



Strong Start Academy

STRONG START ACADEMY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AT THE TONY HSIEH EDUCATION CENTER

BOARD MEETING AGENDA 07/22/2026

Published on July 16, 2026 at 7:50 AM PDT

Date and Time

Wednesday July 22, 2026 at 9:00 AM PDT

Location

Strong Start Academy Elementary School, 310 S. 9th Street, Las Vegas, NV 89101

Agenda

	Purpose	Presenter	Time
I. Opening Items			9:00 AM
A. Call the Meeting to Order		Lorna James-Cervantes	3 m
B. Record Attendance		Lorna James-Cervantes	1 m
C. Public Comment		Lorna James-Cervantes	3 m

Comment during this portion of the agenda must be limited to matters on the agenda for action. If you wish to be heard, come forward and give your name for the record.

		Purpose	Presenter	Time	
	The amount of discussion, as well as the amount of time any single speaker is allowed, will be limited to three (3) minutes absent Board approval. Public comment may also be given by calling 1-415-655-0001 and entering access code number 2661 459 1370 followed by the # sign.				
	D.	Discussion for possible action to approve Minutes from May 14, 2026 Board meeting and Budget Hearing meeting.	Vote	Lorna James-Cervantes	1 m
	E.	Discussion for possible action to approve Minutes from January 29, 2026 Board meeting and AMENDED Meeting Minutes from November 20, 2025 Board Meeting.	Vote	Lorna James-Cervantes	1 m
II.	Finance				9:09 AM
	A.	Report by Nandini Vaishnav from Vertex Education on Strong Start Academy financial update with FY26 forecast with actual spending through May 2026.	FYI	Nandini Vaishnav	5 m
III.	Executive Update				9:14 AM
	A.	Discussion for possible action to approve the Strong Start Academy Elementary School Parent Student Handbook, Employee Handbook, and Test Security Plan for the 2026-2027 School Year.	Discuss	Miriam Benitez	5 m
	B.	Discussion for possible action to approve revised Restorative Justice Plan.	Discuss	Miriam Benitez	5 m
	C.	Report by the Executive Director on the status of on-going marketing efforts, open-enrollment, and recruiting.	Discuss	Miriam Benitez	5 m
IV.	Governance				
V.	Special Reports				
VI.	Citizens Participation				

Purpose	Presenter	Time
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Public comment during this portion of the agenda must be limited to matters within the jurisdiction of the Board. No subject may be acted upon by the Board unless that subject is on the agenda and is scheduled for action. If you wish to be heard, come forward and give your name for the record. The amount of discussion on any single subject, as well as the amount of time any single speaker is allowed, may be limited. Public comment may also be given by calling 1-415-655-0001 and entering access code number 2661 459 1370 followed by the # sign.

VII. Closing Items

A. Adjourn Meeting	FYI
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THIS MEETING WAS PROPERLY NOTICED AND POSTED AT THE FOLLOWING LOCATIONS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE NOTICING STANDARDS

AS OUTLINED IN NRS 241.020:

Strong Start Academy Elementary School website www.clvstrongstartes.org
 City Hall, 495 S. Main Street, 5th Floor Conference Room, Las Vegas, NV
 The Nevada Public Notice website – notice.nv.gov

Coversheet

Discussion for possible action to approve Minutes from May 14,
2026 Board meeting and Budget Hearing meeting.

Section: I. Opening Items
Item: D. Discussion for possible action to approve Minutes from May 14, 2026
Board meeting and Budget Hearing meeting.
Purpose: Vote
Submitted by:
Related Material: May DRAFT_Board_Meeting_Minutes_.docx.pdf
May DRAFT_Budget_Hearing_Minutes_.docx.pdf

Lorna James-Cervantes, President
Maria Tamayo-Soto, Treasurer
Alicia Arroyo, Secretary
Dachresha Harris, Officer
Dr. Alea Moore, Officer
Angela Scurry, Officer
Roxann McCoy, Officer
Vanessa Mari, Officer
Lori McGaughey, Officer

