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Shannon Benson
Deputy Superintendent

Kelly Siddharta
Principal
Elementary School
245 West 129th Street
New York, NY 10027
Tel 212.360.3232

LaRen Bierria
Principal
Middle School
245 West 129th Street
New York, NY 10027
Tel 212.360.3233

Kevin Dougherty
Principal
High School
245 West 129th Street
New York, NY 10027
Tel 212.360.3234

AGENDA

Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) Promise Academy I
Board of Trustees Meeting
Wednesday, September 30, 2026
at
245 West 129th Street
New York, NY

- I. Acceptance of the Minutes
- II. CEO Report (*Kwame Owusu-Kesse*)
- III. Superintendent's Updates (*Shannon Benson*)
- IV. State Testing Results (*Geoff Canada*)
- V. HCZ Promise Academy I Updates
 - i. Elementary School (*Kelly Siddharta*)
 - ii. Middle School (*LaRen Bierria*)
 - iii. High School (*Kevin Dougherty*)
- VI. Financial Report (*Ralph Stefano*)
- VII. Resolutions
 - i. District-wide and Building Level Safety Plans (*Candice Ashby*)

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.

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

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.

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

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/>

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

HARLEM CHILDREN'S ZONE (HCZ), New York, NY

Managing Director – HCZ Promise Academy After School Programs, Athletics, & Armory

September 2025 - Present

- Lead strategic operations for two K-12 after school programs serving more than 1000 scholars daily across academics, athletics, enrichment, and youth development
- Developed community survey and community canvassing plan to update community center programming
- Partnered to redesign K-8 summer programming by integrating academic acceleration/intervention and improving alignment between day school and after school teams

Managing Director – HCZ College Success Office

2023 - 2026

- Oversaw college readiness & application process for 400+ high school students and college persistence for 1000+ college students
- Increased first-year college persistence by 10%.
- Increased college enrollment and persistence rates for scholars attending 2-year and 4-year institutions
- Increased number of college graduates

ELMONT MEMORIAL HIGH SCHOOL, Elmont, NY

Tenured Principal – Grades 7-12, ~1600 students

2015 - 2023

- Maintained 97-100% Graduation Rate throughout tenure and Covid Pandemic
- Recognized by New York State Education Department as one of the top 10 Most Successful Public High Schools for graduating young men of color
- Increased number of Advanced Regents Diplomas by 25%
- Reduced suspension rate by 50% in first 3 years
- Led successful rollout of a 1:1 iPad Initiative in grades 7-12. Twice recognized as an *Apple Distinguished School* and featured in National Apple commercials and literature
- Created the “[Men of Elmont](#)” (IG -@menofelmont) and “Leading Ladies” mentoring groups to help support at-risk students and develop them into leaders within the school community. 300+ students reached. Featured on NBC News and News12
- 2018 Nassau County BOCES Education Partner Award Recipient

PROMISE ACADEMY I & II – HARLEM CHILDREN'S ZONE, New York, NY

PAII Junior High School Principal – Grades 6-9

2013 - 2015

- Founding Principal of Promise Academy II Junior High School. Recruited, hired, trained, and supervised all faculty and staff
- Developed and implemented a school-wide advisory and character development program
- School-wide, ELA and Math State Exam scores increased 7% and 20%, respectively
- Worked with development team and Practitioners Institute to fundraise and share HCZ's best practices with community, educational, and political leaders from around the globe

PAI Upper Elementary Assistant Principal – Grades 4-6 2010 - 2013

- Supervised 30+ teachers, 80+ staff, and 300 students. Created all academic schedules.
- Created weekly teacher film study professional development program
- Helped raise student achievement on the New York State Math and ELA Exams

6th Grade Math Teacher & Mentor Teacher

2009 - 2010

- Developed and implemented 6th grade math curriculum. Raised student achievement by an average of 18% on NY State Exam

WISSAHICKON SCHOOL DISTRICT, Ambler, PA

High School Math and Special Education Teacher/Staff Developer 2006 - 2009

- Taught Probability & Statistics, Trigonometry, Algebra 2, and Geometry to 9th-12th graders
- Coached Math, Science, and Special Education teachers and help build PLC's
- Founder, *CASA* - Multi-pronged program created to help eliminate cultural, achievement, and opportunity gaps

