Minutes of the Harlem Children’s Zone Promise Academy I Charter School
Board Meeting
March 23rd, 2011
35 East 125th Street, New York, NY 10035

In attendance: Geoffrey Canada, Ken Langone, Mitch Kurz, Arlene Gibson, O’Donna Hue Osborne, Hope Williams, Aisha Tomlinson, Kathleen Fernald, Sheryl Ragland, Dennis McKesey, Tonya White, Marquitta Speller, Shakira Petit, Anne Williams-Isom, Mindy Miller, Marlene Fox, Debbie Gonzalez, Tracey Costello, George Khalidun, Betina Jean-Louis, Kate Shoemaker, Conrad Pinnock, Latasha Johnson-Morgan, Lauren Scopaz, Margo Wright, Michelle Germaine, Bessie Wilkerson, Brian McClendon, Shana Brodnax, Tiffany Fountain, Sharleen Morris, Jenny Lai, Alfonso Wyatt (via telephone).

New Building Update

Ms. Lauren Scopaz reported that construction on the new school building has begun and is expected to be completed in fall 2012. Overall, the project is going smoothly, under budget, and according to the timeline. The residents have expressed concern about the possibility of losing the use of the existing playground, some parking spaces and possible safety issues that may be associated with the 129th Street thru street. To address these concerns, Mr. Canada has committed to improving the playground, replacing the lost parking spaces and fostering ongoing conversations to improve safety in the neighborhood. Residents with health issues will be given air conditioners.

Ms. Shana Brodnax reported that thirty-three children from the St. Nicholas Houses have gotten into the 3-year-old PA lottery for the incoming class of 2012; this is one-third of the incoming class. Currently, parents/guardians of twenty of the children from the St. Nicholas Houses are participating in HCZ’s Three Year Old Journey program. Next year these children will join the Harlem Gems program.

The groundbreaking ceremony is scheduled for 10 a.m. on April 6th, 2011. Mayor Bloomberg, Chancellor Cathy Black, and representatives from Google and Goldman Sachs are all expected to attend. Goldman Sachs is also hosting a luncheon and a two day leadership conference following the ceremony.

Promise Academy I Elementary School

Ms. Tonya White reported that attendance has been consistent. The attendance team is now focused on reducing tardiness with incentives for parents who bring their students on time. As the students and staff prepare for the New York State Exam, the whole team engaged in intensive instruction, with a 4 to 1 student to adult ratio. Ms. White has emphasized for staff to build the students’ confidence, stamina and mastery of targeted skills. Students will continue to attend school during April vacation.
Promise Academy I Upper Elementary School

Mr. Dennis McKesey reported that everyone in his school is teaming up to improve academic achievement. He has assigned administrators to each grade and partnered them with students. All the highest performing afterschool tutors are also working with students during the day. Additionally, Mr. McKesey held a workshop for parents to teach them different ways to support their students for the upcoming New York State Exam. Parents reviewed sample test questions and test taking strategies.

All students are expected to attend school during April vacation. Parents have been notified and Mr. McKesey is planning incentives for all students who attend school the entire break.

Promise Academy I Middle School

Ms. Shakira Petit reported that attendance has increased and students are consistently arriving to school on time. Morning and midday intervention is continuing and the afterschool program is also helping her students during the day. Ms. Petit noted that many parents attended her workshop on the New York State Exam; parents were exposed to sample test questions and asked questions about the test. Ms. Petit noted that this was an excellent opportunity for parents to experience the rigorous academic standards of the school.

Ms. Petit has hired a new science teacher with 10 years experience. The teacher has already sparked the students’ interested in science by starting a blog with them. Additionally, the students have recently started a Student Council.

Promise Academy I High School

Ms. Marquitta Speller reported that students are preparing for the Regent Exams scheduled for June. Most students only need to take the U.S. History and Government Regents Exam. All students are continuing to prepare for the SATs.

Additionally, Ms. Speller noted that six students have been chosen to participate in the Cornell Summer College program. The Promise Academy I High School students will be taking classes and rooming with students from around the country. This experience will give them the opportunity to earn college credits and experience college life. Ms. Speller is also investigating other similar summer programs for the twenty-four other students who applied. Ms. Speller also announced that two of her students won the opportunity to participate in Sade Baderinwa’s “Get Reel with Your Dreams” program. The two students will have the chance to win up to $30,000 in college scholarships.

Ms. Speller introduced three members of the Promise Academy I High School ELA team: Mr. Asif Padela, Ms. Judy Palacios, and Ms. Liza Eyster.

In January, every high school student passed the ELA exam. Mr. Padela explained that these results were largely due to three factors. Firstly, classes were grouped purposefully, using student academic data. Secondly, all English classes had 2 teachers, and lastly, the results of
every weekly assessment were used to create differentiated lessons designed to meet student needs.

Ms. Liza Eyster noted that the highest score was earned by an IEP student. She believes that the success of our special education students was due to the investment students felt in their own IEP goals. Every IEP student attended SPED meetings and was a part of all conversations around goal setting.

Dr. Bessie Wilkerson stated that, according to New York State predictions, after two and a half years of high school, 51% of Promise Academy High School students have passed math and English regents exams at the cutoffs that suggest they are college ready. This is double the proportion of students in New York State and more than three times the New York City rate. Mr. Canada reported that Promise Academy I High School students are performing at the level of middle class suburban students.

The board stressed the importance of doubling down on the 49% of students who are not yet college ready, and emphasized the importance of readying students with the skills, internal motivation, and determination needed to succeed in college. They noted that a student’s ability to thrive in a rigorous academic program is deeply connected to the intensity of their interest.

**Resolution for Lottery Priority**

Ms. Shana Brodnax highlighted the need to revise lottery preferences to best meet the needs of the community. Promise Academy would like to give preference to Harlem students who would otherwise go to a low performing school. Mr. Canada reminded the board that HCZ Promise Academy is putting forth great effort to skew preferences toward low income students. This new resolution would include the residents of Harlem who are outside of District 5. All members voted in favor of the motion. Promise Academy will move forward with seeking approval from the City.

**Financials**

Ms. Tracy Costello reported that Promise Academy I is running 7% under budget. She also reported that eRate has been approved and that expenses will be submitted for reimbursement.

Board meeting was concluded at 7:50 am.