

# Harambee Institute of Science and Technology Charter School

## Board of Trustees Public Meeting Minutes

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### Board Meeting Minutes February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2026

The meeting of the Board of Directors was held virtually via ZOOM on Wednesday February 25th 2026 at 6:32 P.M.

#### **Open Session**

##### **Board Members Present:**

Maurice Baynard	Board Chairman
Jan Gillespie- Walton	Board Secretary
Larry Bell	Board Treasurer
Renee Whitby	Board member & Cultural Leader
C. Wade Mosely	Board member
Charis Jackson	Board member
Donna Holmes Lockett	Board member
Valerie Richardson	Board member
Shawn Blue	Board member

##### **Board Members Absent:**

##### **Others Present:**

Gregory Shannon	CEO
Danielle Bryant	Compliance Officer
Nakia Brown	Chief Academic Officer
David Rosario	Chief of Operations and Administration
Deleah Archer	Chief of Student Support & Innovation
Michelle Thornton	CFO
Jenita Lunsford	Board Liaison

##### **Meeting Called to Order**

Board Chairman called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m.

##### **Libation**

Libation was led by Renee Whitby- Board member and cultural leader

##### **Roll Call**

Board Chairman Maurice Baynard asked members and the senior leadership team to give introductions. Board members and the senior leadership team introduced themselves, stated their names and titles.

##### **Introduction of Visitors and Others Present**

None

### **Review and approval of the January 28<sup>th</sup> Board Meeting Minutes**

Board Chairman Maurice Baynard asked if there were any corrections and/or additions to the January 28<sup>th</sup> 2026 Board Meeting Minutes. He opened the floor to Board members for comments. There were no corrections and/or additions. Board member Larry made a motion seconded by Board member Jan to accept the minutes as presented. All were in favor; none were opposed and there was a unanimous motion to accept the minutes as presented.

**Approval:** 9      AYES:0      Nays: 0      Abstentions: 0      Absent: 0

Board Chairman Maurice Baynard turned the meeting over to Greg for the CEO report. Greg began with reciting the Mission, Vision and Core Values of the organization.

Harambee Institute exists to offer our community an education with a focus on the origins, current status, and future of the African world.

Our mission is to educate students to succeed as global citizens with a clear awareness of “who I am, where I am from, where I am going, and how I get there.”

Our vision is a collective and informed African American community utilizing science and technology as a means of promoting education for self-reliance, locally and globally.

Our core values are:

Greatness: Pursuit of excellence in all we do

Accountability: Owning what we do and who we are

Innovation: Open to new ideas with a growth mindset

Integrity: Honesty, transparency, and unity in all we do

### **CEO Report, Greg Shannon**

Greg reported that his team would be providing a presentation this evening relative to their attempt to acquire additional property. He said that they would also discuss their Charter renewal update as well as the amended application process.

### **Charter Renewal Update**

Greg reported that all of their charter renewal documents are with the school district of Philadelphia's charter school office and are now in for review. He stated that they have facilitated board engagement, staff engagement, Harambe parent engagement, community engagement and stakeholder engagement, with respect to their local elected officials and engagement throughout the broader community.

### **2026-2027 Budget**

Greg reported that they have begun the budgeting process for the 2026-2027 school year. He said that he and Michelle met with each of the executive leaders to begin to outline their budgets for the upcoming school year relative to their budget allocation and then that conversation will lead them to personnel.

### **2026 Leadership Retreat**

Greg reported that they are in the midst of planning their leadership retreat, which will occur in July of 2026. It will take place during the week of July 13<sup>th</sup>. He said that they will engage with the board regarding their retreat topic and then with the broader School Leadership Team following that. Their topic for the retreat this year is developing a new five-year strategic plan which will take them through the new five-year charter term.

### **Mid-Year Appraisals**

Greg reported that the mid-year appraisal process is winding up and each member of the organization has facilitated a mid-year appraisal. He said that they are in the final steps of meeting with all staff regarding their performance at the midway point of the school year. Greg concluded his report and opened the floor to questions.