NYCDOE (K497), Brooklyn, NY & WISSAHICKON SCHOOL DISTRICT, Ambler, PA

8th Grade Math Teacher & High School Special Education Teacher 2003 - 2006

- Taught 8th grade mathematics curriculum
- Delivered instruction in English, Political Science, Health, and Environmental Science in Special Education classroom
- Varsity High School Girls and Freshman (Asst. Varsity) Boys Basketball Coach, Poetry Slam Coordinator

EDUCATION

GWYNEDD-MERCY COLLEGE, Gwynedd Valley, PA

Master of Science in Educational Administration

May 2009

PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY, University Park, PA

Bachelor of Science in Special Education

December 2002

VOLUNTEER/PRESENTATIONS

- Clinic Kids (klinicsports.com): *Education Lead*
- Presenter - New York State Education Department, “What Success Looks Like”
- Presenter - Beating the Odds: Building Opportunities for Students in Poverty

2022 – 2023

Harlem Children's Zone Promise Academy I

June 2026 Attendance Report

	HCZ PAI Elementary School			HCZ PAI Middle School			HCZ PAI High School		
Date	Number of Students Absent	Enrollment	% of Students Present	Number of Students Absent	Enrollment	% of Students Present	Number of Students Absent	Enrollment	% of Students Present
6/1	36	604	94%	18	262	93%	48	255	81%
6/2	17	604	97%	17	262	94%	68	255	73%
6/3	31	604	95%	19	262	93%	59	255	77%
6/8	51	604	92%	14	262	95%	19	255	93%
6/9	50	604	92%	23	262	91%	Regents Exams		
6/10	31	604	95%	12	262	95%			
6/11	51	604	92%	13	262	95%	51	255	80%
6/12	64	604	89%	13	262	95%	38	255	85%
6/15	55	604	91%	21	262	92%	35	255	86%
6/16	51	604	92%	30	262	89%	41	255	84%
6/17	35	604	94%	29	262	89%	Regents Exams		
6/18	82	604	86%	50	262	81%			
6/22	122	604	80%	101	262	61%			
6/23	145	604	76%	72	262	73%			
Average	59	604	90%	31	262	88%	45	255	82%

Harlem Children's Zone Promise Academy I

Summer 2026 Attendance Report

	HCZ PAI Elementary School			HCZ PAI Middle School			HCZ PAI and PAII High Schools		
Date	Number of Students		% of Students	Number of Students		% of Students	Number of Students		% of Students
	Absent	Enrollment		Absent	Enrollment		Absent	Enrollment	
7/6	110	291	62%	68	177	62%	24	91	74%
7/7	76	291	74%	50	177	72%	14	91	85%
7/8	70	291	76%	45	177	75%	15	91	84%
7/9	63	291	78%	45	177	75%	33	92	64%
7/10	71	291	76%	48	177	73%	28	92	70%
7/13	80	291	73%	53	177	70%	24	92	74%
7/14	74	291	75%	46	177	74%	31	92	66%
7/15	86	291	70%	46	177	74%	37	92	60%
7/16	90	291	69%	53	177	70%	31	92	66%
7/17	97	291	67%	59	177	67%	38	92	59%
7/20	88	291	70%	52	177	71%	35	92	62%
7/21	84	291	71%	59	177	67%	26	92	72%
7/22	83	291	71%	43	177	76%	27	92	71%
7/23	101	291	65%	77	177	56%	14	92	85%
7/24	111	291	62%	64	177	64%	27	92	71%
7/27	111	291	62%	54	177	69%	39	92	58%
7/28	101	291	65%	43	177	76%	35	92	62%
7/29	106	291	64%	52	177	71%	40	92	57%
7/30	111	291	62%	47	177	73%	36	92	61%
7/31	133	291	54%	74	177	58%	35	92	62%
Average	92	291	68%	54	177	70%	29	92	68%

Promise Academy I
FY 2027 July YTD Budget vs. Actual

		YTD Budget	YTD Actual	Fav/(Unfav)	Full Year Budget
YTD Average Enrollment	(a)		1,125		1,125
DOE and other gov't funding		\$ 2.2	\$ 2.2	\$ -	\$ 26.8
Expenses:					
Salaries		1.4	1.4	-	19.7
Benefits		0.4	0.4	-	5.6
OTPS		0.4	0.3	0.1	4.2
Total Expenses	(b)	2.2	2.1	0.1	29.6
Expenses in excess of public funding	(c)	-	-	-	2.8
Contribution Components:					
HCZ Contribution		-	-	-	-
per student (whole \$)		\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -

(a) Enrollment as of September 14: 1166

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

(c) Anticipated deficits are to be funded out of accumulated prior year reserves.