APPROVED

New Heights Academy Charter School

Minutes

Board of Trustees Meeting

Date and Time
Thursday June 26, 2025 at 7:00 PM

Location
1818 Amsterdam Avenue
New York, NY 10031

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

Trustees Absent
None

Guests Present
Fred Givens, K. Valbrun, L. Garcia, Rocio Zumaya, W. Ramos (remote)

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 Jun 26, 2025 at 7:05 PM.

A. Vasquez made a motion to approve the minutes from Board of Trustees Meeting on 05-29-25.
N. Sunshine seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

II. Community Comments

A. Upcoming School Events

B. Staff Representative Update

N. Weiss (Staff Representative) shared updates from the staff perspective, expressing excitement about closing out the school year and highlighting the success of the recent alumni event.

The group began to discuss the alumni event:

- **Nicky Sunshine and Karen Valbrun** spoke about the positive impact of the alumni event, emphasizing the strong sense of community it fostered and the meaningful involvement of staff.
- **Fred Givens** provided additional details about the alumni event, noting a high turnout and attendance by alumni from a variety of locations.
- **Nicky Sunshine and Karen Valbrun** also underscored the importance of staff presence at the event and shared the positive feedback received from alumni.

C. Recognition of First-Year Teachers at New Heights

Due to end-of-year school activities, there was a miscommunication, and unfortunately, the new teachers were not able to join the meeting as originally planned.

III. Executive Director Update

A. Executive Director Update

Executive Director's Report – Karen Valbrun

Opening Remarks & Gratitude

- Ms. Valbrun opened by expressing sincere gratitude to the Board for their ongoing support, openness, and partnership.
- She reflected on previous experiences and highlighted how this Board stands out in creating a space for growth, challenge, and collaboration.

Special acknowledgments were given to:

- **Mr. Weiss**, Staff Representative, for his service and insight.
- **The Principals**, **CFO**, and **Board members**, for their varied contributions and support.
- **Ms. Zumaya**, for broadening representation by including the voice of parents and students.

Accomplishments Highlighted

- **Five-Year Charter Renewal** successfully achieved.
- **Launch of a Parent Organization**, with a goal to evolve into a formal Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) in the upcoming school year.

Alumni Engagement:

- Alumni now recognized as a key stakeholder group.
- Plans to meaningfully include alumni in school events, including a proposal to invite a 2016 graduate to speak at the 2026 commencement.

Academic & Instructional Progress

- Implementation of a **new student growth assessment tool** (MAP testing) at the high school level.
- Preliminary data suggests **growth in ELA**, with continued improvement needed in math.
- Detailed data analysis scheduled for the following day.
- Promising growth was seen in **i-Ready scores**.
- Ongoing improvement in **instructional quality**, attributed in part to:
    - Increased coaching support.
- Enhanced new teacher support through the leadership of Ms. Adamas.
- Plans for a more structured **New Teacher Academy** to ensure no one is overlooked.

Data-Driven Instruction

- Staff participated in **Harvard's Data Wise** training.
- This framework will be adopted school-wide next year to ensure instructional decisions are **evidence-based**, not solely intuition-driven.

Attendance

- While the school did not meet the 95% target, end-of-year high school attendance reached **93.9%**.
- Final figures will be shared next week.
- Mr. Givens will provide additional context in his report.

School Culture & Climate

- Ms. Valbrun emphasized the importance of **listening to students**, noting that their voices influenced how leadership responded this year.
- Recognized a growing need for **Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)** supports.
- Next year, the school will implement the **CASEL framework** across classrooms.
- Teachers will be trained during the two-week summer professional development period.
- SEL will be embedded into lesson planning and classroom practices.

Family & Community Engagement

- The team has built out a **36-week calendar** with weekly activities to sustain family and community involvement.
- Work has begun on **student cell phone policies**:
- Mr. Givens visited a peer school to observe effective phone storage systems.

