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New York, NY 10029
Tel 212.360.3236

Veronica Delva
Principal
Middle School
35 East 125th Street
New York, NY 10035
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Shannon Ortiz-Wong
Principal
High School
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AGENDA

Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) Promise Academy II
Board of Trustees Meeting
Thursday, October 23, 2025
at
245 West 129th Street
New York, NY

- I. Acceptance of the Minutes
- II. CEO Report (*Kwame Owusu-Kesse*)
- III. Superintendent's Updates (*Saskia Brown*)
- IV. HCZ Promise Academy II Updates
 - i. Elementary School (*Kiana Morris*)
 - ii. Middle School (*Veronica Delva*)
 - iii. High School (*Shannon Ortiz-Wong*)
- V. Financial Report (*Ralph Stefano*)

**Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) Promise Academy II Charter School
Board Meeting
Thursday, September 18, 2025
245 West 129th Street**

Attendees: Geoffrey Canada, Kwame Owusu-Kesse, Mitch Kurz, Ellanor (Bodie) Brizendine, Willie Mae Lewis, Lisa McNear, Keith Meister, DeniLee Peroza, Candice Ashby, Shannon Benson, LaRen Bierria, Saskia Brown, Ari Browne, Celines Castro, Amy Deal, Veroniqua Delva, Garraud Etienne, LaKiesha George, Jenn Klein, Jazmine Lewis, Katherine Martinez, John Macapagal, Liam McCarthy, Kiana Morris, Shannon Ortiz-Wong, Ralph Stefano, Toya Stilley, and Tarik Ward.

Acceptance of Minutes (Geoffrey Canada)

The meeting was called to order at 4:30 PM, and a motion to approve the meeting minutes from June 24 was unanimously approved.

CEO Report (Kwame Owusu-Kesse)

Chief Executive Officer Kwame Owusu-Kesse welcomed new Board members Promise Academy I Parent Representative Denilee Peroza and Promise Academy II Parent Representative Lisa McNear to their first meeting. All meeting participants introduced themselves to the new Board members.

Mr. Owusu Kesse also thanked former Parent Representatives Aisha Tomlinson and Fatime Cadoo for their service.

Mr. Owusu Kesse also introduced the new Chief Operating Officer Tarik Ward:

Prior to joining HCZ, where he oversees Programs, Core Operations, and Information Technology, Mr. Ward was the Director of Global Operations and U.S. Programs at The ELMA Philanthropy Services. In his role, Mr. Ward combined his engineering background, educational expertise, and passion for music to empower young people in the U.S. and South Africa.

Previously, he was Chief Operating Officer at The Commit! Partnership, a Dallas-based nonprofit organization focused on expanding access to quality education for children. In his role, he oversaw internal operations, external communications, and fundraising. Prior to The Commit! Partnership, he was a Senior Consultant at Deloitte, where, among other achievements, he developed a 10-year strategic plan for United Way of Greater Houston – Bright Beginnings, an early childhood education training program. Mr. Ward began his career as an Attitude Determination and Control Officer Flight Controller for the International Space Station at NASA, where he worked for nine years.

A native New Yorker, he holds a Bachelor of Science in Aerospace Engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and a Masters of Business Administration and a Masters of Education from Stanford University.

Superintendent Dr. Saskia Brown introduced the Promise Academy I Middle School Interim Principal LaRen Bierria:

LaRen Bierria is a dedicated educational leader entering her 19th year in the field of education. Over the course of her career, she has served in multiple capacities, including general education teacher, special education manager, and assistant principal, before stepping into her current role as the Interim Principal.

A member of the Promise Academy community for 16 years, Ms. Bierria holds a Bachelor's Degree in Urban Education and dual Master's Degrees in Special and General Education. She is deeply committed to Promise Academy and ensuring that every scholar receives the support, guidance, and opportunities they need to thrive.

Dr. Brown also announced that former Principal Madelaine Schultz has transitioned to HCZ's Strategy and Innovation team in her new role as Principal in Residence. Dr. Brown thanked Ms. Schultz for her service.

Superintendent's Update (Dr. Saskia Brown)

Superintendent Dr. Saskia Brown reported that enrollment as of September 15 is 1,169 for HCZ Promise Academy I and 1,032 for HCZ Promise Academy II.

Dr. Brown reported that the schools engaged in activities to prepare for the 2025-2026 school year. During the summer, scholars participated in Summer Boost, the Extended Learning Program, and Summer Games, an annual Olympic-inspired event hosted at the Nike Track & Field Center at the Armory.