Dr. Baynard asked Greg, since they have turned all of their materials in for renewal and have now seen them through two of those submissions, how would he briefly wrap up this process, as opposed to the first time they did it.

Greg responded that the first time that they did it was a little more arduous for the team given the fact that most of them were new to the charter world, and it was their first time through renewal. Fortunately, at that time, they had Erica, who had shepherded Universal through charter renewal on numerous occasions. This time he felt a whole lot more prepared having the experience of going through it once before. Critical to the process was the engagement with their consultant who has nuanced experience in the charter renewal process and her experience shepherding them through the process was invaluable.

Board member Wade asked what efforts they have made with regard to parent teachers organizations and where are they with the parents, as far as being organized and their representation in general?

Greg indicated that they have engaged with the parents in the first semester of the school year on three separate occasions formally. He said that the last of which was a formal parent meeting to poll their opinion about the acquisition of additional property. For the second semester, there were two more formal engagements with parents. He said that he has a parent on deck now that he will be recommending shortly as a new parent liaison to the board.

Dr. Baynard said that given the fact that this role, even though it looks like just a once-a-month commitment, can become onerous with a lot to review; it is probably best practice to have more than one parent, because if that parent can't make a meeting or

they miss something, then they are without parent representation. He said that he is happy to hear that Greg has a parent in mind, but two would be even better.

### **Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment, Nakia Brown**

Nakia reported that most of what is happening in her department is focused on teaching and learning. She said that they remind their staff and students that this is the most critical time of the year, it is the time where most of their teaching and learning takes place.

#### **Curriculum**

Nakia reported that in curriculum, they have a new program that they purchased to help them to prepare for their end of year state testing which is peer assessment. She said that peer assessment allows their students to mimic the new online version of PSSA. They have now purchased this platform for all of their teachers in grades three through eight. She said that it has been a learning curve for their teachers, but they are looking forward to the data that will come out in April, particularly PSSA. Nakia said that the students will be well prepared for this new online version because they have this new platform.

#### **Instruction**

##### **Black History Door Decorating Contest**

Nakia reported that they are preparing for their black history door decorating contest which was scheduled for this Thursday, but with the snow days they had to postpone it until next Friday. She said that this is their opportunity to engage with all stakeholders and she invited board members to participate. She said that they have people to come in from their police district, crossing guards and parents that serve as judges for the exhibition, which takes place during the day. This year in celebration of the 100th anniversary of Black History Month they decided to do an exhibition where each floor takes on a period of history. K-2 took African kings and queens and they have the Harlem Renaissance with contemporary leaders.

##### **PSSA Plan and Training**

Nakia reported that they are now keeping their eyes keenly focused on assessments and data. They are preparing for PSSA, creating the PSSA plan and putting proctors and test administrators in the correct spaces to be sure that they have all of the building covered during their testing. She said that they start early so that when testing happens things will run officially and smoothly.

##### **Firefly Assessment**

Nakia reported that last week they sat for their Firefly assessment, which is the state's version of practice for PSSA. Their students got an opportunity to sit for that assessment and she is currently going through the data now. She said that it gives a predictor in some regards although it doesn't carry a lot of weight, because it doesn't have anything to really be compared to, but it is another way to prepare the students and give them exposure to what is considered eligible content and things that will be on the test. Nakia concluded her report and opened the floor to questions. Dr. Baynard

asked if snow days this close to the major testing period will have a profound impact on performance. Nakia indicated that while they do have concerns about snow days, she and the coaches find ways to optimize learning. She and the coaches sat in an office, and looked at the number of days that were missed, what topics should have been covered during that time, and then they looked at spaces where they could make up that time. They are now creating a plan with an intervention period already baked into the schedule. She said that they may have to do some reinventing of the schedule so that the students are able to make up those topics. Nakia turned the meeting back to Greg and he turned the meeting over to David for his report on Operations.

