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**Principal
Elementary School**
70 East 112th Street
New York, NY 10029
Tel 212.360.3236

Veroniqua Delva
**Principal
Middle School**
35 East 125th Street
New York, NY 10035
Tel 212.360.3237

Shannon Ortiz-Wong
**Principal
High School**
35 East 125th Street
New York, NY 10035
Tel 212.360.3238

AGENDA

Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) Promise Academy II
Board of Trustees Meeting
Wednesday, January 14, 2026
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 (*LaKiesha George*)
 - ii. Middle School (*Veroniqua Delva*)
 - iii. High School (*Shannon Ortiz-Wong*)
- V. Financial Report (*Ralph Stefano*)

**Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) Promise Academy II Charter School
Board Meeting
Tuesday, December 16, 2025
245 West 129th Street**

Attendees: Geoffrey Canada, Willie Mae Lewis, Lisa McNear, Keith Meister, DeniLee Peroza, Candice Ashby, Shannon Benson, LaRen Bierria, Saskia Brown, Ari Browne, Amy Deal, Veroniqua Delva, LaKiesha George, Jenn Klein, Jazmine Lewis, Stephanie Lilavois, John Macapagal, Liam McCarthy, Shannon Ortiz-Wong, Kelly Siddharta, Meredith Peckosh-Soffrin, Ralph Stefano, Toya Stilley, and Tarik Ward.

CEO Report (Jazmine Lewis, on behalf of Kwame Owusu-Kesse)

Chief Strategy Officer Jazmine Lewis delivered the CEO Report on behalf of Chief Executive Officer Kwame Owusu-Kesse.

Ms. Lewis reported that both HCZ Promise Academy I and II High Schools earned Blue Star recognition from W!se, a national nonprofit organization focused on financial education. She noted that the recognition reflects HCZ's continued investment in financial literacy programming across its middle and high schools through Wealth Builds.

The annual Wealth Builds High School Career Fair, held November 13 at the HCZ Armory, welcomed 739 high school scholars from across the Zone and engaged 98 professionals representing industries such as education, finance, media, software, technology, fashion, data, and beauty.

The HCZ scholarship application cycle closed with 100 percent participation from eligible HCZ high school seniors. A total of 270 scholars applied, and HCZ leadership is reviewing applications. Ms. Lewis thanked Board members and staff supporting the evaluation and interview process.

Approximately 200 HCZ families and staff participated in the annual Night on Broadway, a curated experience at the Gershman Theater. An additional 100 participants attended a VIP experience.

HCZ staff served 333 residents from St. Nicholas Houses at the 11th Annual Westside Community Center Thanksgiving Dinner. Ms. Lewis emphasized HCZ's longstanding commitment to being an engaged and supportive neighbor to the St. Nicholas Houses community.

HCZ held its Food Harvest Distribution on November 23 and distributed 2,000 boxes of perishable and non-perishable food to HCZ community members following SNAP benefit reductions.

Superintendent's Update (Dr. Saskia Brown)

Superintendent Dr. Saskia Brown reported that enrollment as of December 1 is 1,147 for HCZ Promise Academy I and 972 for HCZ Promise Academy II.

Dr. Brown reported that HCZ launched a high-impact tutoring initiative in partnership with HeyTutor on December 8. The initiative deployed 19 tutors across schools to serve about 272 scholars identified through i-Ready and state assessment data. Tutors provide support during the school day, Monday through Thursday, and on Saturdays. Dr. Brown thanked Managing Director Katherine Martinez and the rest of the Teaching and Learning team, Deputy Superintendent Shannon Benson and school leaders for prioritizing the initiative and supporting its implementation.

HCZ Promise Academy II Elementary School (LaKiesha George)

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

The Elementary School held a Top Performer's Award ceremony.

Teachers participated in professional development sessions focused on reviewing social-emotional learning competencies data and supporting a schoolwide reset of scholar behavior systems.

Ms. George announced the hiring of Assistant Principal Natasha Tomlinson, completing the Elementary School Leadership team.