IV. Finance Update

A. Financial Update

Finance and Operations Update – Li'Esha Garcia

Financial Overview

- Ms. Garcia reported a **positive balance sheet**, while also noting ongoing **cash flow challenges**.
- She emphasized the significant impact **student enrollment** has on the school's budget and expressed hope that enrollment will meet budgeted projections in the upcoming school year.

Staffing and Systems

- Karen Valbrun highlighted progress in **filling staff vacancies**, in collaboration with leadership team members.
- She noted a need for **improved internal communication** and more consistent **systems and routines**.
- She shared that **younger staff voices** are contributing positively to school culture and operations.

Summer Programming & Enrollment

- Li'Esha Garcia and Karen Valbrun discussed the **importance of summer programs** in supporting student engagement and increasing enrollment.
- Karen Valbrun identified **ongoing challenges in sixth- and seventh-grade enrollment** and emphasized the need for more **targeted recruitment events**.

- Li'Esha Garcia also provided an **update on student attendance**, sharing that efforts are underway to continue improving **enrollment numbers** overall.

V. Academic Update

A. State of the School

Middle School Update - Nikolas Weiss

- Provided an update on **end-of-year academic benchmarks**, highlighting significant **growth in reading levels among newcomer English Learner (EL) students**.
- Shared progress on **staff evaluations** using the **Danielson Framework**, with an emphasis on growth shown by newer staff members.
- Reported on ongoing **staff recruitment efforts**, identifying a need for additional hires in key positions.
- Nicky Sunshine and Rocio Zumaya emphasized the importance of **sharing positive program outcomes**—such as student growth—with **parents and the wider community** to strengthen engagement and build trust.

High School Update - Fred Givens
All current instructional staff are expected to return for the upcoming academic year. One department has a staff member on temporary leave; leadership will monitor and determine their return status.

- A key structural update includes hiring a **dedicated science coach (Ms. Rodriguez)** to support improvements in science instruction.
- The school will implement a new **co-teaching model in the science department** to provide additional instructional support.

Humanities Performance Highlights
English Language Learners (ELLs):

- The school had 22 ELLs this year—more than ever before.
- Notably, one newcomer ELL student **passed the Global Regents exam**, marking a significant milestone.

Global History Regents:

- Scores increased by **30 percentage points over the past three years**, now reaching **over 90% pass rate**.
- Final results are pending, but **81% of students passed**, with expectations of reaching **approximately 91%** by August.

- **U.S. History Regents:**
- 80 students took the exam; results show growth with **16 students scoring 80 or above**.
- Projected final pass rate is **approximately 80%** once scores are finalized.
- **Languages (Italian, Spanish, Japanese):**
- Italian (Grade 11) and Spanish exams showed **strong performance**.
- All ELL students who took language Regents exams **passed**.
- 3 out of 5 Spanish students achieved **college-ready scores**.
- Japanese was not offered this year but will be reinstated next school year.

STEM Performance Overview

- **Algebra I:**
  - 82% of students passed the Regents exam.
  - Instruction led by Ms. Bailey was noted as particularly strong.
- **Geometry and Algebra II:**
  - Results were still incoming at the time of reporting, but early indicators suggest solid performance.
- **SWD (Students with Disabilities)** demonstrated improvement in math outcomes compared to prior years.
- **Science (Earth Science, Chemistry):**
  - Identified as the school's **greatest area for improvement**.
- **Chemistry:**
  - 30 students took the Chemistry Regents exam.
  - While students reported positive experiences with labs and instruction, **scores did not align with expectations**.

Student Surveys & Feedback

- Results from post-Regents student surveys indicate:
  - **High levels of satisfaction in humanities and science classes**, especially in Chemistry, where students praised hands-on labs and instruction.
  - Feedback will be used to guide professional development and instructional planning.

VI. Closing Items

A. Adjourn Meeting

The board discusses the need for an HR Consultant.
A. Vasquez made a motion to elect Rocio Zumaya to the board.
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 8:04 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
W. Ramos