

APPROVED



# New Heights Academy Charter School

## Minutes

### Board of Trustees Meeting

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#### Date and Time

Thursday May 29, 2025 at 7:00 PM

#### Location

1818 Amsterdam Avenue  
New York, NY 10031

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#### Trustees Present

A. Cummings, A. Vasquez, D. Ortiz, N. Sunshine, N. Weiss

#### Trustees Absent

M. Vargas, W. Council

#### Guests Present

Fred Givens, K. Valbrun, L. Garcia, Rachely Garcia, Rocio Zumaya, Roxanna Marmolejos, W. Ramos

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### 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 Thursday May 29, 2025 at 7:03 PM.

#### C.

### **Approve Minutes**

D. Ortiz made a motion to approve the minutes from Board of Trustees Meeting on 05-14-25.

N. Sunshine seconded the motion.

One abstention by Amryll

The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

## **II. Community Comments**

### **A. Upcoming School Events**

Wendy Ramos shared the upcoming school events.

- High School pep rally.
- Upcoming Regents exams.
- Noted that the last day for high school students is early next week.
- Middle school proms are also taking place.
- High school graduation will occur earlier than usual due to a scheduling agreement with the museum.
- Wendy Ramos inquired if the Board Chair plan to speak at the graduation.

### **B. Staff Representative Update**

Nikolas Weiss shared:

- High School Talent Show was filled with positive energy.
- Staff is excited and looking to wind things down for summer.
- Melissa Azar is promoted to the AP of High School.
- Book fair results were shared, noting a surplus of books and the ease of making recommendations.

### **C. Parent Association**

- Dr. Karen Valbrun introduced Rocio Zumaya, a parent of four New Heights scholars, as the new Parent Association President.
- Rocio Zumaya introduced herself and expressed enthusiasm about serving and supporting the school community.
- Dr. Valbrun shared the vision of evolving the Parent Association into a Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) and outlined plans to build a full parent association board and increase teacher involvement.
- Emphasis was placed on the importance of parent engagement in school activities and student recruitment efforts.

- Board Member Angel Vasquez inquired about the progress of building the Parent Association; Dr. Valbrun noted it was a significant effort to elect Rocio and that the next step is building out the board.
- Angel Vasquez also asked if Rocio would be joining the school board.
- Nicky Sunshine asked about opportunities to involve parents in student recruitment.
- Dr. Valbrun affirmed the focus on family referrals and emphasized the ongoing need for parent-driven outreach.

### **Student Reflections – High School Seniors**

Dr. Karen Valbrun introduced two graduating seniors, Rachely Garcia and Roxanna Marmolejos, to share their experiences at New Heights Academy Charter School.

#### **Rachely Garcia:**

- Attended New Heights for eight years, transitioning from middle school to high school.
- Shared that the school has had a strong influence in shaping her as a person.

#### **Roxanna Marmolejos:**

- Transferred into New Heights during high school and felt immediately nurtured and supported.
- Announced she will be attending SUNY Oneonta and will room with Rachely.
- Expressed gratitude to the school, saying it helped her become a better person.

### **Board Member Questions and Student Responses**

**Nicky Sunshine** asked about their college application experience:

- Students praised the support from college counselors, specifically highlighting Mr. Mantin and Ms. Duran for their guidance and encouragement.
- Noted that underclassmen are fortunate to have such a dedicated college team.

**Angel Vasquez** asked what they will miss most about New Heights:

- Students responded they will miss Ms. Palmetier, describing her as incredibly supportive and deeply loved.

## **III. Executive Director Update**

### **A. Executive Director Update**

Dr. Karen Valbrun presented the following:

#### **Academics and Instruction**

- Regents exams are approaching.

- Honors event took place yesterday.
- A school-wide professional development training is scheduled for June 5.

### **Operations and Staffing**

- Operations team has identified a candidate and is ready to extend an offer for the HR position.
- Compliance audit has been completed with no findings.
- Risk management update: school is not out of compliance.

### **Student Engagement**

- Talent show was held and well-received.
- Softball team earned second place in their league.

### **Community and Family Engagement**

- Parent Association President presented updates (see Parent Association section for details).

### **Innovation and Growth**

- Planning is underway to launch a 12:1:1 program; still in development with an estimated two to three more weeks of planning needed.

### **Public Relations and Marketing**

- Working on an alumni event was held as part of ongoing engagement and outreach efforts.

### **Leadership**

- Ms. Melissa Azar will assume a new leadership role as High School Assistant Principal.

### **Data Review**

- Reviewed school dashboard metrics with the board.

## **IV. Finance Update**

### **A. Financial Update**

#### **Financial Report**

- Li'Esha Garcia presented an update on the school's financial position.
- Reported a positive net equity position, with a noted impact from the Employee Retention Credit (ERC) payment.

- Reviewed the balance sheet, including an overview of current and short-term assets and liabilities.
- Highlighted the financial effects of under-enrollment and the need to accrue summer salary expenses.

