

Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) Promise Academy I Charter School
Annual Board Meeting
Monday, June 22, 2026
35 East 125th Street

Attendees: Geoffrey Canada, Mitch Kurz, Kwame Owusu-Kesse, Stan Druckenmiller, Lisa McNear, DeniLee Peroza, Candice Ashby, Shannon Benson, LaRen Bierria, Saskia Brown, Ari Browne, Amy Deal, Veroniqua Delva, Jenn Klein, Stephanie Lilavois, Katherine Martinez, Shannon Ortiz-Wong, Kelly Siddharta, Liam McCarthy, Meredith Peckosh-Soffrin, and Ralph Stefano.

Acceptance of Minutes (Geoffrey Canada)

The meeting was called to order at 3 PM. The board unanimously approved the meeting minutes from May 21.

CEO's Report (Kwame Owusu-Kesse)

Chief Executive Officer Kwame Owusu-Kesse shared that he and Promise Academy scholars were recently featured on "CBS News Sunday Morning", in a national news segment exploring the impact of obesity in America's children, where he highlighted HCZ's efforts to empower the health and wellness of young people. Mr. Owusu-Kesse noted the feature would be shared with Board members and thanked staff and scholars for participating.

Superintendent's Update (Dr. Saskia Brown)

Superintendent Dr. Saskia Brown reported that as of May 1, enrollment for HCZ Promise Academy I is 1,121 and 939 for HCZ Promise Academy II.

Dr. Brown reported that the schools successfully concluded the 2025–2026 HeyTutor high-impact tutoring initiative. She thanked the Board for its continued financial support of the program and shared that scholars demonstrated positive academic growth throughout the initiative. HeyTutor will resume as part of the Summer Extended Learning Program in July.

HCZ Promise Academy I Elementary School (Kelly Siddharta)

Interim Principal Kelly Siddharta reported the Elementary School's attendance was 92% for May.

The Elementary School achieved a 92% scholar attendance rate for the HeyTutor program, an increase from 84% during the previous reporting period.

Enrollment for the 2026–2027 school year continues, with 118 scholars enrolled in kindergarten and 68 scholars enrolled across grades one through five.

Interim Principal Siddharta reported that the school is now focusing its talent recruitment efforts on the upcoming school year. The Elementary School has hired fifth-grade English Language Arts and Mathematics teachers and promoted several Teaching Fellows to Lead Teacher positions, supporting the school's talent development strategy.

Scholars participated in a variety of end-of-year engagement activities, including a musical showcase, art gallery, Spanish Cultural Fair, and multiple educational field trips.

Mr. Canada commended the Elementary School's success in developing Teaching Fellows into Lead Teachers and encouraged leadership to share practices that may be replicated across HCZ Promise Academy Charter Schools.

HCZ Promise Academy I Middle School (LaRen Bierria)

Interim Principal LaRen Bierria reported the Middle School's attendance was 93% for May.

The Middle School achieved a 94% scholar attendance rate for the HeyTutor program, an increase from 82% during the previous reporting period.

Middle School scholars participated in a theater production, grade-level community service projects, activities for graduating eighth-grade scholars, and several end-of-year enrichment opportunities.

The Promise Academy fifth- and sixth-grade girls' basketball team won the Charter School League Championship.

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

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

The High School held senior activities, including Senior Prom and the annual Senior Jacket Walkthrough, which celebrates graduating scholars as they take their final walk through the school building.

The High School also introduced instruction on the ethical use of artificial intelligence (AI), responsible research practices, and proper citation to strengthen scholars' academic integrity and college readiness.

Board members discussed the increasing importance of artificial intelligence in higher education and the workforce, and encouraged the continued exploration of AI instruction and responsible technology use across the schools.

Financial Update (Ralph Stefano)

Chief Financial Officer Ralph Stefano reported that HCZ Promise Academy I's projected average enrollment for the 12 months ended June 30 is 1,134, which is 26 unfavorable versus the budget. The school's revenue is anticipated to be \$0.4M unfavorable at \$26.4M.

Expenses are anticipated to be \$0.3M unfavorable, at \$26.5M. HCZ projects to make no contribution in FY26.

FY27 Budget (Ralph Stefano)

A motion was called to approve the HCZ Promise Academy I Charter School budget for the fiscal year 2027. The Board unanimously approved the resolution. A detailed version of the resolution can be found in the June 22, 2026, Board packet on the HCZ Promise Academy website.

<https://hczpromise.org/community/board-meeting-documents/>

PAI Board Elections (Candice Ashby)

A motion was called to re-elect trustees whose terms had expired, designate Stan Druckenmiller as a voting trustee, and designate Dr. Alfonso Wyatt as an advisory trustee. The Board unanimously approved the resolution. A detailed version of the resolution can be found in the June 22, 2026 Board packet on the HCZ Promise Academy website.

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HCZ Promise Academy I By-Laws (Candice Ashby)

A motion was called to approve amendments to the HCZ Promise Academy I By-Laws. Ms. Ashby explained that the amendments modernize the bylaws and align them with current law and Board practices without altering the schools' mission, authority, or governance structure. The motion was approved. A detailed version of the resolution can be found in the June 22, 2026 Board packet on the HCZ Promise Academy website.

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HCZ Promise Academy Family Handbook (Candice Ashby)

A motion was called to approve the 2026–2027 HCZ Promise Academy Family Handbook. Ms. Ashby highlighted revisions including the addition of a Child Safeguarding and Crisis Intervention section and updated visitor procedures designed to minimize disruptions to the instructional day. The motion was approved. The updated handbook can be found on the HCZ Promise Academy website.

<https://hczpromise.org/for-parents/>