

Innovation Charter High School

Board of Trustees — May 19, 2026 Meeting Minutes

DRAFT — For Board Approval

Date	May 19, 2026	Time Called to Order	6:02 PM
Meeting Type	Regular Board Meeting	Time Adjourned	7:23 PM
Location	Virtual (Zoom) — held in accordance with Open Meetings Law		

Board Members Present	Innovation Team / Staff Present
LaToya Massey (Chair) Callie Hull Joe Colarusso Yani Peña	Kezena Brown (Principal/ED) Portia Stanley Brenda Alvarez Julia Jackson Shalia Desmond
Board Members Absent	Also Present
Eric (excused)	Jay (Humanities team representative)

1. Call to Order

LaToya Massey, Board Chair, called the May 19, 2026 meeting of the Board of Trustees to order at 6:02 PM. Roll call confirmed the presence of a quorum. The Chair noted that meeting notice and minutes had been filed in accordance with Open Meetings Law.

2. Approval of Minutes

Motion: Approval of the April 2026 Board Meeting Minutes.

Seconded by: Joe Colarusso.

Outcome: Approved by voice vote without objection.

3. North Star & School Leader Report

3.1 Monthly Deep Dive — Retention and Student Satisfaction

Shalia Desmond presented the May deep dive on student satisfaction and retention. The presentation drew on three data sources: the 2024–2025 NYC DOE Annual School Survey (300+ student responses, 200+ family responses), the school's internal Enrichment Week feedback survey (111 student responses), and a Northstar team analysis facilitated across each administrator.

Strengths Identified

- Bullying ratings are below the city average and trending downward.

- Students report feeling respected by teachers and treated with respect by staff; leadership is rated as inclusive.
- Strong family-reported satisfaction with cultural awareness, college and career readiness (CCR), and language translation/interpretation services.
- Enrichment Week feedback: 87% of students would recommend it to a friend; 96% rated trips favorably; 92% reported that it built persistence; strong gains in teamwork skills.
- On the annual survey, 95% of families indicated intent to return.

Areas of Concern

- Academic rigor and engagement: only 30% of students report feeling challenged, and academic-pressure favorability is 55%. Family satisfaction with instruction is declining.
- School climate, safety, and bullying: approximately 50% of students do not feel adults check in on them personally; 54% positive on bullying prevention; under 70% report a sense of belonging.
- Facilities — particularly bathroom cleanliness and cafeteria food quality — show the lowest favorability scores on the survey and are correlated with transfer-out reasons (school environment cited by 46–49% of departing families).

Current and Planned Responses

- New high-quality instructional materials across the school, with instructional leader support.
- Expanded tutoring: Warrior Work Rooms and Saturday Regents prep.
- Community partnerships (Not Another Child, Save Harlem) and reconnection with after-school settings.
- Per-class town halls launched this year; advisory now focused on social-emotional learning lesson planning.
- Full-time at-risk counselor added; deans focused on increasing relational capacity and open-door practice.
- Direct engagement with DOE Food Services regarding repetitive cafeteria offerings driven by the building's new self-service design.

Board Discussion

Chair Massey asked about the structure and frequency of student town halls. Ms. Desmond and Principal Brown confirmed that town halls were held quarterly this year, with students trained on assembly procedures and engagement. Town halls have been teacher- and administrator-facilitated to date, with student voice incorporated, including a student vote to add a new core value. The program is in development; the team's goal is to move toward more student-led town halls over time.

The Chair also probed root causes of low ratings on cleanliness (identified as bathrooms specifically) and food (identified as repetitive menu options driven by DOE food service design constraints in the new cafeteria layout).

Trustee Connection / Ask

Ms. Desmond asked the Board to leverage Harlem and South Bronx networks for tabling and recruiting opportunities, and to remain mindful of funding constraints in discretionary spending.

3.2 Enrollment Update

Brenda Alvarez presented the enrollment update, framing current conditions against the school's historical recruitment footprint when it was the only charter high school in East Harlem.

Current Position

- Current enrollment: 296 students (down 3 since the April board meeting due to transfers-out).
- Late-year applicants are being directed to apply for the next school year for transcript review.
- A multi-year enrollment trend chart shows a continued decline and a sizeable gap to capacity that must be addressed.

Updated Post-Lottery Strategy

- Cross-functional team using a shared real-time spreadsheet tracking acceptance, decline, in-progress registration, complete, and verified — replacing the previous reliance on SchoolMint only.
- Expanded outreach hours, including evening and weekend phone calls; divided lists for divide-and-conquer execution.
- Revised canvassing flyer with QR code; weekly Zoom info sessions every Thursday; daily in-person tours.
- Open House moved to a Saturday (May 30) to increase family accessibility; new end-of-month event for accepted families to deepen engagement.
- Active referral asks of enrolling families and students ("bring a friend").
- Decline survey deployed to capture more granular reasons families opt out, supplementing SchoolMint's brief decline reason.
- Access to the citywide health immunization system to help families complete registration when documentation is a barrier.
- Re-engagement with East Harlem CBOs and middle school counselors; upcoming tabling at the Go Souls anti-gun-violence event and the Mount Sinai Speak Fest.