The Elementary School continued efforts to strengthen scholar and family engagement by hosting weekly community circles for grades K-2 and 3-5.

The Elementary School also held a parent meeting attended by approximately 40 families, who shared positive feedback and expressed confidence in the school's direction.

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

Principal Dr. Veroniqua Delva reported the Middle School's attendance was 90% for November.

Dr. Delva hosted Dive In with Dr. Delva, a parent meeting focused on increasing scholar participation in Academic Hour, Saturday Academy, and HeyTutor. The session emphasized parent partnership as a key strategy for improving attendance and academic engagement.

The Middle School also hosted a Social Emotional Learning (SEL) parent workshop led by the guidance counselor and SEL Team, with a focus on academic success and managing stress.

The Middle School celebrated scholar achievement through an Honors Brunch, awards ceremony, and perfect attendance celebration. Scholars with perfect attendance received incentives, including movie tickets. Gold Honor Roll scholars participated in an enrichment trip to Chelsea Piers, where they engaged in activities such as gymnastics, rock climbing, and batting cages.

To support staff retention and morale, the Middle School hosted a team-building luncheon.

The Leadership team launched development and strategy meetings focused on data analysis to strengthen instructional planning. During a professional development half-day, staff engaged in training focused on small-group instruction and scholar discourse.

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

Principal Shannon Ortiz-Wong reported the High School's attendance was 91% for November.

Advanced Placement World History scholars attended a field trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where they used visual note-taking strategies to deepen content understanding.

The Junior Varsity Girls Basketball Team won its championship game against School in the Square.

The High School hosted an Honor Roll Breakfast recognizing 105 scholars for academic achievement and promoted positive school culture through shared experiences, including a schoolwide viewing of the movie, "A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving."

Ms. Ortiz-Wong shared preliminary college acceptance results. Scholars received acceptance offers from Stony Brook University, Temple University, Rutgers University, Penn State University, the University of New Haven, the University of North Carolina, and the University at Albany, with additional decisions forthcoming.

Financial Update (Ralph Stefano)

Chief Financial Officer Ralph Stefano reported that HCZ Promise Academy II's preliminary October 30 enrollment is 982, which is 45 unfavorable versus the budget. The school's revenue through October is \$0.5M unfavorable at \$7.8M. Expenses are \$0.3M favorable, at \$7.3M. HCZ has not made a contribution through four months of FY26.

**Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) Promise Academy II Charter School
Board Meeting
Thursday, November 20, 2025
245 West 129th Street**

Attendees: Geoffrey Canada, Kwame Owusu-Kesse, Mitch Kurz, Ellanor (Bodie) Brizendine, Stan Druckenmiller, Willie Mae Lewis, Lisa McNear, Keith Meister, DeniLee Peroza, Candice Ashby, Shannon Benson, LaRen Bierria, Saskia Brown, Ari Browne, Celines Castro, Amy Deal, Veronique Delva, LaKiesha George, Jazmine Lewis, John Macapagal, Liam McCarthy, Shannon Ortiz-Wong, Kelly Siddharta, Meredith Peckosh-Soffrin, 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 October 23 was unanimously approved.

CEO Report (Kwame Owusu-Kesse)

Chief Executive Officer Kwame Owusu-Kesse reported that HCZ hosted a Zone-wide Thanksgiving celebration earlier that day at Community Pride Annex - Salem and scheduled HCZ Food Harvest Distribution to provide community members with emergency food aid for the upcoming weekend. Mr. Owusu-Kesse emphasized that these efforts reflect HCZ's longstanding commitment to providing direct and meaningful support to HCZ families.

Superintendent's Update (Dr. Saskia Brown)

Superintendent Dr. Saskia Brown reported that enrollment as of November 1 is 1,154 for HCZ Promise Academy I and 985 for HCZ Promise Academy II.

