APPROVED

Brighten Academy

Minutes

Brighten Academy Governing Board Meeting

Working Session

Date and Time
Monday September 14, 2026 at 6:00 PM

Location
Brighten Academy Charter School

The Brighten Academy Governing Board will meet on Monday, September 14, 2026, in the Media Center.

Directors Present
E. Hammonds, J. Smith, L. Bryant, M. Vitale, R. Coffee, T. Cabrera

Directors Absent
None

Ex Officio Members Present
S. Wells, T. Washington-Knight

Guests Present
A. Cameron, C. Johnson, C. Sparks, Chuck Canady, D. Davis, S. Littles

I. Opening Items

A. Call the Meeting to Order

J. Smith called a meeting of the board of directors of Brighten Academy to order on Monday Sep 14, 2026 at 7:16 PM.

B. Record Attendance

C. Adoption of Agenda

J. Smith made a motion to to adopt the agenda for 9-14-2026.
L. Bryant seconded the motion.
Amended with addition of Grant Proposals, Scarecrow Contest, Coaching Stipends.
The board **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

D. Approval of Minutes

L. Bryant made a motion to approve the minutes from Brighten Academy Governing Board Meeting on 08-24-26.
M. Vitale seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

II. Executive Committee

A. Strategic Plan Update

- The team discussed whether the current Strategic Plan and the addition a **Growth Strategy** should be incorporated and adding additions to SWOT analysis
- Ongoing one-on-one conversations continue regarding each deliverable to ensure alignment and clarity.
- **Next Steps:**
  - Strategic Planning Leads will meet with school leadership to review the draft plan.
  - Identify owners for each deliverable.
  - Finalize baseline numbers and complete remaining placeholders.

B. Board Retreat Update

- The Board Retreat is confirmed for October 3rd, scheduled from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM at the Hilton Garden Inn.
- All arrangements are in place, and contracts have been signed.

C. Bylaws Update

- Revised copies of the bylaws were distributed to all board members for their review and feedback.

Grant Writing Vendor Update
A brief update was provided on the three grant-writing service proposals received. Each vendor offers different pricing structures and levels of support:

- RMJ Consulting – Offers flexible pricing: a $1,500 monthly retainer covering 3–5 grant applications, a $50/hour project-based option, or a custom package based on scope.
- ThrivePoint Consulting – Provides tiered packages beginning at a $450 research bundle, full proposal development ranging from $950–$2,500, monthly retainers for ongoing grant management, and a $4,000 federal grant package.
- Grant Strategies LLC – Offers flat-fee bundles: 3 proposals for $6,375, 5 for $6,800, and 10 for $8,500, with a 30-day turnaround and 50% upfront payment.

Each full proposal was shared with full board and leadership.

Leadership Discussion & Guidance Needed
Leadership noted the importance of first assessing internal needs, priorities, and expectations for charter alignment before engaging a vendor. They also requested vendor success rates to inform future decisions.
Leadership shared they recently applied for a High Impact Tutoring Grant, and results will be provided at the End-of-Month.

The Board and Leadership agreed to table the grant-writing vendor proposals until a later date, allowing time for needs assessment and review of upcoming grant outcomes.
Cultural Arts Council Scarecrow Contest

- The Cultural Arts Council Douglasville/Douglas County, in partnership with Keep Douglasville Beautiful, is hosting its 8th Annual Scarecrow Contest.
- The contest invites participation from sports teams, nonprofits, schools, businesses, and churches.
- Prizes include 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place, along with a People’s Choice Award.
- Entry forms due: September 23rd.
- Scarecrow display: October 1–31 at the Cultural Arts Center on Campbellton Street.
- Contest winners (excluding People’s Choice) will be announced at the CAC’s 30th Annual Chili Cook Off on October 17th.

Brighten Academy Participation

- Brighten Academy Arts students expressed interest in participating with a Wizard of Oz–themed scarecrow.
- The art teacher requested $100 for supplies and a $44 reimbursement for materials already purchased.
- Board agreed to support the request.

III. Finance Committee

A. Finance Committee

June Financials

- Status: June FY25-26 results remain pending final audit. Presentation will occur at the next Board meeting.
  (No additional action requested until audit results are delivered.)