Promise Academy staff and scholars also participated in the Rasuli Lewis Children's March for Peace, an annual event that brings the HCZ community together to march through the streets calling for peace.

State Test Scores (Dr. Saskia Brown)

The schools saw gains in English Language Arts (ELA), particularly at Promise Academy I. At Promise Academy II, performance in ELA remained relatively stable compared to the previous year.

In ELA, proficiency rates among scholars at Promise Academy I increased by three percentage points compared to their 2024 state exam results, while proficiency rates among scholars at Promise Academy II's decreased by one percentage point compared to their 2024 state exam results. Scholars in both schools outperformed peers in their district, while scholars at Promise Academy I also outperformed their peers in New York City (NYC) and New York State (NYS). Notably, scholars in grades

seven and eight at Promise Academy I Middle School strongly outperformed their peers in the district, city, and state by 14 percentage points or more. Also, students with disabilities outperformed their NYC peers in all grades, often by more than five percentage points.

The data also revealed a notable decline in math performance, largely driven by results from Promise Academy II.

In math, proficiency rates among scholars at Promise Academy I decreased by nine percentage points compared to their 2024 state exam results, while proficiency rates among scholars at Promise Academy II decreased by 18 percentage points compared to their 2024 state exam results. Scholars at both schools outperformed peers in their district, while scholars at Promise Academy I also outperformed their peers in NYC and NYS. Notably, scholars in grades seven and eight at Promise Academy I Middle School strongly outperformed their peers in the district, city, and state by 15 percentage points or more. Also, students with disabilities outperformed their NYC peers in grades four, seven, and eight.

Dr. Brown identified teacher vacancies as a contributing factor to underperformance among scholars. Moving forward, leaders will focus on strengthening teacher staffing through recruitment and retention strategies and ensuring every classroom has a highly skilled educator to provide robust instructional support.

Dr. Brown has partnered closely with the newly appointed Chief Human Resources Officer Celines Castro to address critical staffing vacancies. In addition, the schools have refined their instructional coaching model to increase teacher effectiveness. Math and literacy coaches will provide targeted support for teachers in grades 3 through 6, with a particular focus on Promise Academy II and on teachers who are serving as instructional leads. Dr. Brown has also assigned network and school leaders, including the Superintendent, to conduct instructional rounds and provide coaching support to expand the network's overall coaching capacity.

Dr. Brown also reported that the data analysis process has been redesigned to occur weekly, rather than monthly, to allow for more responsive instructional adjustments. Weekly data reports will be shared directly with school leaders and the Superintendent to ensure real-time monitoring of scholar progress and instructional effectiveness. To further strengthen accountability and impact, the schools will use a new three-tiered data system so school leaders can review performance at the teacher, school, and network levels.

The schools also launched a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework to provide targeted academic interventions, particularly for scholars in grades four through six. The Teaching and Learning team has also reviewed and refined math curriculum units to ensure stronger alignment with state standards and improved instructional coherence.

HCZ Promise Academy II Elementary School (Kiana Morris)

Principal Kiana Morris reported the Elementary School's attendance was 86% for June.

The Elementary School hosted its first annual Field Day, during which scholars participated in outdoor activities and team-based "Color Wars" at the neighborhood park.

The school hosted a trip for scholars who achieved Honor Roll status for all marking periods during the 2024-2025 school year. Eligible scholars visited the American Dream complex for a day of celebration and recreation.

The Elementary School held a well-attended Back-to-School Night for families. Parents participated in physical education demonstrations, games, and watched showcases performed by Promise Academy II Elementary After School clubs. Families visited classrooms and met teachers.

HCZ Promise Academy II Middle School (Dr. Veroniqua Delva)

Principal Dr. Veroniqua Delva reported the Middle School's attendance was 88% for June.

In August, the Middle School hosted a Family Orientation to welcome sixth-grade scholars and their families and review expectations. The Middle School hosted an Honors Cohort Orientation for scholars enrolled in the Advanced Program who will be taking the Biology Regents exam, ensuring both scholars and families understood academic expectations and requirements.

The Middle School will host a Back-to-School Night on October 21, which will offer families the opportunity to meet teachers, visit classrooms, and learn more about the curriculum and academic programming.

The Middle School participated in a network instructional walkthrough with the Teaching and Learning Team, Dr. Brown, and Deputy Superintendent Shannon Benson. The walkthrough focused on instructional goals and key areas for growth aligned with the school's action plan.

