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LaKiesha George
**Principal
Elementary School**
245 West 129th Street
New York, NY 10027
Tel 212.360.3232

LaRen Bierria
**Interim Principal
Middle School**
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Amy Deal
**Principal
High School**
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AGENDA

Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) Promise Academy I
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 I Updates
 - i. Elementary School (*LaKiesha George*)
 - ii. Middle School (*LaRen Bierria*)
 - iii. High School (*Amy Deal*)
- V. Financial Report (*Ralph Stefano*)

**Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) Promise Academy I 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 I Elementary School (LaKiesha George)

Principal LaKiesha George reported the Elementary School's attendance was 89% for June.

Over the summer, the Elementary School team implemented several initiatives to strengthen teaching and learning, including Summer Boost programming and the adoption of Lavinia RISE curriculum in ELA and math. School leaders also collaborated with the Teaching and Learning team to launch common intellectual planning sessions designed to deepen instructional practice for both teachers and administrators.

The Elementary School successfully onboarded new staff members and hosted a comprehensive August training for all new and returning staff.

This week, the Elementary School hosted a well-attended Back-to-School Night, where families received free books and connected with teachers and staff.

HCZ Promise Academy I Middle School (LaRen Bierria)

Interim Principal LaRen Bierria reported the Middle School's attendance was 89% for June.

This school year, the Middle School is expanding its One Promise Mentorship Program in partnership with Promise Academy I High School. Through this program, high school scholars can earn community service hours by mentoring middle school scholars.

The Middle School held an Honor Cohort Orientation to re-engage families in the school's academic experience. Parents were invited into classrooms to learn about Biology and Algebra Regents exams, as well as expectations for both scholars and families in supporting academic success.

The Middle School is hosting a Welcome Back Parents' Night on September 18. Additionally, school leaders held Town Halls for all grades to introduce scholars to the staff and review academic and behavioral expectations.

HCZ Promise Academy I High School (Dr. Amy Deal)

Principal Dr. Amy Deal reported the High School's attendance was 90% for June.

Rising 12th grade scholars engaged in Summer Exposure programming, which prepares scholars for college and their careers by giving them the opportunity to participate in courses on college campuses and professional internships.

The High School launched the new school year with a Welcome Week for both new and returning teachers. Principal Deal thanked the Teaching and Learning team for their thoughtful planning.

This year, teachers are focusing on maximizing time on task for scholars and maintaining high academic and behavioral expectations.

Financial Update (Ralph Stefano)

Chief Financial Officer Ralph Stefano reported that HCZ Promise Academy I's preliminary Sep 15 enrollment is 1,169, which is nine favorable versus the budget. The school's revenue through July is on budget at \$2.2M. Expenses are \$0.2M favorable, at \$1.2M. HCZ has not made a contribution through 1 month of FY26.

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

Director of Compliance & Reporting Candice Ashby provided an update on the HCZ Promise Academy District-wide and HCZ Promise Academy I Building-level Safety Plans for the 2025-2026 academic year, to include a Cardiac Emergency Response Plan 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 I 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 I September 2025 Attendance Report

	HCZ PAI Elementary School			HCZ PAI Middle School			HCZ PAI High School		
	Number of Students		% of Students	Number of Students		% of Students	Number of Students		% of Students
Date	Absent	Enrollment	Present	Absent	Enrollment	Present	Absent	Enrollment	Present
9/3	78	622	87%	28	270	90%	20	259	92%
9/4	42	619	93%	17	270	94%	19	259	93%
9/5	52	620	92%	25	269	91%	19	259	93%
9/8	33	620	95%	24	269	91%	15	259	94%
9/9	30	621	95%	18	269	93%	20	259	92%
9/10	36	621	94%	18	269	93%	19	259	93%
9/11	26	621	96%	14	269	95%	27	259	90%
9/12	42	621	93%	19	269	93%	20	259	92%
9/15	38	621	94%	17	269	94%	17	259	93%
9/16	37	623	94%	20	267	93%	10	259	96%
9/17	31	623	95%	14	267	95%	19	259	93%
9/18	34	623	95%	14	267	95%	19	259	93%
9/19	43	622	93%	18	267	93%	23	259	91%
9/22	69	623	89%	29	267	89%	31	259	88%
9/25	40	623	94%	20	267	93%	23	259	91%
9/26	51	623	92%	21	267	92%	15	259	94%
9/29	38	623	94%	12	267	96%	8	259	97%
9/30	33	622	95%	17	267	94%	19	259	93%
Average	42	622	93%	19	268	93%	19	259	93%

Promise Academy I
FY 2026 August YTD Budget vs. Actual

		Budget	Actual	Fav/(Unfav)	Full Year Budget
Enrollment	(a)	1,160	1,146	(14)	1,160
DOE and other gov't funding		\$ 4.5	\$ 4.4	\$ (0.1)	\$ 26.8
Expenses:					
Salaries		2.5	2.6	(0.1)	17.3
Benefits		0.8	0.7	0.1	4.7
OTPS		0.7	0.2	0.5	4.2
Total Expenses	(b)	4.0	3.5	0.5	26.2
Expenses in excess of public funding		-	-	-	-
Contribution Components:					
HCZ Contribution		-	-	-	-
per student (whole \$)		\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -

(a) Reflects enrollment as of Oct 1: 1,146

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