Minutes of The Harlem Children’s Zone Promise Academy I Charter School
Board Meeting
November 16th, 2011
35 East 125th Street, New York, NY 10035


Mr. Kenneth Langone called the meeting to order at 7:00 am and requested a motion to approve the October Board meeting minutes; the motion was unanimously upheld.

New School Building Update

Kristen Levine reported that the excavation and foundation of the new school is complete and the steel has been erected. Construction for the parking lots and detention tanks are also progressing. This part of the project is in partnership with the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA). The school will have a total of 5 floors. Its substantial completion date is Winter 2013. To date we have expended $20.5 million.

Ms. Levine and her team continue to foster relationships with the St. Nicholas residents. Thus far, 146 air conditioners have been distributed. A website and hotline are available to residents to field questions and concerns. The contractor, Tishman Construction, also hosts a monthly meeting to answer questions and share construction updates with the residents. Moreover, a community advisory board will begin meeting as another avenue for residents to share their concerns and voice their ideas about the new school.

The Harlem Children’s Zone along with NYCHA and Tishman Construction is committed to hiring residents of the St. Nicholas housing development. Thus far 2 residents have been hired by NYCHA and 4 residents are now working for Tishman. The Harlem Children’s Zone has also hired 6 residents to be a part of the security team. On the program side of Harlem Children’s Zone, 24 residents have been hired in school and afterschool programs. Various outreach efforts are also being made to community leaders to increase the number of hired residents.

The Harlem Children’s Zone is committed to working with Minority and Women Owned Businesses, MWB. The project aims to work with 25% MWB’s and currently the new school project has surpassed this goal with 35%. The team will continue to work with Tishman Construction and NYCHA to engage additional MWB businesses.
**Promise Academy Incident outside the School Building**

Mr. Canada updated the board about the shooting. After the police viewed all the video tape, he noted that one person was identified as the shooter. That 15 year old teenager has since been arrested. Mr. Canada noted that the organization has been working closely with the police to focus on decreasing violence. Mr. Canada has also been in touch with the District Attorney in regards to the issue of violence in the Harlem community. Mr. Canada is looking to have more cameras installed on campus as a preventative measure.

Ms. Marquitta Speller emphasized that her main goal is to make sure all the students are safe after the recent shooting incident. She is particularly concerned with the students involved in the shooting incident so they have been traveling to and from school in a cab. The parents of those students are texting daily to make sure their children get to and from school safely. There will be a meeting held tonight so that parents can ask questions and share their concerns.

Mr. Canada speculates that this incident was not gang related but rather an act of a crew, a loose affiliation of students who live in the same area but are not involved in the sale of drugs.

Ms. Speller and the Promise Academy High School community are working to empower the students to believe that Harlem can change and will be safe someday. Additionally, the Harlem Mother Saves, a group of mothers who have been affected by violence, will be speaking with families about how parents can be proactive with their children.

**Promise Academy I Lower Elementary**

Ms. Tonya White reported that attendance continues to be high with the exception of Halloween. Many parents keep their children at home for fear their children’s safety. Ms. White also anticipates that the last week in December will be difficult for attendance so she has prepared an incentive for parents during that week.

Each Promise Academy I Lower Elementary administrator is providing small groups of students to accommodate for changes in the New York State Exams. Promise Academy I Lower Elementary is using Fountas and Pinnell to guide student’s reading progression and shared with parents during their parent-teacher conferences. The teachers have noted that the students are becoming stronger readers. Moreover, the Math in Focus program is helping students to understand math both concretely and abstractly. Importantly, Grade 2 Saturday Academy has begun to give students additional instructional time. Lastly, Ms. White continues to run special programs, including parent workshops, and art and physical education programs.

Ms. White has met with 8 of the 12 parents of students who are chronically absent. During the meetings, parents often mention their child’s health issues and Ms. White referred parents to the HCZ Asthma Initiative and the Harlem Children’s Zone Health Center.