Miriam Benitez, Executive Director



DRAFT Board Meeting Minutes of the Strong Start Academy Board Meeting

Date: Thursday, May 14, 2026

Time: 5:45 PM PST

Location: City Hall, 495 S. Main Street, Fifth Floor, Las Vegas, NV

I. Opening Items

A. The meeting was called to order by Chair Lorna James-Cervantes at 5:45 PM with confirmation of quorum.

B. Roll Call

1. Present: Maria Tamayo-Soto, Dr. Alea Moore, Alicia Arroyo, Angela Scurry, Lori McGaughey, and Dachresha Harris.

2. Absent: Dr. Vanessa Mari and Roxann McCoy,

C. Public Comment

1. Public comments were made during this portion of the agenda by Jessica Campos and Katie Bandy.

i. Summary: Jessica Campos addressed the Board in support of Strong Start Academy's bilingual education program and encouraged future middle school expansion opportunities.

ii. Summary: Katie Bandy expressed appreciation for the school's academic structure, small class sizes, and student support, and requested consideration of a future middle school continuation program.

iii. Summary: Chair Lorna James-Cervantes thanked both speakers for their comments and participation.

D. Approval of Minutes

1. The minutes from the April 9, 2025 meeting were reviewed and approved
 - i. **Motion:** Alicia Arroyo; **Second:** Maria Tamayo-Soto; **Vote:** Unanimously approved

II. Finance

A. Financial Reports: Presented by Nandini Vaishnav

1. The Board discussed and approved the FY 2026-2027 Final Budget following the public budget hearing.
2. Nandini Vaishnav from Vertex Education presented the March 2026 financial update and forecast.
3. Projected net income increased from approximately \$211,000 to approximately \$300,000.
4. Federal grant allocations increased and reimbursements were underway.
5. The school maintained strong reserves and remained above the 60-day cash reserve benchmark.
6. **Motion:** Dachresha Harris; **Second:** Angela Scurry; **Vote:** Unanimously approved

III. Executive Updates

A. Marketing and Enrollment Report: Presented by Miriam Benitez

1. Miriam Benitez presented enrollment and recruitment updates.
2. Enrollment decreased slightly due to student relocation and homeschooling withdrawals.
3. Summer recruitment efforts will focus on third and fourth grade enrollment.
4. The Organizational Performance Framework Self-Certification Form was reviewed.
5. Discussion included ELAD endorsement compliance, special education staffing, and evaluation timeline requirements.
6. **Motion:** Dachresha Harris; **Second:** Maria Tamayo-Soto; **Vote:** Approved unanimously

IV. Governance

A. Governance, Organizational Business Updates, and Calendar Events

1. The Board approved renewal of the BoardOnTrack agreement.
2. The annual Board Retreat was scheduled for July 22, 2026.
3. The Board discussed possible future middle school expansion opportunities.
4. Annual disclosure form requirements were reviewed.
5. Critical labor shortage designations were approved for the Executive Director and bilingual teacher positions.
6. The Board approved renewal of the Vertex Education agreement pending legal review.

VI. Citizens' Participation

A. Public Comment

1. No public comments were made during this portion of the agenda. No comments were received via WebEx, email, or phone.

VII. Adjournment

- A. The meeting was adjourned by Chair Lorna James-Cervantes at 6:53 PM

Lorna James-Cervantes, President
Maria Tamayo-Soto, Treasurer
Alicia Arroyo, Secretary
Dachresha Harris, Officer
Dr. Alea Moore, Officer
Angela Scurry, Officer
Roxann McCoy, Officer
Vanessa Mari, Officer
Lori McGaughey, Officer

Miriam Benitez, Executive Director



DRAFT Budget Hearing Minutes of the Strong Start Academy Budget Meeting

Date: Thursday, May 14, 2026

Time: 5:15 PM PST

Location: City Hall, 495 S. Main Street, Fifth Floor, Las Vegas, NV

I. Opening Items

- A.** The meeting was called to order by Chair Lorna James-Cervantes at 5:15 PM with confirmation of quorum.
- B. Roll Call**
 - 1. Present:** Maria Tamayo-Soto, Dr. Alea Moore, Alicia Arroyo, Angela Scurry, Dachresha Harris, Lori McGaughey, Lorna Cervantes (Chair)
 - 2. Absent:** Vanessa Mari, Roxann McCoy
- C. Public Comment**
 - 1.** Public comment procedures were read into the record.
 - i. Members of the public were advised comments were limited to budget hearing agenda items.
 - ii. No public comments were made in person, electronically, or by telephone.