Board Discussion

Chair Massey asked whether canvassing materials enable on-the-spot application; Ms. Alvarez confirmed paper applications and QR-coded flyers are distributed. The Chair urged a summer engagement plan to hold the "yes" from acceptance through August. Principal Brown reported that a summer scrimmage is in the works pending athletics confirmation, and the Chair encouraged a broader, low-cost outdoor event (e.g., basketball/soccer/frisbee with food) open to accepted and declined students alike.

The Chair noted the new data-driven approach directly supports the school's enrollment plan obligation to its authorizer and the longer-term goal of moving from approximately 300 students toward a capacity target of 400.

3.3 Attendance Update

- Attendance numbers are largely consistent with last year by cohort; the senior cohort continues to trend below other grades.
- The Senior Management Team, with Emily and counseling support, has revised attendance practices for next year: clearer ownership at each tier, stronger preventative/proactive expectations, and accountability checks for advisor execution.

- Attendance letter language has been revised across all three notification stages, with the second and third letters communicating progressively stronger family responsibility and escalation language.
- Early-dismissal days before holidays produced a measurable attendance hit (71% versus 78% on non-early-dismissal days) without a corresponding PD benefit. For next year, those half-days will be removed before breaks and the PD time will be redistributed as more consistent two-hour blocks during the year.

Board Discussion

Chair Massey asked when the LTAs (long-term absences) are expected to be cleared; Principal Brown will follow up. The Chair also asked about the criteria for the two home visits noted in the report; the team confirmed home visits are triggered by lack of contact across all standard communication channels.

3.4 Counseling Corner

- April referrals: 12; year-to-date: 10. Behavioral concerns remain the highest referral category and correlate with an increase in physical altercations noted in the RAD report.
- Attendance referrals dipped, but tier 2 and tier 3 interventions continue based on counselor-driven progress-period reviews rather than referrals alone.
- Mental Health Awareness Month focus: advisory blocks teaching explicit SEL skills with scenario- and discussion-based practice.
- Planning for next year: per-student Google folder housing individual learning plans so check-ins, group support, and outcomes are centralized and the counseling program's effectiveness can be evaluated systematically.

3.5 Restorative Action & SEL

- Total referrals YTD: 293, predominantly tier 1.
- Out-of-school suspensions: 30 (a significant increase from the low single digits seen in the first three months of the year).
- Principal Brown attributed the rise in part to inconsistent enforcement of school-wide expectations (SmartPass usage, dress code, Yondr/cellphone policy) across staff; tensions are originating in classroom spaces and escalating before the RAD team is engaged.

Plans for Next Year

- Restructure the RAD team to include a Dean of School Culture role focused on preventative culture-building, including opportunities for student joy alongside increased academic rigor.
- Differentiated culture PD tracks paralleling the school's instructional PD tracks, so teachers receive support matched to their needs (new-to-profession, new-to-community, or veteran).
- Upskill the RAD team to deliver feedback and coaching conversations to teachers on classroom management.
- Move RAD work to a data-driven model that uses prior-year referral data to predict and proactively engage families for high-risk students earlier (summer and first 30 days).
- Publish a clearer escalation menu of consequences alongside the existing menu of restorative interventions; restorative practice does not mean the absence of accountability.

Board Discussion

Chair Massey asked whether teachers feel comfortable seeking support for classroom management. Principal Brown noted recent staff feedback that visible, consistent leadership presence and shared accountability are still being built — and that all staff carry responsibility for the school's culture. Jay (Humanities) added that teachers in her department feel comfortable bringing classroom concerns to AP Portia Stanley, that AP Michelle Goodall has been visibly redirecting students, and that Principal Brown has been more present in hallways since the last meeting.

Trustee Peña asked whether the school administers a student survey targeting school culture and behavior. Principal Brown confirmed one was not administered this year and committed to considering one, with results processed back to students at a town hall.

3.6 Talent Acquisition Update

- The school remains engaged with an external talent partner to fill remaining vacancies for the upcoming year, including seven STEM vacancies — historically the hardest to staff.
- Interviewing for two NYU resident positions; total April applicant pool: 15 (3 internal referrals); 6 advanced to demo across ELA, math, chemistry, special education, and STEM.
- AP Stanley reported that an ELA offer was extended and accepted today.
- Referral bonuses for current internal referrers are intended pending confirmation of the June year-end budget position.