Mr. Canada has also started a Boy’s Club with twelve 3rd grade male students. Each student has self-identified goals and each student will bring evidence of working towards that goal at the next monthly meeting.
Ms. White and her administration also led a whole staff team building retreat. The retreat included all 113 staff members. Ms. White noted that the retreat took a lot of coordination but that it was well worth the work, she feels that the experience made her team stronger.

**Promise Academy I Upper Elementary**

Mr. Achil Petit noted that attendance held strong during the month of October at 96%, thanks to the efforts by the family workers, parent coordinators and deans.

Mr. Petit highlighted that the whole school is supporting the students who are still struggling with basic math facts. All staff members have flash cards to use with students in the hallway. Students also practice during the first ten minutes of class.

Mr. Petit made special mention of a student that has recently made a huge turnaround in his academics and behavior thanks to the whole team (school and after-school staff) coming together to address his issues comprehensively. The student’s father calls every day for an update on his child.

Mr. Petit then introduced his leadership team, Mr. Kevin Dougherty, Mr. Joseph Cordero, and Ms. Karen Francois. Mr. Dougherty, the Director of Curriculum, began Saturday Academy on October 15th. Students who scored a 2 or below on the New York State Exam receives instruction in English and/or math. The teaching staff rotates biweekly and to instruct students during Saturday Academy. Thus far, there are forty-four 5th graders and forty-three 6th graders participating in Saturday Academy. The teachers are compensated for the extra teaching time.

Mr. Dougherty also noted that teachers are mandated to give more quizzes frequently. The questions on the quizzes mirror the State exam. The frequent feedback has helped to build confidence in the children.

Mr. Cordero, Director of Student Support Services, has organized an academic Olympic system to recognize the students that are academically achieving. Students who have earned an average of 90-100, 85-89 and 80-84 earn gold, silver, and bronze ties, respectively. The ties have really made an impact on school culture. All the ties were presented to students during a ceremony during recess. Students were also given certificates and a letter from Mr. Petit to take home. Mr. Cordero plans to repeat this ceremony every 6 weeks. The short-time period allows students to focus on short-term feasible goals.

Ms. Francois has invited the whole building to take part in the Book of the Month initiative. Every month a book will be chosen and everyone in the building is invited to read the book. The goal of the initiative is to improve school culture, teach character education and foster conversations between students and adults. The books include *Who Moved My Cheese* and *The Honest To Goodness Truth*.

**Promise Academy I Junior High School**

Ms. Shakira Petit reported that attendance was low for the month of October at 90%, in part due to sickness and the parents fear for their children’s safety during Halloween. Ms. Petit has continued to refer to parents to our wraparound services and increased the number of parent conferences to discuss attendance.

Last week, Promise Academy I Junior High School held a career fair to introduce students to various areas of study that may peak their interest. Ms. Petit also noted a special literacy project that the students
have been working on with Chef Andrew Benson. The students entered a healthy recipe contest and Chef Benson chose a winner whose recipe was posted on the school’s blog.

Ms. Petit then introduced Ms. Porco and Ms. Nanatokie. Ms. Porco is the Art teacher and Ms. Nanatokie is the Japanese teacher. Ms. Porco brought 4 students in to present their art work, ranging from impressionism to monochromatic painting. Ms. Nanatokie then introduced two students who spoke in Japanese, introducing themselves and talking about their family and favorite foods.

**Promise Academy I High School**

Ms. Marquitta Speller reported that Barry Mills, the President of Bowdoin College, came to visit the High school students and has generated interest for students to apply. She also reported that high school students visited many colleges this fall, including Fisk University, the University of Rochester, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Trinity College, the University of Pennsylvania, Temple University, and Lincoln University.

Ms. Speller’s discussion on the safety of her high school students is mentioned above.

**Promise Academy I Financials**

Ms. Tracey Costello reported that the Promise Academy I budget is slightly over budget but this was related to the anticipated start up costs of the school year. Adjustments will need to be made but she is working closely with Promise Academy Central Office to ensure the schools stay under budget.

The Board meeting adjourned at 8:05 am.