



# SOLA

School of Leadership Afghanistan

## HEAD OF SCHOOL SEARCH

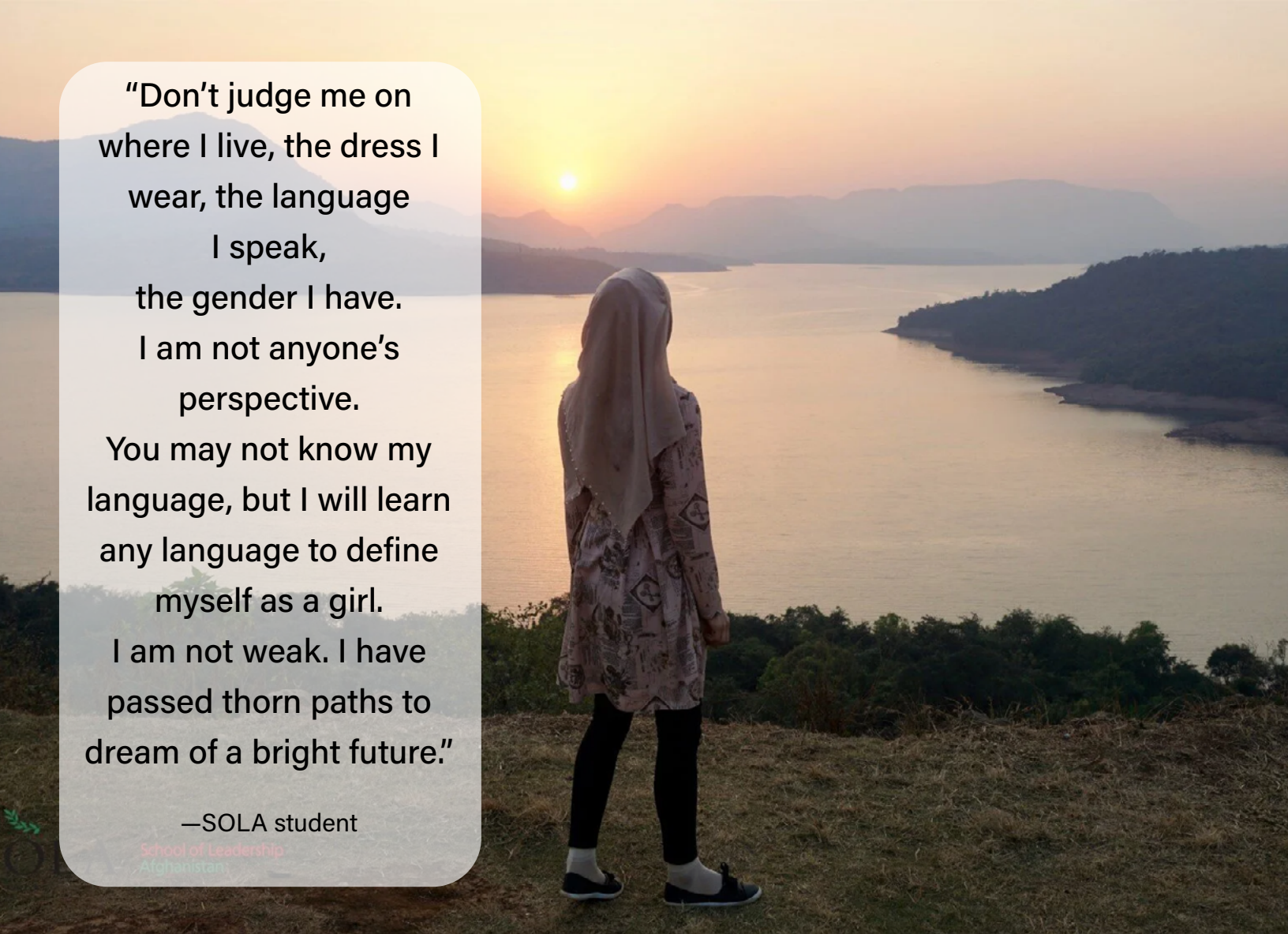
Position Starts July 1, 2026

Rwanda



MISSION

**Today, I am here,  
I am brave.**



"Don't judge me on  
where I live, the dress I  
wear, the language  
I speak,  
the gender I have.  
I am not anyone's  
perspective.  
You may not know my  
language, but I will learn  
any language to define  
myself as a girl.  
I am not weak. I have  
passed thorn paths to  
dream of a bright future."