### **Attendance Reporting**

- Wendy Ramos discussed the ongoing process of reporting attendance data to the state.
- Noted the operational challenges associated with managing and verifying large volumes of student data for compliance.

## **V. Academic Update**

### **A. State of the School**

#### **Middle School Update – Presented by Nikolas Weiss**

##### **Staff Updates**

- Dr. Crystal Joye is recovering from surgery; advised to rest.
- Nikolas expressed appreciation for staff perseverance during a busy time.

##### **Instruction & Academics**

- Writing across all subjects has increased significantly.
- ELA department push is showing positive results.
- Newcomer students are demonstrating strong academic progress (e.g., receiving “Most Improved” awards).
- Typing during testing improved student comfort and editing capability.
- Fatigue and stamina during testing remain concerns, considering strategies to build endurance.

##### **Student Engagement & Projects**

- Students highly engaged in project-based learning (e.g., 7th-grade advisory).
- Science Fair was well received; students demonstrated enthusiasm and ownership of their work.
- Shout-out to 7th grader Jimena for solo Spanish song performance at the talent show.

##### **Professional Development**

- Continued partnership with The Collaborative for PD.
- PDs from The Collaborative rated highly practical, actionable, and effective.
- Staff attended and benefited from offsite PD sessions.

## **Newcomer Support & ESL/MLL Initiatives**

- Notable improvement among students who were newcomers last year.
- Translation tools (e.g., ChatGPT) have eased challenges.
- Karen Bo (Student Support Services) registered for MLL programming course to help improve ESL supports.
- Re-evaluating intervention structures using the **Data Wise Framework**:
  - Considering shift back to homogeneous homerooms to better support students.

## **End-of-Year & Transition Planning**

- Grade-level teams will create rosters for the incoming school year based on student needs.
- Learning Strategists to complete IEP snapshots for teachers.
- Student Support Services finalizing CSE files.
- NYSESLAT testing just completed; data being processed.
- Many newcomer and IEP students invited to Summer Soar enrichment program.

## **Curriculum & Assessment**

- No major curriculum changes planned for next year.
- Considering shift from i-Ready to **MAP testing** (alignment with high school assessments, particularly NWEA MAP).
- Continuing STEAM focus for future curriculum planning.

## **High School Update – Presented by Fred Givens**

### **Celebrations & Events**

- Softball team finished **2nd in the championship**; trophy arriving soon.
- Rising Eagle Ceremony held for juniors transitioning to seniors:
  - Students received new shirts with a motivational slogan.
  - Ceremony boost student morale and senior-year readiness.

### **Academics & Testing**

- Students completed AP exams; national technical issues were resolved.
- Regents and IAs ongoing; final results will determine summer school placement.
- Students scoring 70 or below flagged for potential summer school.
- Planning in place for timely updates to graduation eligibility.

### **Curriculum Updates & Expansion**

- **New: AP Computer Science Principles** to be offered to all 10th graders.
  - Teachers to attend training sessions.

- **College Now program with City College** launching:
  - Students can take Biology (in-house) and Freshman Seminar for **college credit**.
  - Estimated 50 students to participate.
- Ongoing review of **curriculum across subjects** to integrate **STEM and 21st-century skills**.

### **Graduation & Transition**

- Anticipate continued high graduation rate in June.
- Some students will need to complete August exams to finalize graduation.

### **General & Policy Updates – Angel Vasquez, Board Chair**

#### **Cell Phone Policy (Statewide Mandate Discussion)**

- **NY State law requires all schools to restrict student cell phone use by August 1.**
  - Enforcement policies must be posted publicly.
  - Schools may apply for funding (~\$10 per student) to implement the policy.
- **Key Considerations:**
  - Exemptions for medical needs and translation services.
  - Emergency contact protocols must be clarified for families.
  - Avoid over-disciplining marginalized student populations; data collection required.
- **Implementation Ideas:**
  - Yondr pouches and central collection stations (seen in other schools like Yonkers).
  - Parent education workshops (suggested collaboration with Apple Store for digital literacy and control).
  - Communication of policy already started with incoming families.

#### **Summer Planning – Dr. Karen Valbrun, Executive Director**

- Summer school begins **July 1**.
- Students invited based on academic need and support requirements.
- Summer Soar includes enrichment activities; past participants reported enjoying the program.

### **Board and Operations**

- Discussion on holding a **team-building/retreat-style board meeting** in June.
- Need for clarification on **public notice timeline**:
  - Meetings should be posted on the website **at least three days in advance**.

- Upcoming update will include **remote attendance options** for the public.

## VI. Closing Items

### A. Adjourn Meeting

A. Vasquez made a motion to to a adjoun meeting.

N. Sunshine seconded the motion.

The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

There being no further business to be transacted, and upon motion duly made, seconded and approved, the meeting was adjourned at 9:00 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

W. Ramos