

INNOVATION CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

Board of Trustees

Regular Meeting of the Board

March 17, 2026

Location: Innovation Charter High School | 410 East 100th Street, East Harlem, NY 10029 (Virtual/Hybrid)

Called to Order: Approximately 6:15 PM

Adjourned: 8:04 PM

Chair: Latoya Massey

Secretary: Joseph Colarusso

I. Attendance and Quorum

Trustees Present:

- Latoya Massey, Board Chair
- Joseph Colarusso, Secretary
- Callie Hull, Treasurer / Finance and Audit Committee Chair
- Eric Reyes, Trustee
- Julia Baly, Trustee

Trustees Absent:

- Yani Peña, Trustee (absent for full meeting, including all votes)

Staff and Guests Present (Open Session):

- Kezena Brown, Principal / Head of School
- Shalia Desmond, Director of Enrollment and Recruitment
- Michelle Ott, Assistant Principal (Instructional)
- Kathy Rodriguez, Director of Operations (departed prior to Executive Session)

Quorum confirmed. Five of six seated trustees were present.

II. Call to Order

Chair Latoya Massey called the meeting to order at approximately 6:15 PM. The meeting was conducted in a hybrid format. Chair Massey noted a technical issue with the meeting link requiring her to rejoin and apologized for any delay.

III. Head of School Report

Principal Kezena Brown facilitated the school report, which included presentations from department leads across five topic areas.

A. Recruitment and Enrollment Update

Shalia Desmond, Director of Enrollment and Recruitment, presented the SY2025-26 recruitment activity summary and application pipeline status.

Key data points presented:

- 242 total applications received as of the meeting date, against an SY26-27 enrollment goal
- Scola (external recruitment vendor) generated 82 leads; the internal recruitment team generated 319
- Prospective Student Open House held March 11 generated 39 leads, 17 family attendees, and 14 on-site applications
- A letter from the Principal was mailed to 11,000 prospective families through Vanguard, the DOE mailing partner
- Recruitment activities since October have included presentations at five middle schools, tabling at high schools, and digital/print advertising through the Schneps media package (AM New York, Bronx Times, charter publications, and social media)
- Application deadline: April 1; lottery: April 2

Upcoming recruitment activities:

- Virtual Prospective Student Open Houses (Wednesday sessions, noon and 6:30 PM)
- Street team canvassing using Scola geographic data to target high-yield areas
- Post-lottery 'Second Chance' outreach campaign
- May 2 Accepted Students Open House
- 12-week 'Keep Warm' engagement campaign for accepted families in partnership with Scola

Board discussion:

Chair Massey encouraged strengthening alumni-to-middle-school outreach as a trackable data point for future grant applications, and suggested exploring community events (e.g., barbecue or back-to-school gathering) to engage incoming 9th graders. Trustee Hull inquired about the projected enrollment number relative to the revised charter goal. Ms. Desmond confirmed applications are tracking positively relative to prior years but noted that final enrollment depends on yield rates, which are difficult to forecast in New York City's school-choice environment given ongoing lottery shuffles. Trustee Colarusso requested that future recruitment updates be broken down by grade cohort and requested historical yield data so the board can assess conversion probability and identify where targeted intervention is most needed.

Board request:

- Staff to share virtual open house invitations with trustees for optional attendance
- Shalia Desmond to provide application and enrollment data disaggregated by grade cohort at the next update

B. Attendance Update

Principal Brown presented the year-over-year and subgroup attendance comparison for SY2025-26.

- Early-intervention strategies implemented this year, including increased family phone contact and at-risk counselor involvement, produced modest gains
- A significant proportion of students are experiencing chronic attendance challenges requiring Tier 3 supports
- Leadership is revising the attendance intervention system for SY2026-27, maintaining early-intervention elements while substantially expanding Tier 3 capacity

Principal Brown acknowledged that chronic absenteeism is a sector-wide challenge and committed to ongoing refinement of the strategy.

C. Interim Assessment Update: iReady Literacy (Fall-to-Winter)

Portia Stanley, Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment, presented fall-to-winter iReady diagnostic results. The iReady assessment measures comprehension, vocabulary, and foundational reading skills.