The Middle School held town halls for scholars focused on vision setting for the school year.

New and returning staff members engaged in activities that emphasized academic expectations and school culture under the theme "Work Hard, Play Hard."

HCZ Promise Academy II High School (Shannon Ortiz-Wong)

Principal Shannon Ortiz-Wong reported the High School's attendance was 89% for June.

In August, several scholars returned from Summer Exposure Programs programming, which prepares scholars for college and their careers by giving them the opportunity

to participate in courses on college campuses and professional internships. Scholars attended programs at Hunter College and City College.

In preparation for the new school year, High School leadership and the Facilities Team ensured the school building was clean, organized, and ready to welcome scholars. Principal Ortiz-Wong also collaborated with Dr. Delva and the Middle School team to ensure a smooth transition for rising ninth graders, identifying scholars who would benefit from additional academic or social-emotional support at the start of the school year.

College Success Office hosted a send-off event for graduating seniors entering college, providing supplies and words of encouragement as they began their next chapter.

Financial Update (Ralph Stefano)

Chief Financial Officer Ralph Stefano reported that HCZ Promise Academy II's preliminary Sep 15 enrollment is 1,032, which is five favorable versus the budget. The school's revenue through July is on budget at \$2.1M. Expenses are \$0.2M favorable, at \$1.1M. HCZ has not made a contribution through 1 month of FY26.

HCZ Promise Academy District-wide & Building-level Safety Plans (Candice Ashby)

An update was provided on the HCZ Promise Academy District-wide and HCZ Promise Academy II Building-level Safety Plans for the 2025-2026 academic year, including recent revisions and compliance measures in accordance with New York State Education Department requirements.

A motion was called to approve the HCZ Promise Academy District-wide and HCZ Promise Academy II Building-level Safety Plans for the 2025-2026 academic year. The motion was seconded and approved. The District-wide Safety Plan can be found on the HCZ Promise Academy website.

<https://hczpromise.org/community/>

HCZ Promise Academy II

September 2025 Attendance Report

		HCZ PAII Elementary School			HCZ PAII Middle School			HCZ PAII High School		
Date		Number of Students		% of Students Present	Number of Students		% of Students Present	Number of Students		% of Students Present
		Absent	Enrollment		Absent	Enrollment		Absent	Enrollment	
9/3		52	525	90%	34	274	88%	38	230	83%
9/4		42	525	92%	20	273	93%	27	217	88%
9/5		53	527	90%	26	273	90%	30	213	86%
9/8		34	528	94%	20	273	93%	13	211	94%
9/9		29	528	95%	13	273	95%	14	211	93%
9/10		38	527	93%	13	273	95%	15	210	93%
9/11		34	527	94%	18	273	93%	19	208	91%
9/12		46	528	91%	18	272	93%	14	208	93%
9/15		37	528	93%	21	272	92%	15	208	93%
9/16		31	529	94%	15	272	94%	11	207	95%
9/17		26	529	95%	23	272	92%	14	207	93%
9/18		37	529	93%	15	272	94%	14	207	93%
9/19		45	527	91%	35	272	87%	17	207	92%
9/22		59	529	89%	30	272	89%	22	207	89%
9/25		39	528	93%	27	272	90%	24	207	88%
9/26		45	528	91%	24	272	91%	24	206	88%
9/29		25	528	95%	18	272	93%	15	206	93%
9/30		26	529	95%	17	272	94%	11	206	95%
Average		39	528	93%	22	272	92%	19	210	91%

Promise Academy II

FY 2026 August YTD Budget vs. Actual

		Budget	Actual	Fav/(Unfav)	Full Year Budget
Enrollment	(a)	1,027	1,003	(24)	1,027
DOE and other gov't funding		\$ 4.1	\$ 4.0	\$ (0.1)	\$ 24.8
Expenses:					
Salaries		2.4	2.4	-	16.3
Benefits		0.7	0.5	0.2	4.4
OTPS		0.7	0.5	0.2	3.9
Total Expenses	(b)	3.8	3.4	0.4	24.6
Expenses in excess of public funding		-	-	-	-
Contribution Components:					
HCZ Contribution		-	-	-	-
per student (whole \$)		\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -

(a) Reflects enrollment as of Oct 1: 1,003

(b) Excludes PA Initiatives, bonus, growth fund, & other HCZ allocations.