—SOLA student

School of Leadership  
Afghanistan

## The Vision

SOLA educates the girls who'll change the world. That's not hyperbole—it's the school's promise, purpose, and the work its community has committed to since day one. The vision is transformative: a generation of compassionate, confident Afghan women with the leadership skills to rebuild Afghanistan and guide their homeland toward a peaceful, prosperous future.

As founder Shabana Basij-Rasikh says, the secret to a peaceful Afghanistan is no secret at all. It is educated girls. SOLA is a boarding school where Afghan girls in grades pre-6 through 10 (currently) focus on their education in ways impossible anywhere else on Earth. Here, they're challenged by rigorous coursework and encouraged to take on leadership roles. Here, they build bonds of sisterhood that transcend every geographic and cultural barrier Afghanistan has ever known. In the Pashto language, "sola" means peace—and this is what the school's students will bring home.

## At a Glance

- Girls Boarding School
- Grades 6-12
- 100 students
- 5,416 applications, from Afghan girls in 13 countries
- About 30 new students enrolled (0.5% of applicants)
- 100 students currently, 250 students on the new campus
- Annual budget wholly supported by philanthropy
- 80 faculty and staff
- 27-acre campus in development



**“What is one girl worth?  
She’s worth everything...  
and she can do anything.”**

**—Shabana Basij-Rasikh, Founder**



## **The SOLA Story**

In March 2016, twenty-four Afghan girls walked onto SOLA’s campus in Kabul for the first time. These sixth graders had chosen a path that under Taliban rule fifteen years earlier would have been unthinkable: attending Afghanistan’s first and only all-girls boarding school. Those girls came from fourteen provinces, traveling through territory that was rarely safe. They came anyway. SOLA grew—enrolling a new class annually until nearly one hundred girls from twenty-eight provinces called the campus home. Their families, especially their fathers, some of whom received death threats for educating their daughters, showed extraordinary courage.

Then came August 15, 2021. The Taliban swept back into power, and Shabana closed SOLA’s gates for the last time. Ten days later, nearly 250 members of the SOLA community—including the entire student body of more than one hundred girls—arrived in Rwanda. Four days after that, classes resumed. Rwanda, a nation that knows both suffering and resilience, welcomed them. Here is where SOLA is setting down roots, with plans to one day return to Afghanistan while maintaining its Rwandan campus.

The day will come when the school returns to Afghanistan. But now is the moment to grow SOLA the school and expand SOLA the mission.



## The Founder

Shabana Basij-Rasikh was six years old when the Taliban seized Kabul in 1996. Girls were forbidden from school. But across Afghanistan, secret schools opened anyway. Shabana's family was among those ready to risk everything. Because her older sister couldn't appear in public without a burqa and chaperone, Shabana dressed as a boy and accompanied her to hidden classrooms, schoolbooks concealed in shopping bags.

When the Taliban fell in 2001, Shabana returned to school openly. She attended high school in the United States, then Middlebury College in Vermont, where in 2008 she co-founded SOLA. After graduating magna cum laude and earning a Master's from Oxford, Shabana has devoted her entire adult life to this work. She's been named a CNN Leading Woman, a National Geographic Explorer of the Year (2023), and received Afghanistan's Malalai Medal. But her greatest accomplishment came in August 2021 when she led the evacuation of the SOLA community to safety. Today, under the Taliban's renewed rule, Afghanistan is once again as it was during Shabana's youth—women's rights restricted, girls forbidden from completing their education. Shabana's commitment remains unchanged: to make SOLA a place where Afghan girls will always be free to learn.

## SOLA's Future

The Taliban's return changed everything and nothing. SOLA's commitment to educating Afghan girls can never change. In 2025, the school received more than 5,000 applications from Afghan girls in thirteen nations. SOLA can enroll only 0.5% of those who applied—a staggering number that reveals thousands of girls desperate for education.





SOLA is responding through innovation. In March 2024, the school launched SOLAx, its online academy offering app-based education to Afghan girls worldwide. SOLA is also constructing a new physical campus in Rwanda for September 2026, and hasn't abandoned its dream of returning to Afghanistan to operate both facilities in tandem.