Standalone Tier 2 Reading Intervention Results:

- At the start of the year, approximately 83% of students receiving standalone Tier 2 reading intervention were performing three or more grade levels below; at mid-year, that figure declined to 33%
- Approximately 42% of Tier 2 intervention students are now performing at early-on-grade-level; 8% are performing one grade level below
- Several students made multi-grade-level gains within a single semester (e.g., grade 6 to grade 10 reading level)
- Intervention capacity expanded from two sessions per week on an A/B schedule (Semester 1) to five days per week (Semester 2), with the number of interventionists increasing from one to two; approximately 56 students are now served across 7 sections

Whole-School iReady Results by Cohort:

- Grade 9: Students performing at mid-on-grade-level increased from 0% to 11%; students one grade level below decreased from 26% to 16%
- Grade 10: Students three or more grade levels below decreased from 57% to 45%; students early-on-grade-level increased from 10% to 16%
- Grade 11: Mixed results; students early-on-grade-level increased from 11% to 15%, but students three or more grade levels below increased from 54% to 59%, warranting further investigation
- Grade 12: Students three or more grade levels below decreased significantly from 80% to 65%; students one grade level below increased from 9% to 22%, indicating upward movement toward graduation readiness
- Schoolwide: Students reading at or above grade level increased from 12% to 18%

Plans for Semester 2 and SY2026-27:

- Continue strengthening Tier 1 instruction across all content areas through HQIM implementation, explicit vocabulary instruction (morphology), and data-driven planning cycles
- Expand Tier 2 supports, including math intervention (not yet offered), and incorporate Win blocks into SY2026-27 scheduling to address the credit-hour barrier currently limiting student access to standalone intervention
- Expand Special Education support to align IEP literacy goals with intervention programming

Board discussion:

Trustee Colarusso asked about the number of students currently in Tier 2 intervention versus the number who need it but cannot access it due to credit-bearing course conflicts. Ms. Stanley confirmed that approximately 56 students are served but a significant number who qualify cannot enroll due to scheduling constraints. She confirmed that the proposed Win block in SY2026-27 is intended to function as a structured intervention period for all students who need it. Principal Brown noted the school's strategy is to pull both levers simultaneously: strengthen Tier 1 universally while deepening Tier 2/3 capacity so that intervention is not the school's primary mechanism of support. Trustee Reyes asked whether Win blocks are in planning for next year's master schedule; Ms. Stanley confirmed this is the intent.

D. January 2026 Regents Results and June 2026 Regents Planning

Assistant Principal Michelle Ott presented January 2026 Regents results and the plan for the June 2026 administration.

January 2026 Results (selected subjects, improvement from June 2025):

- Algebra: Pass rate increased approximately 24 percentage points from June 2025
- Living Environment: Pass rate increased approximately 21 percentage points from June 2025

- U.S. History: Pass rate increased approximately 9 percentage points from June 2025 (from an already strong baseline)
- U.S. Seminar: 7 of 9 students enrolled in the aligned prep course passed the exam
- ELL students demonstrated strong pass rates, in several subjects outperforming the general population; attributed in part to after-school homework help and co-teaching supports
- Students with IEPs performed below average; expanded in-class Tier 2 supports and tighter alignment between IEP goals and core instruction identified as the primary response for SY2026-27
- Students enrolled in the aligned Regents prep course outperformed those who did not participate, supporting the case for expanded prep offerings in June

Class of 2026 Regents Status:

- 65 students have all five required Regents for graduation
- Eighteen students have outstanding Regents requirements, ranging from one to four exams. Counts by number outstanding are omitted because several fall below the threshold at which individual students could be identified.
- A small number of students have not yet sat for any of the required exams. Families have been notified of graduation risk and targeted support is being provided
- 9 of 18 students with outstanding Regents requirements may be eligible for superintendent's option or appeals; however, school policy is to encourage all students to sit for each administration before appeal eligibility is considered

June 2026 Preparation:

- Mock Regents scheduled for March 30 and March 31; all staff supporting proctoring
- New Visions portal purchased for Regents data analysis; will provide standards-level breakdowns and Individual Student Reports
- Post-mock-Regents PD for teachers to analyze results and develop action plans
- Regents prep classes will be offered across all subjects for June; exploring partnership with Beacon tutoring program for highest-need students

