APPROVED

New Heights Academy Charter School

Minutes

Board of Trustees Meeting

Date and Time
Thursday October 30, 2025 at 7:00 PM

Location
1818 Amsterdam Avenue
New York, NY 10031

Trustees Present
A. Vasquez, N. Sunshine, N. Weiss, R. Zumaya, W. Council

Trustees Absent
A. Cummings, D. Ortiz, M. Vargas

Guests Present
Fred Givens, Frederica Fernandez, K. Valbrun, L. Garcia, Lily Cabrera, Melissa Ransome, 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 Oct 30, 2025 at 7:00 PM.

C.

Approve Minutes

A. Vasquez made a motion to approve the minutes from Board of Trustees Meeting on 09-25-25.
N. Sunshine seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

II. Human Resource Update

A. Staff Survey Data

Presented by: Meredith Hosey, HR Consultant

- **Staff Climate Survey Results:**
  - Strengths: Staff commitment to students, collaboration, and resilience.
  - Areas for Growth: Communication, accountability, documentation consistency, and role clarity.
  - Concerns included over-meeting, lack of clear follow-up systems, and perceived micromanagement.
- **Recommendations:**
  - Establish clearer structures for communication and accountability.
  - Develop a **process library** for documentation and standardized procedures.
  - Review staffing models, particularly for Special Education and EL services.
  - Enhance onboarding and career pathway development.
  - Prioritize respectful and professional communication as a cultural expectation.
- **Leadership Response:**
  - Dr. Valbrun and Ms. Hosey noted legacy challenges predating current leadership.
  - Steps taken include shifting meetings to Zoom for documentation and improving professionalism, and instituting more structured agendas with clear follow-up actions.
- **Board Discussion:**
  - Trustees emphasized the urgency of addressing workplace culture and ensuring respectful communication across all levels.
  - Acknowledged progress made but noted the need for ongoing monitoring and professional development.

III. Finance Update

A. Financial Review of Q1

Presented by: Li'Esha Garcia, CFOO

- **Quarter 1 Overview (Ending September 30):**
  - Total revenue: $3.7 million, reflecting a $149K increase from the prior year, primarily due to an increased per-pupil funding rate.
  - Actual enrollment is 604 students, compared to the budgeted 683, resulting in a projected $1.4 million revenue shortfall if enrollment remains unchanged.
  - Expenses: $3.2 million, down from $3.5 million last year due to cost reductions in salaries, fringe benefits, and facilities.
  - Net position: $403K surplus for Q1; however, this is expected to adjust downward as actual enrollment data replaces budgeted figures.
- **Cash Position & Liabilities:**
  - Approximately $700K in cash as of September.
  - Accounts receivable have decreased following receipt of ERC funds.
  - The leasehold improvement related to long-term lease obligations is now reflected on the balance sheet, per new accounting requirements.
- **Fiscal Concerns and Mitigation:**
  - Ongoing efforts to cut costs and control expenditures due to under-enrollment.
  - Exploring opportunities to secure private or federal grants through development consultants to offset state aid shortfalls.

Board Discussion:
Trustees discussed the potential long-term impact of under-enrollment and corresponding budget cuts on staffing, programming, and student services. It was noted that reductions have already affected teaching supports, programming, and staff morale.

IV. Student Recruitment

A. Addressing Under Enrollment

Presented by: Dr. Karen Valbrun, Executive Director & Leadership Team

- **Current Enrollment:**
  - 604 students enrolled (down from 613 in the prior month).
  - Sixth grade has 41 students, highlighting a critical need for recruitment in middle school grades.
  - High school enrollment remains stable.
- **Challenges Identified:**
  - Declining middle school enrollment continues to impact revenue.
  - Enrollment losses attributed to families relocating, student transfers, and a few disciplinary or health-related withdrawals.
  - Exhausted waitlist for key grades.
- **Recruitment Efforts and Strategies:**

    - Increasing staff and leader participation in weekend and community canvassing.
    - Exploring a parent ambassador program to engage families in recruitment efforts.
    - Strengthening marketing through social media, open houses, and community events.
    - Expanding after-school and summer programs (STEAM, robotics, debate, cosmetology) to attract families.
    - Highlighting success stories, cultural responsiveness, and one-to-one technology access in outreach messaging.

- Parents expressed both appreciation for the school's academic quality and concern about communication gaps and safety incidents
- Leadership agreed to follow up directly and schedule appropriate discussions outside the public session to maintain privacy and compliance.
- Board members encouraged collaborative problem-solving and consistent storytelling to rebuild trust and enhance the school's public image.

V. Closing Items

A. Community Comments

- Parents expressed both appreciation for the school's academic quality and concern about communication gaps and safety incidents.
- Leadership agreed to follow up directly and schedule appropriate discussions outside the public session to maintain privacy and compliance.
- Board members encouraged collaborative problem-solving and consistent storytelling to rebuild trust and enhance the school's public image.

B. Adjourn Meeting

There being no further business to be transacted, and upon motion duly made, seconded and approved, the meeting was adjourned at 9:06 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
W. Ramos