SOLA is creating a movement—a network of compassionate, confident young Afghan women prepared to return home and rebuild their homeland. The girls the school educates today will be the leaders Afghanistan needs tomorrow. They'll be doctors, teachers, engineers, artists, and changemakers. They'll remember what they learned at SOLA: that they are sisters, that they are capable of anything, and that Afghanistan's future belongs to them.

## A New Home for SOLA

On a quiet hillside under Rwanda's sunny sky, SOLA's future is taking shape. At full capacity, the school will enroll more than 250 students who'll live in dormitories, study in state-of-the-art classrooms and labs, pray in the mosque, and gather in the student center. Groundbreaking was in February 2025, with students displaying art, presenting speeches, and reciting poetry.

The school's first academic year in this new campus begins in September 2026. As Shabana's father told her: "You can lose everything you own in your life. Your money can be stolen. But the one thing that will always remain with you is what is in here"—and he would point to his head. "Your education is the biggest investment in your life." The girls of SOLA never will regret theirs.





## Strategic Plan Overview 2022-2027

SOLA's mission is to educate Afghan girls. The school's leaders envision SOLA students as members of the best-educated generation of women in Afghanistan's history – the women who will lead their nation into a peaceful and prosperous future. To accomplish this, SOLA has set three core strategic priorities for the years 2022-2027:

- **Establishing a permanent school in Rwanda** for Afghan girls in grades pre-6 through 12, including securing a land grant from the Rwandan government and constructing a permanent campus that will operate alongside a future return to Kabul
- **Establishing access to education for Afghan girls unable to attend school** through an entirely online curriculum accessible within Afghanistan and worldwide, plus a satellite campus in a nation with significant Afghan refugee populations near Afghanistan
- **Building an active network of SOLA students and alumnae** to nurture bonds of sisterhood and create a community of highly educated Afghan women committed to leading Afghanistan toward a brighter future

These priorities reflect SOLA's response to urgent need—the Taliban's bans on girls attending school beyond sixth grade and on women attending university—and the school's unwavering mission to educate Afghan girls regardless of where in the world they may live. SOLA intends to return to Kabul when conditions allow while maintaining its Rwanda campus to serve the ongoing needs of the Afghan refugee diaspora.