### **Operations, David Rosario**

#### **Act 47**

David reported that he would begin with Act 47 because they would be asking the board on the policy and on the calendar for 2026-2027 school year. In addition, he said that he had to create a policy for the Boards approval to align Harambee with some of the changes that are in the comprehensive act 47 policy. Act 47 is a sweeping change for the 1949 school code, that governs how they go about school. He said that it's the most sweeping comprehensive change that have done in more recent years. There are some things that don't apply to Harambee but for the presentation tonight, there is something that applies to Harambee specifically, which is how they address asynchronous days.

He said that their calendar has three asynchronous days built into it. They have 180 student days, which keeps them compliant with the laws. They have 196 staff days, which keeps them under the number and the ceiling which encompasses PD days in summer so they are aligned in those areas. David said that he touched on all of the important ancestor days throughout the year, as they do each year and he specifically wanted to put that before the Board to see if there are any questions on the calendar that was presented.

David explained that he created a draft and sent it to four people that he identified and asked for their feedback. After receiving feedback, he sat down with Greg and Nakia and then submitted it to the Board as a draft for review and approval. He said that complimenting that this year is a new policy which is for asynchronous learning. He said that for them as an organization they have the work to support the time out of school if they choose to use it as an asynchronous day. David pointed out that asynchronous learning from covid going forward, has been abused by some entities and some operators. He said that some would not show up to school but there wasn't any meritorious work that was supporting the time out. He said that Harambee does have the work to support the time out of school. He said that if folks who come to knock on doors come knocking, they can present the work and be in a good light. He said that what they did not have was a policy, because November 2025 is when Act 47 came out so they are responding to the changes organizationally. He said that this is the policy that they have before the Board this evening and he stands open for any questions regarding the calendar as it is presented and the act 47 policy proposal for a vote. David concluded and opened the floor for questions.

Board member Renee asked is there an organized time that the school has parent meetings. And, are the dates organized enough that they can go on the school calendar.

Greg responded that yes, the dates are organized and occur each semester of the year. He said that this is the official academic calendar that has to be submitted separately to the School District of Philadelphia.

Board member Renee also asked if there is a cultural calendar that has dates of cultural activities so that the Board can support cultural events. Greg stated that he will be sure that Board member Renee receives that additional information.

Board Member Donna stated that she agrees with Board member Renee's statement about letting the Board know about events separately because she lives by a calendar and it really makes a difference to receive notice alerting them of events.

Dr. Baynard suggested that this may be a good opportunity to merge the Board calendar with the cultural calendar and produce them ahead of next year so that Board members know all of the things that they need to be aware of year over year.

Greg indicated that they have the calendar and he will send it to the top of Board members inbox.

Board member Wade asked if the intention in the Act 47 policy under Attendance & Accessibility means that a student does not have to be physically present as long as the student completes their work.

David stated that Asynchronous Instruction is without teachers and is based upon the students own work and this particular policy is isolated to Asynchronous work which is independent work for a student at home.

Board member Wade asked how do they remain in compliance with IEP's under the Asynchronous Instruction policy.

Greg responded that the students who have IEP's are given work aligned with their IEP goals.

Board Chairman Maurice Baynard opened the floor for a vote on the following polices

**Motion:** Board member Wade made a motion to accept the two polices below as they have been presented and explained, seconded Board member Charis. All were in favor; none were opposed and there was a unanimous motion to accept the 2026-2027 calendar and the 2026-2027 ACT 47 PDE Asynchronous Instruction Day Delivery Policy as presented.

**Vote: 2026-2027 Calendar vote**

**Approval:** 9      **AYES:**0      **Nays:** 0      **Abstentions:** 0      **Absent:** 0

**Vote: The 2026-2027 ACT 47 PDE Asynchronous Instruction Day Delivery Policy**

**Approval:** 9      **AYES:**0      **Nays:** 0      **Abstentions:** 0      **Absent:** 0

**Island Avenue Framework**

David reported that he would be making a presentation tonight on the framework of the Island Avenue property. He said that they have submitted all of the amended paperwork and are now in the stage of acquisition as they enter into letters of agreement and agreements of sale potentially. He stated that they have no commitments that are not irreversible and with a due diligence period that gives them ways to get out of those positions if they see things that they are not pleased with. However, there are timeframes where they have to do specific work.

