APPROVED

New Heights Academy Charter School

Minutes

Board of Trustees Meeting

Date and Time
Thursday May 29, 2025 at 7:00 PM

Location
1818 Amsterdam Avenue
New York, NY 10031

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

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