4. Committee Reports

4.1 Academic Excellence Committee (AEC)

Trustee Peña reported on her pre-renewal-visit observation and reflection. She acknowledged that her written notes from the visit have not yet been circulated and committed to typing them up this weekend, as well as to a more active in-person presence next month.

Chair Massey proposed that AEC's meeting cadence return to monthly (from bimonthly) for next year, given that curriculum guidance, professional learning structures, and two strong APs are now in place. The committee's focus should shift toward a clear plan and a tracking framework for student performance and growth ahead of the next renewal cycle, which will accelerate quickly.

4.2 Finance Committee

Trustee Callie Hull (Chair, Finance) reported that the committee remains focused on budget development with a target of board approval at the June board meeting. The Chair thanked Principal Brown for her work on bringing the budget into balance under resource constraints.

In addition to the operating budget, the committee is overseeing two financial transitions: a move from TD to obtain better banking rates, and a transition to a new PEO provider expected to yield significant savings.

Trustee Hull invited any board member with questions to join a finance committee meeting.

4.3 People & Resources Committee (PRC)

Chair Massey reported that PRC is focused on completing the Principal's evaluation. The evaluation framework will be circulated to Principal Brown later this week for her feedback. The Executive Committee has not been required to convene any emergency meetings.

5. Other Business / Public Comment

No other business was raised. There was no public comment.

6. Calendar of Upcoming School Events

- Decision Day — the day following this meeting (board members invited to view, video coverage to be arranged).
- In-Person Open House — Saturday, May 30, 2026.
- Culinary Barbecue — June 3, 2026.
- Prom — June 4, 2026.
- Pinning Ceremony — June 8, 2026.
- Staff vs. Student Basketball Game — June 12, 2026 (date pending confirmation; staff recruits welcome).
- Graduation — June 30, 2026.

The board was also informed that the Spring Fling was successfully held earlier in May with approximately 35 students, featuring a DJ, culinary-prepared food, a dance competition, and a student fashion show.

7. Motion to Adjourn Regular Session

Motion: To close the regular session of the board meeting at 7:11 PM.

Outcome: Seconded and approved by voice vote without objection.

8. Executive Session

The Board entered executive session at 7:11 PM, following the close of the public session, with all non-board members excused from the meeting.

8.1 Executive Session — Finances of Innovation Charter High School

Time: 7:11 PM — 7:13 PM.

Topic: Discussion of the school's financial transitions, including the transition to a new PEO provider (documents signed by Principal Brown the prior day) and the relocation of funds from TD to a higher-yielding institution. The Board confirmed there were no outstanding questions on budget, PEO transition, or related financial matters.

Motion: To exit executive session for the purposes of discussing the finances of Innovation Charter High School.

Seconded by: Yani Peña.

Outcome: Approved by voice vote without objection at 7:13 PM.

8.2 Executive Session — Graduation

Time: 7:13 PM — 7:14 PM.

Topic: Final RSVP confirmation of trustees attending graduation. Confirmed: Callie Hull (yes). Pending: Julia Jackson (maybe), Eric (maybe), Pudge Nichols (maybe). Unable to attend: Yani Peña, Joe Colarusso.

Motion: To exit executive session for the purposes of discussing graduation.

Seconded by: Yani Peña.

Outcome: Approved by voice vote without objection at 7:14 PM.

8.3 Personnel Matters

The Board also discussed personnel matters.

Motion: To exit executive session following discussion of personnel-related matters.

Seconded by: Yani Peña.

Outcome: Approved by voice vote without objection at 7:23 PM.

9. Adjournment

Motion: To formally adjourn the May 19, 2026 Board Meeting.

Seconded by: Yani Peña.

Outcome: Approved by voice vote without objection. Meeting adjourned at 7:23 PM.

10. Action Items & Follow-Ups

- **Trustee Peña** — Type up and circulate AEC pre-renewal-visit observation notes (target: by end of weekend following meeting).
- **Trustee Peña** — Confirm increased in-person AEC engagement beginning next month.
- **Trustees Jackson, Eric, Nichols** — Confirm graduation attendance with Chair (text confirmation acceptable).
- **Chair Massey** — Share Principal evaluation framework with Principal Brown later this week for feedback.
- **Principal Brown** — Follow up on the status of LTA (long-term absence) removals.
- **Principal Brown** — Coordinate video coverage of Decision Day for trustees unable to attend in person.
- **Principal Brown / Athletics** — Confirm feasibility of a summer scrimmage / outdoor engagement event for accepted (and declined) students.
- **Finance Committee** — Bring the FY budget to the June board meeting for approval.
- **Board** — Surface community connections in Harlem and the South Bronx to support recruitment tabling and outreach.

Minutes Respectfully Submitted

Submitted for Board review and approval.

Date Approved by Board: _____

Board Chair Signature: _____