Board discussion:

Chair Massey asked about the plan for students with the greatest number of outstanding Regents requirements. Principal Brown described continued family outreach and alternate instruction to maintain engagement. Chair Massey requested that leadership notify the board as early as possible regarding students who may require superintendent's option or appeals so the board can execute required approvals without delay. Principal Brown agreed to share a preliminary list of potentially eligible students ahead of June. Trustee Colarusso noted the correlation between Regents prep participation and pass rates and suggested this data be shared with students to encourage voluntary participation. Ms. Ott committed to doing so. Trustee Colarusso also inquired about the status of the Beacon tutoring partnership; Principal Brown confirmed there is no barrier on the school's end and that Concord (the Beacon staffing partner) has been slow to respond.

E. Family and Community Engagement

Principal Brown presented February and March highlights.

- February: Smile New York dental clinic provided cleanings and screenings to approximately 56 students; Warrior Excellence Award Ceremony held with 30 families in attendance; praised as one of the strongest student events of the year
- March: Prospective Student Open House (detailed under Enrollment); Family-Teacher Conferences held with 66 in-person sessions; teachers are conducting follow-up virtual conferences for families who did not attend in person

F. Counseling and Student Support Update

Principal Brown presented the counseling update.

- Referral trends show increases in academic-decline and attendance referrals, consistent with spring-semester patterns and reflective of improved teacher data literacy around referral protocols
- Crisis referrals are tracked monthly, and each was addressed promptly by the counseling team in accordance with school protocol
- March advisory curriculum focused on self-awareness, decision making, and sustained academic engagement through end of year
- Counseling team has shifted toward a data-driven model: routine cohort review at each progress-report period, with proactive assignment of supports rather than reactive-only response
- Disciplinary data: 14 in-school suspensions year-to-date (compared to 26 at this point last year); 21 out-of-school suspensions; a modest uptick in fights attributed to seasonal patterns
- School-wide culture initiative: all staff are being re-engaged as 'culture keepers' with language and practices for early redirection and de-escalation
- New hire: Milan Robinson joining the Social Studies department
- SY2026-27 instructional staff recruitment has begun through LinkedIn and Bamboo HR; school is maintaining high qualification standards while acknowledging that applicant pool quality has declined sector-wide; potential partnership with NYU teacher residency program pending a site visit

IV. Committee Reports

A. Finance and Audit Committee

Trustee Callie Hull, Committee Chair, reported on behalf of the Finance and Audit Committee.

- FY2026-27 budget development is underway. A draft budget is expected to be ready for board review by the April 21 board meeting. Staff offer letters for returning staff will follow budget finalization; in the interim, Kezena Brown will communicate verbally to returning staff regarding employment for next year to provide continuity and reduce attrition risk
- The school is evaluating three banking institutions for treasury services (optimization of cash reserves), with a target to move reserves by the end of April
- Additional Finance Committee matters of a sensitive nature were deferred to Executive Session

B. Academic Excellence Committee

Trustee Julia Baly reported on behalf of the Academic Excellence Committee (AEC). The planned AEC meeting with the Head of School had been postponed and is being rescheduled, with a virtual format preferred for near-term convenience. Trustee Baly committed to a scheduling update by the April board meeting.

C. Personnel Review Committee

Chair Massey reported on behalf of the Personnel Review Committee (PRC).

- The committee is finalizing the Head of School evaluation instrument. The PRC is meeting the following day to review the tool based on Principal Brown's recommendations
- Following adoption, the instrument will be distributed to a select group of school community stakeholders for completion prior to the formal evaluation
- No issues have been escalated to the Executive Committee

V. Public Comment

Chair Massey opened the floor for public comment. No public comments were offered. The public comment period was closed.

VI. Other Business

Portia Stanley offered remarks acknowledging the progress reflected in the evening's data presentations. She noted that the gains reported across literacy, Regents performance, and student support represent substantial institutional work and encouraged the school team to recognize that progress alongside the ongoing challenges. Principal Brown accepted the acknowledgment on behalf of the staff.