July 2026 Financials (FY26-27 Month 1)
Note: July is the **first month of the fiscal year**; results are largely seasonal/opening-month and **no immediate actions are required**.
Topline (Budget vs. Actual, July):

- **Revenue: $831,935** vs. budget **$889,270** (**$57,335 under**) — primarily due to **lower QBE** tied to **lower FTE counts**.
- **Expenses: $786,834** vs. budget **$918,253** (**$131,418 under**) — schools closed much of July.
- **Operating surplus (July): $45,101** (YTD equals July). *CFO narrative references $74K surplus; committee should note the difference and rely on the Snapshot/BvA tables showing $45K for minutes.*

Cash & Liquidity:

- **Cash balance: $4.65M** across operating, money market, nutrition, and fundraising accounts.
- **Days cash on hand:**
  - **YTD basis: ~2,155 days** (opening-month artifact).
  - **Prior 12 months expense basis: ~155 days** (more meaningful operating benchmark).

Debt & Coverage:

- **Interest expense (July): ~$30,489**; **DSCR (YTD): 0.665** vs. **required 1.10** (expected to normalize as the year progresses).

Program/functional highlights (seasonal opening-month patterns):

- **Instruction**: **$557,059** (slightly **$10.6K over** YTD budget); reflects payroll timing and start-up costs.
- **School Administration**: **$83,868** (**$42,964 under** budget); timing of fees/memberships.
- **Maintenance & Plant**: **$48,424** (**$11,893 under** budget).
- **School Nutrition Program (SNP)**: **$6,107** expenses vs. budget **$39,631**; **SNP net $586** (month).
- **Fundraising/ASP**: Fundraising **deficit ~$3,211** YTD; **ASP surplus ~$51** YTD — both minor and typical for July.

Compliance frameworks (informational):

- **SCSC/GA DOE financial performance metrics** indicate **"Meets Financial Performance Standards"** scoring based on current ratio and days cash; debt ratio/efficiency margin will be tracked through FY.

Accounts Payable & Aging (as of 7/31/2026):

- **A/P balance: ~$107,557**; routine vendors (utilities, maintenance, professional services) and **interest payable** recorded.

M. Vitale made a motion to to approve an expenditure of $30,500 to cover coaching allotments.
T. Cabrera seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

Roll Call	
R. Coffee	Abstain
T. Cabrera	Aye
E. Hammonds	Aye
M. Vitale	Aye
L. Bryant	Aye
J. Smith	Aye

B. Audit Update

- Brighten Academy received a clean, unmodified audit opinion; financial statements were found to be fairly presented with no material weaknesses, no significant deficiencies, and no instances of noncompliance.
- No audit findings or questioned costs were issued, and federal expenditures were below the single-audit threshold.
- The management letter included no additional recommendations.

- Auditors reported no disagreements with management, no difficulties during the audit, and all proposed adjustments were accepted.
- Management affirmed responsibility for financial reporting, internal controls, and compliance, noting no fraud, litigation, or noncompliance.
- Financial results:
    - Net position deficit improved to $(4.9)M (from $(6.3)M).
    - Annual surplus of $1.36M.
    - Revenues: $11.7M; Expenses: $10.3M.
    - Cash: $4.7M; Long-term debt: $7.47M, with all covenants met.
    - Pension/OPEB liabilities remain significant.
- Adjusting journal entries mainly involved depreciation, pension, and OPEB, all recorded.
- IRS Form 990 review confirmed no unrelated business income, no private inurement, and strong governance practices (conflict-of-interest and whistleblower policies in place). No excess benefit transactions or governance issues reported.

IV. School Leadership Report

A. Information Only

Executive Director Report –Mrs. Washington-Knight

1. Significant Issues

- Ongoing technology and infrastructure needs, including teacher laptops and access point upgrades.
- Need to reconcile and verify vendor contracts, including start and end dates.
- Athletics funding concerns, specifically how coaches will be compensated when student fees fall short.

2. Items for Approval

- **Surplus List** dated **9/14/2026** presented for board approval.
  (Includes damaged or outdated furniture, Chromebooks, laptops, rugs, books, and miscellaneous items.) - Needs signature prior to next meeting.

