fraud and Misappropriation, and Whistleblower Policies:

Insurance policies are maintained in accordance with legal requirements and reviewed annually to protect the school's assets.

The school has established clear policies for detecting and preventing fraud, with procedures for reporting and investigating suspected fraudulent activities.

A whistleblower policy encourages the reporting of unethical or illegal activities, ensuring protection for those who report violations in good faith.

Through this comprehensive financial management plan, Great Lakes Academy demonstrates its commitment to responsible financial management, ensuring the school's long-term viability and compliance with all regulatory requirements.

Section 8: Board Capacity and Governance Structure

A competent, trained governing board is essential to the success of a public charter school. Fully describe how your school has developed a strong governing board with a diverse set of skills. Be sure to include how board members understand their roles and responsibilities and have developed a transition plan and ongoing professional development to maintain board strength going forward.

(This value must be between 1 and 750 words)

Great Lakes Academy (GLA) has established a robust framework for developing a strong governing board with a diverse set of skills, ensuring that board members understand their roles and responsibilities, and implementing a transition plan and ongoing professional development to maintain board strength. This framework is outlined in the bylaws and conflict of interest policy of GLA.

Development of a Strong Governing Board

GLA's board is governed by a self-perpetuating board of directors, as stated in the bylaws, with no members of the Corporation itself. This structure allows for a focused and dedicated governance model, emphasizing the recruitment of directors who are deeply committed to GLA's mission and values. The board's composition and the election process are designed to ensure a diverse set of skills among the directors, aligning with the strategic needs of the school.

Understanding of Roles and Responsibilities

The bylaws clearly define the general powers, number and tenure, qualifications, election, resignation, removal, and vacancies concerning the board of directors. This clarity ensures that each director understands their roles and responsibilities from the outset. The bylaws also specify that the board will administer the affairs and overall policy of the Corporation, highlighting the importance of strategic oversight and fiscal responsibility.

Transition Plan

The bylaws provide for a staggered term system for the directors, ensuring that the board's composition remains stable over time while allowing for the introduction of new members with fresh perspectives. This system facilitates a smooth transition as outgoing directors are replaced by newly elected ones, maintaining the board's continuity and effectiveness.

Ongoing Professional Development

The bylaws mandate the formation of a Governance Committee, tasked with, among other responsibilities, providing ongoing orientation to directors and overseeing an annual Executive Director assessment process. This committee ensures that the board members are continually updated on best practices in nonprofit governance and the specific needs of GLA. Moreover, the bylaws require that all directors, officers, and committee members annually affirm their understanding and commitment to GLA's conflict of interest policy, further ensuring that the

board's actions are aligned with the highest ethical standards.

Maintenance of Board Strength

To maintain board strength going forward, GLA has implemented several key strategies:

Regular Review and Adaptation: The bylaws and conflict of interest policy are subject to periodic reviews, ensuring that they remain relevant and effective in guiding the board's operations and governance practices.

Commitment to Ethics and Compliance: The conflict of interest policy delineates procedures for addressing potential conflicts, ensuring that the board's decisions are made in the best interest of GLA and its mission.

Transparent and Inclusive Governance: The bylaws ensure compliance with Illinois' Open Meetings Act, making the board's meetings open to the public and fostering an environment of transparency and accountability.

Together, these elements form a comprehensive framework for GLA's board governance, ensuring that the board is well-equipped to provide strategic leadership, fiscal oversight, and ethical governance in support of the school's mission to prepare K-8 students to excel in and graduate from high school and college.

Section 9: School Leadership and Management

Fully describe and justify the intended leadership structure of your school. Share a strong leadership and staffing plan that ensures high-quality implementation and sustainability of the school.

(This value must be between 1 and 750 words)

Introduction:

Our school is committed to providing high-quality education and fostering a supportive environment for all students. Central to achieving these goals is a strong leadership structure and staffing plan that ensures the effective implementation and sustainability of our educational programs.

Leadership Structure:

Executive Director

The executive director serves as the leader of the organization, overseeing budget and strategy.