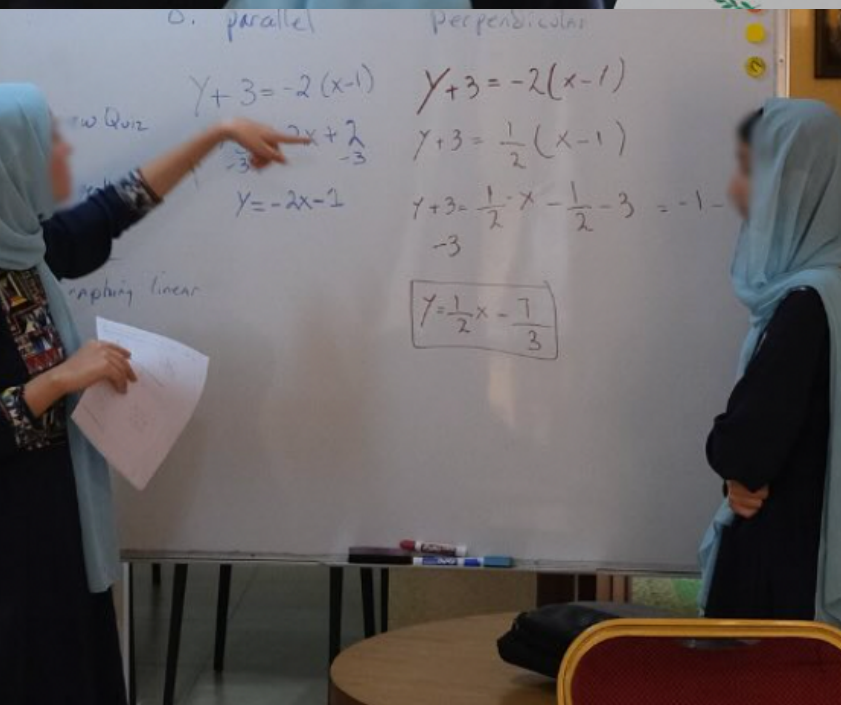


## Seeking the New Leader of SOLA

The Board of SOLA seeks a collaborative, culturally competent, and inspiring Head of School to lead this special school as it begins the next stage in its evolution. This unique opportunity will be a great match for an experienced, dedicated leader with a deep understanding of the boarding school experience, the capacity to build and nurture relationships within a diverse school community, and the ability to manage change with care and compassion. Working in close partnership with the school's founder and leadership team, the next Head of School will be kind, approachable, and responsive as well as a passionate advocate for the SOLA and its mission. The next Head will harness the passion evident throughout this remarkable community and build on its resilient mission-driven foundation to strengthen and grow the school.

### Professional Skills Desired in the Next Head of School

- Strong communicator and collaborator who excels at interpersonal relationships, seeks input in decision-making, and designs and facilitates effective meetings
- Strategic leader with excellent organizational skills who demonstrates exceptional time management, plans and schedules in advance, sets clear goals, and executes on them with thoughtful, data-driven decisions
- Empowering delegator who distributes leadership, responsibility, and decision-making to others while respecting and leveraging specific expertise without micromanaging
- Accountable and consistent leader who sets clear expectations, holds people accountable, and articulates and executes policies consistently across all areas of the school
- Champion of people development who values faculty and staff professional growth, evaluation, and development while respecting employees' personal time and ensuring fair and equitable treatment
- Cultural steward and community builder who serves as keeper of the culture and role model for adults and students while building and nurturing an inclusive community



- Culturally competent leader who understands, appreciates, and respects Afghan culture, embraces the Rwandan location and culture, and honors the diversity of cultures at SOLA
- Strategic and systems thinker with solid understanding of school finance and budgeting who can balance operational excellence with long-term vision
- Seasoned school leader with lived experience in boarding schools (ideally all-girls), strong middle/upper school pedagogical knowledge, and practical understanding of curriculum development and implementation

### Personal Attributes Embraced by the New Leader

- Warm, approachable, and compassionate leader who is honest, trustworthy, and an excellent listener while maintaining appropriate professional boundaries
- Visible and engaged presence on campus who demonstrates genuine interest in understanding the work and needs of all employees across the school
- Culturally competent and respectful of Muslim culture, Islamic religious practices, and the diverse backgrounds that make up the SOLA community
- Inclusive community builder who fosters an environment of open, respectful dialogue where all voices are valued and heard
- Inspirational leader, not a boss who demonstrates what a female leader can be and brings a leadership presence that is both firm and kind
- Emotionally intelligent and self-aware with the maturity to be empathetic without being drawn into emotional drama
- Calm, steady, and resilient leader who remains fair and balanced even in challenging circumstances
- Flexible and adaptable with the ability to adjust approaches and strategies while maintaining core values and vision





## Compensation

Compensation and benefits are competitive for this role, and spacious housing on campus is provided.

## The Search Schedule

The Search Committee plans to identify a preliminary group of candidates to interview (virtually) in early December. The Board expects to reach a decision by March 1, 2026.

### Learn More Here

- [SOLA on "60 Minutes"](#)
- [Shabana's Blog](#)
- [TED Talks: Dare to Educate Afghan Girls](#)
- [SOLAx: Online Education for All](#)



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'You can lose everything you  
own in your life. Your money  
can be stolen. But the one  
thing that will always remain  
with you is what is in here.' And  
he would point to his head.  
'Your education is the biggest  
investment in your life,'  
he would say.  
'Don't ever regret it.'"

–Shabana Basij-Rasikh





## To Apply

Candidates interested in this position are asked to submit the following materials in a single merged pdf file to Nat Conard or Tracy Bennett as soon as possible. The deadline for submission of materials is November 30, 2025. Dossiers will be reviewed upon receipt.

- EC Summary Sheet (contact Nat Conard or Tracy Bennett for this document)
- Letter of Interest addressed to the Search Committee
- Current Résumé
- Statement of Educational Leadership Philosophy
- A list of five or more references with contact information (name, relationship to candidate, phone and email address); references will not be contacted without permission from the candidate
- Disclosure Statement (contact Nat Conard or Tracy Bennett for this document)

Nat Conard, Educators Collaborative  
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Tracy Bennett, Educators Collaborative  
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