II. Discussion Regarding FY 2026-2027 Final Budget

- A. FY 2026-2027 Final Budget Report:** Presented by Nandini Vaishnav
 - 1. The final budget was developed based on projected enrollment of 300 students.
 - 2. Projected state funding was estimated at \$9,484 per pupil.
 - 3. Projected local support included approximately \$1.3 million from the City of Las Vegas.
 - 4. Federal grant allocations were projected at slightly more than \$400,000.
 - 5. The school projected approximately 34 staff members for FY 2026–2027
 - 6. Payroll and benefits remained the largest expenditure category.

7. Healthcare benefit premiums were projected to increase by approximately 18.34%.
8. Board members discussed maintaining competitive employee benefits to support teacher recruitment and retention.
9. The proposed budget projected approximately \$254,000 in net income and stable reserve balances.
10. No formal action or vote was taken during the budget hearing meeting. Final budget approval was scheduled for the regular board meeting following the hearing.

III. Citizens' Participation

- A. No additional public comments were received during citizen participation.

IV. Adjournment

- A. **Chair Lorna James-Cervantes adjourned the budget hearing meeting at 5:44 PM.**

Coversheet

Discussion for possible action to approve Minutes from January 29,
2026 Board meeting and AMENDED Meeting Minutes from
November 20, 2025 Board Meeting.

Section:	I. Opening Items
Item:	E. Discussion for possible action to approve Minutes from January 29, 2026 Board meeting and AMENDED Meeting Minutes from November 20, 2025 Board Meeting.
Purpose:	Vote
Submitted by:	
Related Material:	DRAFT_Board_Meeting_Minutes_1.29.2026_.pdf FINAL_AMENDED_Board_Meeting_Minutes_11.20.2025_AROSE (1).pdf

Lorna James-Cervantes, President
Maria Tamayo-Soto, Treasurer
Alicia Arroyo, Secretary
Dachresha Harris, Officer
Dr. Alea Moore, Officer
Angela Scurry, Officer
Roxann McCoy, Officer
Vanessa Mari, Officer
Lori McGaughey, Officer

Miriam Benitez, Executive Director



DRAFT Board Meeting Minutes of the Strong Start Academy Board Meeting

Date: Thursday, January 29, 2026

Time: 9:00 AM PST

Location: City Hall, 495 S. Main Street, Fifth Floor, Las Vegas, NV

I. Opening Items

A. The meeting was called to order by Chair Lorna James-Cervantes at 9:05 AM with confirmation of quorum.

B. Roll Call

1. **Present:** Lorna James-Cervantes, Maria Tamayo-Soto, Dr. Vanessa Mari, Dr. Alea Moore, Alicia Arroyo, Roxann McCoy, Dachresha Harris, Angela Scurry.
2. **Absent:** Lori McGaughey

C. Public Comment

1. No public comments were made during this portion of the agenda. No comments received via WebEx, email, or phone.

D. Approval of Minutes

1. The minutes from the November 20th, 2025 meeting were reviewed and approved pending corrections noted and amended: Names in items 4D.
 - i. **Motion:** Maria Tamayo-Soto; **Second:** Alea Moore; **Vote:** Unanimously approved

II. Finance

A. Financial Reports: Presented by Nandini Vaishnav

1. **Forecast vs. Budget:** Net income holding at approximately \$215,000, an improvement of about \$4,000 driven by federal revenue increases offset by higher supplies expenses.
2. **Budget Amendment:** One amendment completed for AB 3908; Board may see a spring amendment if > 10% expense variance or > 5% enrollment change emerges.

3. **Balance Sheet Strength:** Liquid assets $\approx$ \$2.6M; liabilities $\approx$ \$268K; liabilities (including PERS) are being paid down monthly; metrics remain very strong.
4. **Grants:** All reimbursement-based; some reimbursements temporarily on hold pending SPCSA amendments. Spending continues according to allocations; focus on compliant AB 3908 distribution following new guidance and a mandatory meeting next week to resolve reporting alignment (PERS/SPCSA/schools).
5. **Cash Projection:** Far above 60-day cash goal line; projected $\approx$ 200 days cash on hand at year-end as grants spend down.
6. **Compliance Tasks:** Capital improvement and Q2 financials due Friday; GMS reimbursements due Feb 15 for expenses through January.