Responsibilities include ensuring the principal carries out the instructional program, student supports, and sound operations of the school.

The executive director meets with the school's board of directors to ensure the school meets its district, state, and federal compliance obligations.

Managing Director of Operations

The Managing Director of Operations sets and carries out the operational strategy of the organization.

Responsibilities include creating staffing and technical infrastructures to reach school goals.

Principal:

The principal serves as the instructional leader of the school, overseeing all aspects of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Responsibilities include providing instructional leadership to teachers, managing school operations, fostering a positive school culture, and engaging with parents and the community.

The principal will hold regular meetings with staff to ensure alignment with school goals and provide professional development opportunities.

Assistant Principal (Academics):

The assistant principal focuses on academic affairs, working closely with teachers to enhance instructional practices, curriculum development, and assessment strategies.

Responsibilities include conducting classroom observations, providing feedback to teachers, and implementing data-driven instructional strategies to support student learning.

The assistant principal collaborates with the principal to develop and implement initiatives aimed at improving student achievement.

Assistant Principal (Operations and Student Support):

The assistant principal oversees school operations and student support services, including discipline, attendance, and student services.

Responsibilities include managing school facilities, coordinating transportation services, and implementing programs to support student well-being and social-emotional development.

The assistant principal works with stakeholders to address any issues related to student behavior or support services.

Deans of Instruction (English Language Arts and Math)

The deans of instruction provide curriculum oversight and instructional coaching within specific subject areas, Responsibilities include facilitating coaching meetings, carrying out classroom observations, supporting teacher professional development, managing school wide assessment systems, and ensuring alignment with state standards and educational best practices.

Dean of Specialized Services

The dean of specialized services oversees special education and English learner instruction and program compliance.

Responsibilities include supervising case management systems for students with IEP's, ensuring the school stays in compliance under federal law, and managing compliance with our English language learner program.

Dean of Student and Family Engagement

The Dean of Student and Family Engagement is a lead social worker who creates and manages our student support programs

Responsibilities include creating and managing programs in support of student mental health and well-being, securing and managing partnerships with vendors who provide 1:1 services for students, and managing the school's program for Students in Temporary Living Situations (STLS)

Staffing Plan:

Recruitment and Selection:

We will recruit highly qualified educators who are dedicated to our school's mission and values.

The selection process will include multiple interviews, demonstration lessons, and thorough background checks to ensure candidates meet our standards for excellence.

Professional Development:

We will invest in ongoing professional development to support teacher growth and enhance instructional practices.

Professional development opportunities will include workshops, seminars, peer observations, and collaboration with educational experts to stay abreast of the latest research and best practices.

Mentoring and Support:

New teachers will be paired with experienced mentors who provide guidance, support, and feedback during their first year.

We will establish a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement, where teachers feel supported and empowered to excel in their roles.

Evaluation and Feedback:

We will implement a comprehensive evaluation system to assess teacher performance and provide constructive feedback for professional growth.

Evaluations will be based on multiple measures, including classroom observations, student achievement data, and contributions to the school community.

Justification:

A strong leadership structure ensures effective decision-making, accountability, and alignment with the school's mission and goals.

Our staffing plan prioritizes recruitment, professional development, and support to attract and retain talented educators who are committed to student success.

By investing in our leadership team and staff, we ensure high-quality implementation and sustainability of our educational programs, ultimately benefiting the academic achievement and well-being of our students.

In conclusion, our proposed leadership structure and staffing plan are designed to promote excellence in education and create a supportive environment where all students can thrive. We appreciate your consideration of our grant application and look forward to the opportunity to further discuss our plans for advancing educational outcomes in our community.

Section 11: Growth Plan

Describe how the charter school will grow its enrollment and how it intends to implement its growth plan. The applicant will include current recruitment and enrollment practices.

(This value must be between 1 and 800 words)

Growth Plan

With this transformative investment, Great Lakes Academy seeks to expand access to high-quality education, enhance academic achievement for all students, and foster a supportive learning environment. Since its establishment in 2014, GLA has consistently expanded its enrollment, incorporating one grade level annually until reaching full capacity in the 2021-22 school year. Over the subsequent three years, applicant numbers have surged by over 26 percent. To accommodate this rising demand, we are targeting the addition of 60 seats to our student body.

To effectively grow its enrollment, GLA has a strategic growth plan that addresses key areas such as community engagement, targeted recruitment, academic excellence, and stakeholder satisfaction. The following outlines a comprehensive approach to growing enrollment, including current recruitment and enrollment practices and strategies for implementing the growth plan.

Current Recruitment and Enrollment Practices

Open Houses and School Tours: Hosting regular open houses and school tours for prospective students and their families. This provides an opportunity to showcase the school's facilities, curriculum, extracurricular activities, and unique culture.

Community Outreach: Engaging with local communities through participation in community events, partnerships with local businesses and organizations, and presentations at community centers and local educational fairs.

Digital Marketing: Utilizing social media, the school website, and email newsletters to highlight student achievements, school events, and application deadlines, reaching out to a broader audience. With support from CSP funds, GLA aims to raise awareness among a broader range of families across the Chicago region.

Word of Mouth: Encouraging current students, parents, and staff to share their positive experiences with their networks, leveraging personal recommendations as a powerful tool for attracting new families. This represents our primary channel for student recruitment, constituting almost 40 percent of all new student enrollments in the 2023-24 academic year.

Targeted Advertising: Using targeted advertising in local newspapers, radio, and online platforms to reach families within the school's geographic area and demographic target.

Enrollment: Offering assistance with the application process, including in-person support sessions, to make it easier for families to apply. Annually, GLA conducts a lottery followed by a rolling enrollment period to fill any remaining vacancies. The front office team plays a crucial role in establishing personal connections with families, providing them with the necessary tools and resources to navigate the registration process smoothly, and removing barriers that may exist. After families complete registration, there are multiple touchpoints, ensuring they feel confident that GLA is the right school for their family. These touchpoints include orientation, a back-to-school barbeque, and family engagement events throughout the school year.

Implementation of the Growth Plan

Employing a new Student Admission Lead is crucial for skillfully managing the influx in enrollment. This position, in partnership with the Operations Director, will implement a robust range of recruitment tactics while simultaneously guaranteeing that prospective families receive tailored support at every stage of the application and registration process up to the commencement of the school year. Embedded within our approach to recruitment and enrollment are the following strategies for growth:

Enhancing Academic Programs: Continuously improving the academic program to offer a rigorous, engaging, and relevant curriculum that meets the needs of a diverse student body. Highlighting specialized programs, such as our enrichment program, arts partnerships, or bilingual education, can attract students with specific interests.

Building Community Partnerships: Establishing partnerships with local businesses, non-profits, and higher education institutions to create internship opportunities, mentorship programs, and enhanced learning experiences for students.

Expanding Outreach Efforts: Identifying and targeting underserved communities within the school's area to ensure that the school's opportunities are accessible to all families. This may include multilingual marketing materials, community liaison roles, and outreach programs specifically designed for these communities.

Investing in Professional Development: Ensuring that teachers and staff are equipped with the skills and knowledge to effectively recruit and support a growing and diverse student population. Professional development should focus on cultural competency, differentiated instruction, and effective communication strategies.

Leveraging Technology: Utilizing technology to streamline the application and enrollment process, making it more

user-friendly. Implementing a robust Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system can help track inquiries, manage communications with prospective families, and analyze the effectiveness of recruitment strategies.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Regularly monitoring enrollment trends and evaluating the effectiveness of recruitment strategies. This involves collecting data on application numbers, demographic information, reasons for choosing the school, and family feedback about the recruitment process.

Adjusting Strategies as Needed: Being flexible and ready to adjust recruitment and enrollment strategies based on feedback, data analysis, and changing community needs.

By focusing on these areas, GLA can effectively grow its enrollment by attracting and retaining students whose families chose our educational model. The key to successful implementation is a commitment to continuous improvement, community engagement, and a deep understanding of the needs and preferences of the families the school aims to serve.