David shared his screen and elaborated on key areas in the power point that identify the need for expansion. He compared the current location with the unique possibilities of the new location which offer opportunity for growth and expansion.

**The Structural Problem (current location)**

Current location has limited space for applied STEM learning  
An operational ceiling independent of enrollment

**Possible future at the current location**

Recruitment competitiveness will decline  
Long-term charter positioning weakens

David told members that there is a great opportunity should they get down the road to a larger footprint. He said that the plan would be to have a two-campus instructional model.

**Two-Campus Instructional Model**

66th Street – Foundational Learning Campus (K-4)  
2821 Island Ave – new campus Innovation Campus (5-8)

**Eastwick Campus Composition**

2821 Island Ave – ~50,000 sq ft primary instructional facility  
2801 Island Ave – ~19,917 sq ft auxiliary support building (Combined multi-acre campus environment). David explained why both properties matter. He said that the two buildings would provide land that encompasses 5-6 acres, a larger enrollment footprint and potential zoning opportunities for them to do many things like Stem, drones and their agricultural pursuits.

David indicated that they are moving into the next phase of due diligence and approvals. He elaborated on the next steps and outlined some of the key elements which include:

- Risk Exposure Approval Conditions
- Zoning and land use approval
- Charter authorization approval
- Environmental and title clearance
- School Board Approval of Amended Application
- Regulatory approvals
- Permission to evaluate acquisition
- Authorization to enter into Purchase Agreement
- Final board authorization
- Closing
- What the Board Is Authorizing

David explained that all of the above items are needed in order for them to move forward with the transaction. He advised that there will be a financial component that he would leave to Michelle. He concluded his presentation and opened the floor to questions.

Board member Larry asked what they are basing the sale price on. David said that the sale price is based upon market analysis per the commercial broker that they are working with and an appraisal that was done 2 years ago for the existing property.

Board member Wade asked what the ask is because the Board has already authorized \$100,000 for due diligence, therefore what are they asking for that is different from the due diligence effort.

David responded that this is just an update because they knew that they would have to come back to ask for more money for some of the areas that he covered in the presentation like environmental, zoning and all of the other areas that they need to be able to move forward.

Dr. Baynard clarified that this is a heads up that there will be a request coming for additional funds. He asked if David has a ball park figure.

Greg responded that they are not prepared this evening to give a specific amount and he wouldn't want to announce an amount that would be inaccurate. He said that as they continue to engage with the attorney's they will come back at a later date with a more accurate number.

Dr. Baynard suggested that an acquisition update be a part of every months Board meeting.

Board member Wade commented that there should be an immediate affirmation on the flood plain issue. He also suggested that they engage designers to determine if the building can be converted, redesigned and retrofitted for the intended purpose.

Dr. Baynard commented that they need to engage with experts and receive feedback on what to expect with the flood plain models and what that region can really expect.

David said that he would work on getting that information and would follow-up with the Board. He turned the meeting back to Greg. Greg turned the meeting to Michelle for her report on the financial aspects of the acquisition.

### **Business & Finance, Michelle Thornton**

Michelle reported on the financial considerations and funding strategies for the project. She said that they have been working with PNC over the past year about the possibility of refunding their current bonds. She said that it will be twofold; refunding their current bonds at a lower rate and also funding for the project. Michelle indicated that they have been discussing the items needed to develop this process. They are going through the bond rating process for Harambee which requires them to complete an application and she mentioned that another strategy would be creating a nonprofit arm of the organization that would hold the mortgage. She said that this would open a revenue stream for them to claim the rent reimbursement that Charter Schools are eligible for when they pay rent.

Michelle said that establishing that entity would require the Boards involvement since they would need to establish the entity and create a new Board with bylaws. She said that the advantage of having a nonprofit own the mortgage and the bonds would be a tax strategy as well in order for it to be affordable for Harambee.