III. Executive Updates

A. Marketing and Enrollment Report: Presented by Miriam Benitez

1. **Tabling & Outreach:** Multiple events in December–January yielded positive responses. Current enrollment increased to 268 (from 262 in November); budget built on 260 students.
2. **2026–27 Open Enrollment:** 298 students accepted with 23 seats available; waitlists at all grade levels except 3rd and 4th.
3. **Kindergarten Start Strategy Discussion:**
 - i. Consideration to begin Kindergarten a few days earlier than the main start to reduce no-shows and allow backfilling before CCSD starts; parents offered supportive feedback despite multi-child scheduling issues.
 - ii. Alternatives (e.g., pre-calling top waitlist families) were trialed previously and produced class size complaints (temporary overage in Grade 1 resolved later).
4. **Dual-Language Entry Challenges:**
 - i. Best fit for newcomers with Spanish (including Portuguese-speaking families transitioning via language similarity).
 - ii. Greater challenge for late entrants without Spanish in grades 3–4 given the immersion model.
5. **Capacity Model:** Discussion noted space limits and original “small school” design choice (no more than 3 classrooms per grade), constraining ideas to add extra Kinder/1st sections.

B. Mid-Year (Winter) 2025–26 Student Achievement – iReady Diagnostic Presented by Miriam Benitez

1. Reading: 69% proficient mid-year vs. 65% at same time last year; strong grade-level improvements and reductions in below-grade cohorts (e.g., “two grades below” decreased from 10% to 4%).
2. Math: +7% proficiency increase year-over-year; movement from mid/above and early on-grade categories with “two grades below” reduced from 10% to 4%.
3. Assessment Platform: State approval to use iReady (replacing MAP), reducing double testing; chosen for strong correlation to SBAC outcomes (Board note)
4. School Performance Plan Alignment: On track to achieve goals—Reading from 64% $\rightarrow$ 74%, Math from 41% $\rightarrow$ 51%.

C. 2024–25 Nevada School Performance Framework (NSPF) Results

1. **Official Rating: Four-Star School;** index 83.5 (five-star threshold 84; note: no rounding). A clerical error excluded one student who would have pushed the score to five-star; Board and ED noted pride while acknowledging the technical shortfall.
2. Reporting Delay Context: State cyberattack delayed public release until December.
3. **Current-Year Outlook:** Added new, out-of-state fifth graders performing below grade level may not count for growth (achievement only), making five-star attainment more challenging; mitigation includes January launch of Saturday School (English-language delivery) to support math (typically taught in Spanish) without diluting immersion minutes.

IV. Governance

A. Committee Updates and Calendar Events

1. The Chair noted this item would be held for later workgroups during the retreat (discussion only, no decisions to be made in those groups at this meeting).

V. Facilities:

A. Construction Update on New Strong Start Academy Building: Presented by Missy Fredriksen on behalf of Angela Rose

1. **Expansion Timeline:** Began January 2025; completion targeted January 2026. Final stages included new grades 3–5 playground, exterior stucco painting, and new parking lot paving.
2. **Ribbon Cutting:** Held Friday, December 12, 2025 during annual Tony Hsieh Day; speakers included the Mayor, Councilman Diaz, Executive Director Miriam Benítez, and the Builders United CEO.
3. **Punch-List:** 30-day contractor punch list submitted December 2025; expected completion January 16, 2026.
4. **Move-In & Instruction:** School moved into the new building over winter break; classes began Monday, January 5, 2026.
5. **Traffic & Parking Planning:** Coordination with Public Works for 2026–27 options, including potential one-way conversion of 9th Street; further facilities upgrades planning to begin spring 2026 with City, school team, and public safety officials.
6. **Board & City Acknowledgments:** Chair recognized staff, parents, students, and City partners (including parking enforcement) for managing downtown parking and safety challenges during construction.

VI. Citizens' Participation

A. Public Comment and Adjournment

1. The Chair opened general public comment for matters within Board jurisdiction; no public comments were made in person or received electronically/phone at this time.