3. Risk & Compliance Updates

- **Charter Compliance (Due 12/1/26)** – *In progress*; exploring a **1-year waiver** from DCSS to support strategic planning and accreditation preparation.
- **Accreditation (Due 6/1/26)** – *Not started*; contact made with accreditation leaders for next steps.
- **Safety/Security** – School Safety Plan approved for 2026–27; next steps include selecting the panic alert vendor and staff training.
- **TKES/LKES** – Administrators completed certification; **66.7% of staff plans** complete with goal of **100% by end of September**.

- **Academic Diagnostic Walkthroughs** – Completed on **9/10** with growth/commendation feedback provided; second round scheduled for December.

4. Strategic Plan Implementation

- **Strategic Plan Review (Due 10/28/26)** in progress (next steps mentioned above)

5. KPI Updates

- **Student Achievement**: Reviewing iReady data for support/enrichment needs.
- **Technology Implementation**: Ongoing systems development; quote provided for additional access points.
- **Enrollment**: Current enrollment **790 students**.

6. Key Accomplishments

- Appointment of **Lucy Reyes** as Executive Assistant (effective 9/1/26).
- Successful **Goodies with Grandparents** events on 9/14–9/15.
- Active recruitment underway for **Front Office Coordinator**.

7. Matters for Noting

- Participation in **September Saturdays** event (9/26, Douglas County Courthouse).
- **Logo Refresh** work continues; revisions requested to include the 7 Cs.
- Leadership participation in **Chamber "State of Education"**, **GCSA Maximizing Student Success**, and **Cognia Schools Leadership Conference**.
- Celebration of Brighten's **Teacher of the Year**, Mrs. Young, on 9/17.
- **HB1193 Early Literacy Act**: State requires a **School-Based Literacy Coach** for K–3; coordination under way with DCSS.
- Development of **30-60-90 Day Plan** continues.
- School Website Launch Progress- needs follow-up

Additional Attachments Included

- **Surplus inventory list** (furniture, laptops, Chromebooks, books).
- **TechnologyLab network quote** for access point installation ($18,839).
- **Management Representation Letter** for FY 2026 Audit.
- **Logo concepts and refresh options**.
- **District Academic Walkthrough Report** (BACS, 9/10/26).

M. Vitale made a motion to accept the school's recommendation to adopt Raptors as the official panic button system.
R. Coffee seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.
M. Vitale made a motion to to approve the purchase of 65 staff laptop devices totaling $89,960.
T. Cabrera seconded the motion.

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

B. Staff Updates: Areas of Function

Items of Note (Per M. Vitale)

- Prior approval to move funds to additional I-Ready Training has taken place.
- Kudos to school progress in making sure students are in correct categories.

V. Governance Committee

A. Policies for Vote

B. Info Only

D13, F3, I2 – Complaint Receipt & Notification Process

- These three items share the same focus area.
- Summary: Review and confirm how complaints are received, documented, and the order in which notifications must occur. Applies universally across D13, F3, and I2.

H7 – Food Service Charges

- Status: **Hold until next committee meeting**.
- No action taken at this time
- Through recent review, it was identified that over 200 students had been incorrectly classified as free/reduced lunch recipients in the current food service software, resulting in more than $5,000 in reimbursement corrections that must be processed.
- An additional 75 students were identified this year with similar misclassification concerns.
- Leadership is evaluating alternative food-service software vendors due to accuracy and data-management issues.
- Despite these challenges, the team successfully reduced outstanding cafeteria balances from $24,000 to below $20,000 by correcting student eligibility statuses.
- Leadership is also considering new processes to further reduce negative balances going forward.

September 2026 Review Items
G7 – EMS/HCP or Student Transport Language

- Status: **Hold** pending additional EMS/Healthcare Provider presence on site or student transport scenarios.
- Action: Review and clarify district language once additional information is available.

G7-E1

- Status: **No changes recommended**.

F34

- Status: **Minor change needed**.

F35

- Status: **Changes required**; further revision necessary.

B1-E1 – Board Functions

- Status: **Changes required** to align with updated board function expectations.

Policy Updates

- **DCSS Updated Policies** – Review and integrate relevant district-level policy updates.
- **DOE State Updated Policies** – Ensure alignment with current state-level policy updates.

VI. Executive Session

A. Exec Session Voting

J. Smith made a motion to to proceed with the DCSS charter renewal waiver.
E. Hammonds seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

VII. Other Business

A. Announcements

Basketball Tryouts and Parent Meetings
Good for the Order

VIII. 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 9:50 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
J. Smith