### **High Level Cost of the Project**

Michelle said that currently their annual debt service based on 6 million dollars is a little over 500,000 dollars. She said that based on their conversations with PNC they are looking at possibly a 25-million-dollar deal. She said that it would include rolling the previous bonds, purchasing the new property and the cost for the construction or rehab of the new property which would be between 17 and 25 million dollars. The debt service on that amount would be an annual 1.7 million dollars. She said that as it stands right now, they are looking at a couple of things:

- 1) Refinancing current bonds at a lower rate and a decrease to their debt service
- 2) Increase of enrollment by 20% equivalent to about 120 students
- 3) Establishing a nonprofit arm which will allow for another revenue stream from rent reimbursement at approximately 75-100K per year.

Michelle reported that the next part would be their timeline. She said that they have been working with PNC since December to move the process along and another part of that process is forming a finance team. She suggested that once they get a core team together that Board members become a part of the weekly meetings, especially the

finance team. She said that the other part of forming a team would be selecting their bond counsel. They have been looking for candidates and did receive 2 responses that they will be reviewing so that they can make a selection this week. She estimated that the process will take approximately 3 months. Michelle concluded the presentation and opened the floor to questions.

Dr. Baynard commented that they were going to have to do something with the current bonds anyway so this is a really positive plan. He asked if all the things that Michelle discussed doing, worked well, how much would that bring in?

Michelle said that she prepared it based on a minimum and the minimum was the 1.7 million. She said that she presented it that way to show how reasonable and affordable it would be for Harambee. She said it is very easy for them to get an additional 120 students, particularly in that area. The research shows that in that area for the grades that they intend to have it would be very easy for them to get a minimum of 100 new students across the K-8 grade population. She agreed with Dr. Baynard that 120 additional students would more than cover the increased cost of the debt service.

Michelle said that they estimate that getting the additional 100 students would be immediate, not gradual. She said that part of the work that they are doing now is marketing for that. Greg informed members that he has forwarded Board member Jan and Dr. Baynard a sample of the marketing campaign that has begun.

Board member Larry commented that as a finance committee they need a little more detail because while it may cover the debt service, there are a lot more cost involved and they should be certain that everything else can be covered along with the debt service.

Michelle indicated that in addition to the Acquisition presentation, she had a few additional announcements to make.

### **Budget Process**

Michelle reported that they are in the process of preparing for next year 2026-2027. They will be framing the budget and waiting for information on funding over the next couple of months. Next month they will present a draft to the finance committee and in April, they will submit it to the entire Board for a vote at the May Board meeting.

### **Audit**

Michelle reported that there were some conditions at the last meeting regarding the audit. The conditions included possible additional questions from the Board. She said that they did not receive any additional questions, therefore, they closed the audit and are now in the process of completion. She said that they received a draft of the 990 and will be presenting it at the next Board meeting.

## **Human Resources**

Michelle reported that they participated in 2 job fairs over the past 2 weeks where they had a good experience with both Penn University and LaSalle.

Michelle also reported that they have a Mental Health and Wellness Day planned for this Friday. They have about 13 partners that will join in various areas of mental health and wellness. They also have a number of sponsors like The African American Museum, Citizens Bank, South Restaurant and their Health insurance organizations. She said that the theme is to remove the stigma around Mental Health.

Michelle concluded and Dr. Baynard opened the floor for questions and comments from the Board.

## **Old Business**

Board member Wade asked if they still have an alliance with the Tiger Woods golf club. Greg said that they engage with them ongoingly and the students were just there in January for a field trip.

Greg added that they have embarked on a media campaign to promote Harambee. He asked everyone to go to their linked in page and search for Harambee. There is a post that he asked everyone to like, comment and repost. He asked that everyone share it to all of their networks and contacts. He thanked Danielle for sharing it and said that they will be highlighting Board members and staff in their media campaign.

## **New Business**

None

## **Public Concerns**

None

**Motion to Adjourn:** Board member Wade made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Board member Larry. All were in favor; none were opposed and it was passed unanimously.

**Approval:** AYES: 9      Nays: 0      Abstentions: 0      Absent:

Next Meeting: Wednesday, March 25<sup>th</sup> 2026