APPROVED

New Heights Academy Charter School

Minutes

Board of Trustees Meeting

Date and Time
Thursday February 26, 2026 at 7:00 PM

Location
1818 Amsterdam Avenue
New York, NY 1003

Trustees Present
A. Cummings, D. Ortiz, M. Vargas, N. Weiss, R. Zumaya

Trustees Absent
None

Guests Present
Clara Pena, Emmanuel Alagbon, Fred Givens, Jaislynn Hiraldo, K. Valbrun, L. Garcia, Lesly Humbert, Lily Cabrera, Nidia Santos, W. Ramos (remote)

I. Opening Items

A. Record Attendance

B. Call the Meeting to Order

A. Cummings called a meeting of the board of trustees of New Heights Academy Charter School to order on Thursday Feb 26, 2026 at 7:08 PM.

C.

Approve Minutes

A. Cummings made a motion to approve the minutes from Board of Trustees Meeting on 12-18-25.
N. Weiss seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

D. Community Comments

Board Chair reviewed public comment protocol:

- Two-minute limit per speaker
- Maximum of 10 speakers
- No dialogue between speakers and Board during comment period

Parent Concerns Raised

Staff Turnover & Vacancies

- Concern regarding mid-year staff departures, including college counselor and principal.

Administration reported:

- All vacancies filled except:
- High School ELA SPED Teacher (in process)
- Middle School Social Worker (final hiring stages; new counselor model)
- Middle School currently without a principal.
- Executive Director overseeing instructional leadership with support from STEAM and Humanities coaches.
- Hiring process for Middle School Principal to begin late March/early April.

College Counseling

- Students expressed concern about impact of College Counselor departure.

Administration noted that new counselor model will support dual roles aligned to 6–12 structure.

Mental Health Coverage

- Question raised regarding social worker coverage across both campuses.

Administration confirmed new hire is in final stages to support both schools.

Board Accessibility & Communication
Parents and staff raised concerns about:

- Limited awareness of Board meeting dates.
- Lack of automatically posted Zoom links.
- Language access and translation needs.
- Need for paper flyers and non-digital communication for families not tech-proficient.
- Perception of division within school community.

Board clarified:

- Meetings are publicly posted on website.
- Virtual access must be requested in advance per policy.

Action Items:

- Review process for posting Zoom links for public meetings.
- Explore translation services and improved multilingual communication.
- Strengthen outreach strategies to increase family participation.

II. School Update

A. School Report

Presented by: Dr. Karen Valbrun, Executive Director

Upcoming Events

- Black History Month Celebrations (MS: 2/26; HS: 2/27)
- Open House (2/28)
- Kindness Closet & Parent Workshop (Mid-Year Reset)
- Scholastic Book Fair (March 6)
- Pi Day (March 13)
- Career Day & 30th Precinct Basketball Game (March 18)
- Literacy Night (March 19)
- Monthly Family Zoom (March 23)

Enrollment & Attendance

- Total Enrollment: 595 students
- January Student Attendance: 92.7% (Goal: 95%)
- Staff Attendance: 92%

Student Demographics

- Students with IEPs: 99
- ELL Students: 91

- January–February: 10 enrollments, 19 discharges

Compliance

- Meeting held with authorizer and CSE to ensure continued compliance.

Family Engagement Highlights

- New Year's Breakfast
- Family Zoom Sessions (with translation)
- Credit Recovery Family Meeting
- Monthly Newsletter
- 20-Year Anniversary Video
- Community Open Houses

Office Data Tracking

- Main Office tracking trends in parent calls (attendance, letters, general information) to identify service gaps.

Recruitment & Enrollment Efforts

- Harlem Charter School Fair
- City Expo
- Cardinal McCloskey Fair
- Upcoming Bronx recruitment event
- Partnerships with community-based organizations
- Canvassing & tabling initiatives

HR Updates
Current Vacancies:

- Science Co-Teacher
- Humanities Co-Teacher
- Middle School Social Worker (final stages)

Presented by: Li'Esha Garcia, Chief Financial & Operations Officer

- Operational restructuring implemented to offset under-enrollment.

Financial Snapshot (Through January)

- Revenue: $8.49M
- Expenses: $8.12M
- Current Surplus (temporary)

Notes:

- Cash flow remains tight.
- Positive net equity maintained.
- Under-enrollment continues to impact revenue.
- Savings achieved in:
- Salaries (position consolidations)
- Professional services (renegotiated contracts)
- Fundraising expenses (shift from consultants to internal strategies)

Action Item:

- Continue identifying diversified funding streams (grants, philanthropic sources).

Presented by: Fred Givesn, High School Principal
Regents Performance (January 2026 vs January 2025)

- Overall improved performance year-over-year.
- Small testing groups may impact percentage swings.
- SWDs and ELLs remain lower performing across subjects.
- Identified Trends
- Stronger performance in History.
- Persistent challenges in:
- Biology (9% proficiency on IA)
- Science & Math application skills
- ELL & SWD subgroups
- English Regents performance
- Instructional Adjustments
- Restructured 9th Period intervention groups (skill-based groupings)
- Saturday Academy launched
- Differentiated small-group support
- Coaching & curriculum adjustments
- Color-coded annotation strategy in Math
- Targeted re-teaching in English (rhetorical analysis, tone)
- Writing scaffolded into smaller skill-based components
- Full-time Spanish teacher hired (replacing long-term substitute)
- Board Requests (Academic Accountability)
- Board Member requested:
- Enrollment numbers per course
- Mini-IA scheduled for April (all subjects)
- Clear benchmark targets for April progress
- Justification for set performance benchmarks
- Updated reporting at April Board meeting

Action Items

Admin to provide:

- Exact student counts per IA
- April Mini-IA dates
- Subject-specific benchmark goals
- Rationale for targets
- Progress report at April meeting
- Board expressed strong concern regarding low proficiency rates (e.g., 9%, 12%, 32%) and emphasized urgency in improving outcomes.

III. Executive Session (if needed)

A. Governance Session

M. Vargas made a motion to have Amryll Cummings serve as Interim Board Chair.
R. Zumaya seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.
A. Cummings made a motion to have Megan Vargas serve as Interim Board Vice Chair.
D. Ortiz seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

IV. 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 9:45 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
W. Ramos