Dr. Brown shared several leadership updates. At HCZ Promise Academy II, Principal Kiana Morris and Assistant Principal DeBorah Pryor departed the organization, and Dr. Brown thanked them for their service. She announced that Ms. LaKiesha George, former Principal of HCZ Promise Academy I Elementary School, now serves as Principal of HCZ Promise Academy II Elementary School. Dr. Brown expressed confidence in Ms. George's leadership and thanked her for stepping into the role.

At Promise Academy I Elementary School, former Assistant Principal Kelly Siddharta now serves as Interim Principal. Dr. Brown highlighted Ms. Siddharta's long-standing service to the organization and thanked the instructional teams — including Deputy Superintendent Shannon Benson, Principal-in-Residence Madelaine Schultz, and instructional coaches — for supporting school operations and classroom coverage during the transition. Mr. Owusu-Kesse also thanked Ms. George and Ms. Siddharta for their leadership in taking on their new roles.

Dr. Brown invited Ms. Siddharta to introduce herself to the Board. Ms. Siddharta shared that she moved from Michigan to New York to study ballet at Barnard College. She later earned a degree in German literature from Columbia University. She then joined Teach For America and began her 17-year tenure at HCZ, serving as a Teacher, Literacy Coach, Education Director, and, for the past four years, Assistant Principal at HCZ Promise Academy I Elementary School.

Ms. Siddharta holds a master's degree in progressive school leadership from Bank Street College and holds a New York State School Building Leader license. She recently completed her 16th consecutive New York City Marathon, noting that the resilience and discipline required in long-distance running mirror the leadership skills she brings to her role. She expressed gratitude and excitement for the opportunity to deepen her impact with scholars and families.

Dr. Brown announced that the schools were selected for the United Way Community Library Initiative, which will bring culturally responsive books and resources to HCZ Promise Academy libraries. The Teaching and Learning and Facilities teams will partner to enhance library spaces. Dr. Brown thanked the Development Team, Managing Director of Teaching and Learning Katherine Martinez, and Director of Humanities Mirabel Smith for securing the grant.

Dr. Brown also reported steady progress in closing performance gaps across the schools. Leadership Teams participated in the first Data Lab, where they analyzed scholar performance data and developed targeted action plans. HCZ Promise Academy is also expanding tutoring services by onboarding external tutors and engaging HCZ alumni to support intervention periods, Academic Hour, and Saturday Academy. Dr. Brown thanked the Teaching and Learning Team, school leaders, Chief Strategy Officer Jazmine Lewis, and the College Success Office for coordinating alumni engagement and strengthening the tutoring pipeline.

Dr. Brown concluded by reporting that the second component of the New York State Education Department's Annual Report was submitted ahead of the November 1 deadline. Dr. Brown thanked Director of Compliance & Reporting Candice Ashby, Director of Business Administration Ari Browne, and the Finance Team for completing the report.

HCZ Promise Academy II Elementary School (LaKiesha George)

Principal LaKiesha George reported the Elementary School's attendance was 92% for October.

During a half day of school in October, the Elementary School led several professional development activities focused on strengthening school culture and instructional practice. Staff participated in team-building activities and workshops on maximizing the impact of two adults in the classroom. The sessions also included learning modules about best practices for supporting scholars' testing skills.

In early November, the Elementary School hosted its first in-person parent meeting, PAll: The Next Chapter, facilitated by Principal George and Deputy Superintendent Shannon Benson, with support from Dr. Brown. Families responded positively to the event, and the Elementary School plans to continue building family engagement initiatives throughout the year.

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

Principal Dr. Veroniqua Delva reported the Middle School's attendance was 92% for October.

Seventh-grade scholars participated in Career Day at Barclays Center, where they engaged with professionals from the Brooklyn Nets organization and explored various career paths. Scholars also visited the Harlem Library, where they received library cards and learned how to access resources.

To celebrate strong performance on the first quarterly assessments, the Middle School hosted a Decades Party for scholars who earned scores of 80 or higher. The party aligned with the Middle School's "work hard, play hard" theme and celebrated academic achievement.