VII. Executive Session

At approximately 7:16 PM, Chair Massey moved to enter Executive Session. The motion was seconded and approved. All non-board members and non-essential staff were excused. Head of School Kezena Brown was requested to remain for the initial portion of the session. The board convened in Executive Session to discuss the following matters, as listed on the approved agenda:

- Personnel matters
- Student discipline matter
- Financial matters

The board conducted multiple Executive Session segments throughout the evening. Substantive discussion during Executive Session is not reflected in these minutes in accordance with applicable law and governance policy.

VIII. Actions Taken Upon Return from Executive Session

The board returned to and from Executive Session at various intervals between approximately 7:16 PM and 8:03 PM. The following formal actions were taken:

Motion 1: Student Discipline Matter

Trustee Joseph Colarusso moved that the Board of Trustees accept the Hearing Officer's recommendation as set forth in the advisory report, in the student discipline matter presented, subject to the conditions outlined in that report.

Second: *Seconded by Eric Reyes*

Vote: Ayes: Massey, Colarusso, Hull, Reyes, Baly, Stanley. Nays: None. Abstentions: None. Absent/Not Voting: Peña.

Result: Motion carried, 6-0.

Motion 2: Election of Vice Chairperson

Chair Massey moved to elect Joseph Colarusso to the position of Vice Chairperson of the Board of Trustees of Innovation Charter High School. Chair Massey confirmed that the Vice Chairperson role does not conflict with the current Secretary role. The nomination had been raised at the prior board retreat.

Vote: Ayes: Massey, Hull, Reyes, Baly, Stanley (Colarusso not noted as voting on own election). Nays: None. Abstentions: None. Absent/Not Voting: Peña.

Result: Motion carried. Joseph Colarusso is elected Vice Chairperson of the Board of Trustees, effective immediately.

IX. Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Massey moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded. The board voted unanimously to adjourn. The meeting was adjourned at 8:04 PM.

X. Summary of Action Items

Owner	Action Item	Deadline
Shalia Desmond	Provide enrollment application data disaggregated by grade cohort; include historical yield rates to inform board's conversion probability analysis	Prior to April 21 board meeting
Shalia Desmond / Kezena Brown	Include virtual open house meeting invitations to board members for optional attendance	Ongoing / immediate
Michelle Ott / Kezena Brown	Share with students the correlation between Regents prep participation and pass rates to encourage voluntary enrollment in prep sessions	Prior to June Regents
Kezena Brown	Provide the board with a preliminary list of Class of 2026 students who may be eligible for Superintendent's Option or Regents appeals	Prior to April 21 board meeting
Kezena Brown / Portia Stanley	Follow up with NYU teacher residency program to reschedule the site visit; confirm partnership timeline	April 2026
Julia Baly	Reschedule AEC meeting with Head of School; confirm date with board	Prior to April 21 board meeting
Kezena Brown / Latoya Massey	Confirm the conditions of the advisory report are reflected in the student return plan	Prior to April 13
Callie Hull / Kezena Brown / Latoya Massey	Align on Director of Operations backfill strategy and interim operational priorities; review job description scope	Week of March 31
CSBM / Finance Committee	Prepare FY2026-27 budget draft for board review; support payroll continuity during operational transition	By April 21 board meeting
Finance Committee / Latoya Massey	Confirm logistics for potential drawdown from reserves to cover near-term expenses; determine whether a special board vote is required or whether action can occur at April 21 meeting	By April 21 board meeting
PRC / Latoya Massey	Finalize Head of School evaluation instrument; distribute to designated school community stakeholders	April 2026
Joseph Colarusso	Draft written board response to Hearing Officer's advisory report letter confirming board's acceptance of recommendation	Immediately following meeting
Latoya Massey	Provide the board with documentation relating to a personnel transition for review	March 18, 2026

XI. Certification

These minutes are a DRAFT record of the proceedings of the regular meeting of the Board of Trustees of Innovation Charter High School held in March 2026. They are subject to correction and approval by the board at the next regular meeting.



Joseph Colarusso, Secretary
Board of Trustees

Date Approved by Board: