APPROVED

New Heights Academy Charter School

Minutes

Board of Trustees Meeting

Date and Time
Wednesday May 14, 2025 at 7:00 PM

Location
1818 Amsterdam Avenue
New York, NY 10031

Trustees Present
A. Vasquez, D. Ortiz, M. Vargas, N. Sunshine, N. Weiss (remote), W. Council

Trustees Absent
A. Cummings

Guests Present
Dr. Crystal Joye, Fred Givens, K. Valbrun, L. Garcia, W. Ramos

I. Opening Items

A. Record Attendance

B. Call the Meeting to Order

A. Vasquez called a meeting of the board of trustees of New Heights Academy Charter School to order on Wednesday May 14, 2025 at 7:04 PM.

C. Approve Minutes

A. Vasquez made a motion to approve the minutes from Board of Trustees Meeting on 03-27-25.
M. Vargas seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

D. Public Participation Guidelines

Wendy Ramos shared the outline of public participation guidelines.

Discussion on Public Participation Guidelines
The board revisited the topic of public participation, following up on the discussion from the previous meeting. The following procedures were outlined and presented for review:

- A **Zoom link** will be created for each board meeting to allow parents and members of the public to join virtually.
- A structured process will be implemented to allow members of the public to **sign up for public comment** in advance.
- Each speaker will be allotted a **maximum of two minutes** to speak.
- A total of **no more than 15 minutes** will be allocated for public comment during each meeting.
- The board is **not required to respond** to public comments during the meeting; the purpose is to hear from the public.
- An option will be provided for stakeholders who cannot attend the meeting to **submit written comments** in advance. These written submissions will be monitored and reviewed to ensure all voices are heard.
- Angel Vasquez shared these guidelines aim to enhance transparency and meet public expectations and that they would only be allotted 2 minutes for comments.
- It was noted that the implementation of these procedures will help **satisfy feedback received during the school's renewal process** regarding increased parent engagement and participation.
- The Executive Director also expressed an interest in working closely with the **Parent Association President** to serve as a thought partner in shaping ongoing efforts for meaningful parent involvement.

These guidelines were presented for board **review and feedback** before implementation at future meetings.

II. Community Comments

A. Upcoming School Events

Wendy Ramos shared the upcoming events for May:

- **Staff Appreciation Week**

May 6 – 9, 2025

- **Family Meeting**
  May 12, 2025 @ 5:30 PM
- **National Honor Society Induction Ceremony**
  May 28, 2025 @ 6:00 PM
- **High School Spring Fling**
  May 16, 2025 6:00 – 10:00 PM
- **Memorial Day – School Closed**
  Monday, May 27, 2025

Graduation Update
It was shared that **graduation will take place on Tuesday, June 24** at **El Museo del Barrio**. Board members were informed of the date and invited to attend.

Angel Vasquez was asked to confirm if he plans to speak at the ceremony so that his participation can be included in the event program.

B. Staff Representative Update

Nickolas Weiss reported that state testing was successfully completed. He noted that the coordination of the process is a significant logistical effort, especially given that all assessments are now computer-based. Despite this complexity, testing went smoothly. Student activity time in the cafeteria and outdoor spaces after testing was also well managed

Staff and Student Well-being
Mr. Weiss also shared updates on staff and student well-being. The Executive Director is conducting ongoing one-on-one meetings with staff members to better understand their experiences and the challenges they face. These conversations are intended to inform ongoing efforts to support a positive school culture and work environment.

C. Parent Association

The president of the parent association will be at the next meeting.

III. Executive Director Update

A. Executive Director Update

Staffing Updates
The Executive Director shared that internal promotions will be announced at the June board meeting. Additionally, some necessary staffing reductions are being implemented, and conversations with key individuals affected have already taken place.

Enrollment and Program Expansion

Efforts are ongoing to support **enrollment and student recruitment** for the upcoming school year. The school is exploring the introduction of a **12:1:1 program** as an additional academic option. This would allow students who require a 12:1:1 setting to start at New Heights and eventually transition into mainstream classes, potentially serving as a unique niche for the school.

- This program would run in addition to existing ICT models.
- The Executive Director will be submitting an **implementation plan** to the authorizer, outlining details such as staffing, student eligibility, and program structure.
- The goal is to reduce barriers for students with IEPs who currently decline offers due to unmet support needs.

Civic Engagement Initiative
Nicky Sunshine is collaborating with the **Civic Engagement Commission** as part of **Phase 3** of a citywide initiative. Each borough is selecting projects and soliciting input from community members. The city is encouraging voting from residents aged **11 and up**. Students and staff will be encouraged to participate as a way to promote **youth voice and civic involvement**.

Student Mental Health & Safety Concerns
The Executive Director reported a concerning rise in **student mental health issues**, particularly among seniors. Multiple students have been **hospitalized due to suicidal ideation or attempts**, with underlying factors including anxiety, difficulty fitting in, home instability, and pressure.

- There has also been an **uptick in homelessness** among students.
- Tragically, some former students have been victims of violence, including shootings.
- In response to mental health concerns:
    - The school calls **Mobile Crisis** as needed.
    - Staff is closely monitoring and supporting affected students.

Certification and Professional Development
During the charter renewal visit, it was noted that the school currently has **more uncertified teachers than certified teachers**.

- Fred Givens shared that the **Relay Graduate School of Education** presented a teacher certification pathway.
- Relay offers an **affordable online program**, approximately **$27,000**, and some New Heights teachers have already completed it.

Renewal and Regents Update

Angel Vasques inquired about the results of the Regents' decision. The Executive Director confirmed that the school received a **full 5-year charter renewal**.

Data Dashboard Review
The Executive Director presented and reviewed the **school performance dashboard**, highlighting key indicators and metrics.

B. Academic Update

Middle School Update shared by Dr. Crystal Joye:

Standardized Testing Administration
In preparation for the New York State assessments, testing will be administered on a staggered schedule between April 28th and May 9th.

End of Year Students Assessment
Students will complete the i-Ready End-of-Year (EOY) assessments during the week of June 9th.

Final Teacher Evaluations
Final teacher evaluations will be completed and submitted by June 20, 2025, in alignment with annual requirements.

Parent & Community Engagement Efforts

- We hosted a family meeting focused on assessment readiness, where we shared key information about testing procedures for all upcoming standardized assessments.
- Our Summer Soar enrichment program will begin on July 7th. A parent information session is scheduled for June 11th to provide families with program details and expectations.

Summer School Plans

- The Summer Soar program has been promoted school-wide, and we currently have 75 out of 120 spots filled. Final enrollment decisions will be made following the close of Marking Period 3.
- The program is open to all students, with priority given to students with disabilities (SWDs), English Language Learners (ELLs), and those at risk for retention.

High School Update shared by Fred Givens:

Academic and Student Achievement Update
Advanced Placement (AP) Testing

- AP testing is concluding, with **AP Psychology** being the final exam.

- Most students reported feeling confident about their performance.

Graduation Readiness & At-Risk Students

- Graduation Participation in Danger (PID) meetings have taken place.
- Parents of students at risk of not graduating have been notified.
- Students with averages below 70 are being closely monitored, with opportunities remaining to improve outcomes before year-end.

Regents & Course Performance
English/ELA

- Approximately **50% of students are on track** across most grades.
- **English III: ~60%** of students are on track to pass the Regents. This is encouraging, as AP students have already satisfied the exam requirement.

History

- **AP U.S. History students** (25 students) are expected to pass the Regents.
- Once AP scores are included, **over 50% of students** will be on track for history assessments.

Math

- **Algebra II:** Strong performance; a teacher created an **online learning program** mid-March to address instructional gaps due to a prior vacancy. Another mock Regents exam will be administered to gauge readiness.
- **Geometry:** Continued area of concern despite efforts. However, most students have already passed a required math Regents, leaving only a handful needing geometry to graduate.

Science

- **Chemistry:** Noted as a bright spot; **strong student engagement and lab work**. Teacher is highly effective, and Regents pass rates are the highest in recent years.
- **Biology & Earth Science:** Improvements noted, but additional support and instructional adjustments are planned, particularly for Earth Science.

Languages

- **Italian:** ~70% of students were on track as of March. AP Italian students felt confident post-exam.
- **Japanese:** Students are performing well on the Regents level; however, classroom instruction requires more support to ensure consistency.

College Admissions & Scholarships

- Students have been awarded over **$13 million in scholarships**, with additional undocumented awards anticipated.
- College acceptances include a **wide range of schools**, including **NYU (4 students)**, **Columbia**, **Temple University**, SUNY schools, and community colleges.
- Notably, a **current 11th-grade student** has already been accepted into college with **70% of tuition covered**.

Class Cohorts & Readiness

- The current **senior class faced multiple disruptions**, including COVID-19 and building issues, which impacted their high school experience.
- The **junior class** is the first post-pandemic group with a full in-person high school experience and is expected to perform more like pre-COVID cohorts.

Marketing & Recruitment
Academic performance highlights have **not yet been used in middle school recruitment efforts**.
A new **marketing video** is being developed to incorporate these success stories and statistics.
Let me know if you'd like a version that separates items by presenter or includes action items for follow-up.

IV. Finance Update

A. Financial Update

Li'Esha shared the financial overview and budget proposal:

- Li'Esha Garcia presents the financial overview, including the balance sheet and profit and loss statement, showing a positive position with a surplus of $45,000.
- The board discusses the budget proposal for the upcoming fiscal year, including a conservative salary increase of 3% and adjustments to other expenses.
- The board discusses the importance of transparency with staff regarding financial decisions and the need to balance budget constraints with staff morale.

W. Council made a motion to pass the budget presented for sy 2025-26.
M. Vargas seconded the motion.
The board votes unanimously to approve the budget, with a focus on being more realistic based on student population and financial constraints.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

V. Closing Items

A. Adjourn Meeting

There being no further business to be transacted, and upon motion duly made, seconded and approved, the meeting was adjourned at 8:23 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
W. Ramos