The Middle School held a Town Hall to review Quarter 1 data with scholars and strengthen scholar ownership of academic outcomes. Based on this analysis, school leaders are prioritizing small group instruction as a key focus area. The Middle School has also shown a significant increase in participation in Academic Hour and Saturday School.

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

Principal Shannon Ortiz-Wong reported the High School's attendance was 92% for October.

High School scholars participated in college tours, visiting the University of Rochester, Binghamton University, and Syracuse University. These visits provided scholars with exposure to a range of postsecondary options and broadened their understanding of available educational pathways.

The High School held fall Parent-Teacher Conferences, with more than 50 families attending to meet with teachers and collaborate on academic goals.

High school scholars also participated in the third annual Remix the Industry: Save the Music competition against eight other schools. Scholars had 30 minutes to compose a 45-second original piece, and HCZ Promise Academy II High School won the competition. Each participating scholar received a pair of \$250 headphones. Save the Music has funded 60 music education grants across New York City to highlight how music education fuels career pathways and brighter futures.

Financial Update (Ralph Stefano)

Chief Financial Officer Ralph Stefano reported that HCZ Promise Academy II's preliminary September 30 is 998, which is 29 unfavorable versus the budget. The school's revenue through September is \$0.3M unfavorable at \$5.9M. Expenses are \$0.5M favorable, at \$5.3M. HCZ has not made a contribution through three months of FY26.

HCZ Promise Academy II Charter Revision: Projected Enrollment (Candice Ashby)

A motion was called to approve a revision to the HCZ Promise Academy II Charter, reducing enrollment projections for the remaining three years of its current term. The motion passed unanimously, and the revision was submitted to the School's authorizer to obtain approval from the New York State Education Department.

**Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) Promise Academy II
December 2025 Attendance Report**

Date	HCZ PAII Elementary School			HCZ PAII Middle School			HCZ PAII High School		
	Number of Students		% of Students	Number of Students		% of Students	Number of Students		% of Students
	Absent	Enrollment	Present	Absent	Enrollment	Present	Absent	Enrollment	Present
12/1	52	510	90%	31	262	88%	19	199	90%
12/2	55	509	89%	22	262	92%	21	199	89%
12/3	22	509	96%	24	262	91%	10	199	95%
12/4	32	509	94%	30	262	89%	17	199	91%
12/5	44	509	91%	33	262	87%	12	199	94%
12/8	54	508	89%	22	262	92%	13	199	93%
12/9	60	508	88%	31	262	88%	16	199	92%
12/10	57	508	89%	20	262	92%	13	199	93%
12/11	43	508	92%	28	262	89%	17	199	91%
12/12	91	508	82%	41	262	84%	25	199	87%
12/15	58	508	89%	25	262	90%	30	199	85%
12/16	56	508	89%	26	262	90%	26	199	87%
12/17	34	507	93%	32	262	88%	33	199	83%
12/18	52	507	90%	24	262	91%	31	199	84%
12/19	100	507	80%	39	262	85%	39	198	80%
Average	54	508	89%	29	262	89%	21	199	89%

Promise Academy II
FY 2026 November YTD Budget vs. Actual

		<u>Budget</u>	<u>Actual</u>	<u>Fav/(Unfav)</u>	<u>Full Year Budget</u>
Enrollment @ Nov 30	(a)	1,027	972	(55)	1,027
DOE and other gov't funding		\$ 10.3	\$ 9.8	\$ (0.5)	\$ 24.8
Expenses:					
Salaries		6.2	6.4	(0.2)	16.3
Benefits		1.7	1.6	0.1	4.4
OTPS		1.6	1.4	0.2	3.9
Total Expenses	(b)	9.5	9.4	0.1	24.6
Expenses in excess of public funding		-	-	-	-
Contribution Components:					
HCZ Contribution		-	-	-	-
per student (whole \$)		\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -

(a) Enrollment as of Jan 1: 968

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