VII. Adjournment

A. The meeting was adjourned by Chair Lorna James-Cervantes at 9:45 AM

Lorna James-Cervantes, President
Maria Tamayo-Soto, Treasurer
Alicia Arroyo, Secretary
Dachresha Harris, Officer
Dr. Alea Moore, Officer
Angela Scurry, Officer
Roxann McCoy, Officer
Vanessa Mari, Officer
Lori McGaughey, Officer

Miriam Benitez, Executive Director



Board Meeting Minutes of the Strong Start Academy Board Meeting

Date: Thursday, November 20, 2025

Time: 5:00 PM PST

Location: City Hall, 495 S. Main Street, Fifth Floor, Las Vegas, NV

I. Opening Items

A. The meeting was called to order by Chair Lorna James-Cervantes at 5:00 PM with confirmation of quorum.

B. Roll Call

1. Present:

- Lorna James-Cervantes
- Maria Tamayo-Soto
- Dr. Vanessa Mari
- Dr. Alea Moore
- Lori McGaughey
- Alicia Arroyo
- Roxann McCoy (joined later)
- Dachresha Harris (joined later)

2. Absent:

- Angela Scurry

C. Public Comment

- No public comments were made during this portion of the agenda. No comments received via WebEx, email, or phone.

D. Approval of Minutes

- Action Item: Approval of October 9, 2025 Board Meeting Minutes
 - i. Motion: **Lorna James-Cervantes moved to approve the minutes as submitted.**
Second: **Dr. Vanessa Mari**
Vote: **Unanimous approval.**
Motion passed.

II. Finance

A. Financial Reports: Presented by Kristin Dietz

Kristin Dietz presented:

- Strong financial performance through September 2025
- Enrollment reflected at **260 students** (revised from original projections)
- Increases in weighted funding for ELL and At-Risk students
- New AB3908 teacher pay-raise revenue incorporated
- Transportation grant added
- Strong cash position (~176 days cash on hand)
- All compliance tasks submitted on time
- Recommendation: adopt the September forecast as the amended FY25–26 budget

B. FY2025 Audit Report – CliftonLarsonAllen (CLA)

Presenter: Jamie Williams, CLA

Audit Results:

- Unmodified (clean) audit opinion
- No audit adjustments
- No material weaknesses or significant deficiencies
- Two new accounting standards implemented with no financial impact
- Increase in assets and revenue; positive change in fund balance and net position

Board members were provided the full audit report via BoardOnTrack.

Action Item: Approval of FY2025 Audit Report

Motion: Lorna James-Cervantes

Second: Dr. Alea Moore

Vote: Unanimous approval

Motion passed.

C. Approval of September Forecast as Amended Budget

Action Item: Adopt the September 2025 Forecast as the FY25–26 Amended Budget

Motion: Lorna James-Cervantes

Second: Roxann McCoy

Vote: Unanimous approval

Motion passed.

D. Approval of Fund 220 for AB3908 Teacher Pay Raises

- Kristin Dietz explained that Fund 220 must be formally approved for State-required accounting of AB3908 funds.

Motion: Lorna James-Cervantes moved to approve the use of Fund 220.

Second: Maria Tomayo-Soto

Vote: Unanimous approval

Motion passed.

III. Executive Director Report –

A. Enrollment & Marketing (Miriam)

- Current enrollment: 262 students
- Lost 3 students (family circumstances)
- No community tabling events in November; seeking events in December and beyond
- January outreach events are scheduled; none confirmed for December
- Demographic and language reports provided in packet

B. Organizational Performance Framework

- Miriam presented the Nevada State Public Charter School Authority's SY24–25 Organizational Performance Ratings.

- Results:
Strong Start Academy met all standards across all categories.

IV. Governance

A. Committee Updates

- Outreach Committee continues planning and community engagement.
- CEO Evaluation Committee will circulate a new board survey soon.

B. January Board Retreat Scheduling

- Board agreed to hold a half-day in-person retreat on January 29 (morning).
- EdTec will provide financial training for both new and returning board members.
- This meeting may replace the February meeting depending on agenda needs.

C. Facilities Update – City of Las Vegas

- Construction nearing completion; substantial completion anticipated by December 12.
- Ribbon-cutting event scheduled for December 12, 8:30–10:00 AM.
- Security upgrades will begin after construction is fully turned over to the City.
- Playground and exterior work nearly complete.

V. Citizens' Participation

A. Second Public Comment Portion of the Meeting

- Miriam Benitez made comments directly to the Board regarding construction progress at the school and wanted to acknowledge Board Member, Maria Tomayo-Soto for her assistance in providing Parking Services support to her staff during the last phase of construction.

VI. Adjournment

The meeting continued with additional facilities comments and closed following the conclusion of agenda items at 6:27 PM.