Heritage Classical Academy
1130 W. 34th Street
Houston, Texas 77018

Board Minutes – Special Meeting, August 3, 2026

Members present in person: Stuart Saunders (Chairman). Present online: Arthur Donnelly, Richard Hendee (Treasurer), and Kathryn van der Pol (Secretary). Sharon Griffin was not present.

Guests present: Superintendent Oscar Ortiz (joined after the meeting was called to order) and Administrative Staff.

1) Roll Call; Establishment of Quorum; Call to Order

Mr. Saunders confirmed that a quorum was present and called the meeting to order at 5:17 p.m.

2) Prayer and Pledge of Allegiance

3) Reading of the School Mission Statement and Vision

By consensus, the Board dispensed with the opening formalities in order to proceed directly to the action item.

4) Public Comments

No members of the public had signed up to address the Board, and no public comments were offered.

5) Action Items

a) Review and take possible action on a charter amendment regarding operational minutes of the school.

Background.

Mr. Saunders reviewed the history of the matter. Following the school's first year of operation, Mrs. van der Pol, chair of the Academic Committee, raised the question whether the school had met the operational minutes commitment stated in its charter, which is 83,250 operational minutes, for the 2025-2026. Mrs. van der Pol also observed that the 2026-2027 academic calendar proposed by management did not meet the 83,250 operational minutes required by our charter.

Mr. Saunders expressed concern if the school were to knowingly operate out of compliance with our operational minutes commitment. He noted that the 2026–27 calendar approved by the Board on March 17, 2026, provides 79,650 operational minutes — below the charter commitment — and that the start time had been moved from 7:45 a.m. to 8:00 a.m. in response to parent requests.

Mrs. van der Pol addressed the compliance framework: the charter functions as a contract; operational minutes are a material term; the mechanism for changing a material term is a charter amendment; and while an amendment is under review — a review that may take up to 60 days — the school remains bound by the existing charter. Her recommendation was that the Board direct management to adjust the 2026-2027 academic calendar to include 83,250 operational minutes so that the school is in compliance on the first day of instruction, and then the school can work on a non-expansion amendment to be filed promptly.

Mr. Donnelly asked how the original 83,250 figure was derived. Mrs. van der Pol explained that the founding group sought a longer school day to accommodate two recesses, specials, and double sections of literacy and mathematics, and that research cited in the charter application supported extended time for students from lower-income households. Mr. Saunders added that Michael Feinberg, a founder of KIPP and a consultant during the application process, emphasized time on task as the single greatest driver of educational outcomes. Mr. Ortiz confirmed that the emphasis at the time of the application was additional time on task for an underserved Houston population.

Administration's perspective.

Mr. Ortiz stated that, addressing the immediate operational problem, administration prefers to remain at 79,650 minutes for 2026–27 because the calendar has been communicated to families and teachers and is tied to the approved budget, and because credibility with families and trust with teachers are at stake. He noted that additional daily minutes can be psychologically taxing on a largely first- and second-year teaching staff, but that such changes have been made successfully at other schools. He agreed that the school year must begin at 83,250 minutes in order to be in compliance, and proposed that the additional minutes be weighted toward the later part of the year so that the practical effect falls near the 60th day of instruction, by which time the Agency's decision should be known.

Administrative staff estimated that meeting 83,250 minutes would require approximately eight additional school days, and noted that one scheduled bad-weather day could be converted to an instructional day. Mrs. van der Pol clarified that the commitment is expressed in operational minutes — the time students are on campus — not instructional minutes, so re-allocating time within the existing day does not help. Mr. Saunders and Mr. Ortiz confirmed that teacher contracts are written in terms of 177 instructional days, so adding days would likely create claims for additional pay, while extending the length of the school day would not alter the literal terms of the contracts. Mr. Donnelly observed that the required increase is roughly 20 minutes per day, and that adjustments to the drop-off time and the car-line schedule could substantially close the gap. Mr. Donnelly and Mr. Ortiz also discussed whether growing enrollment would reduce operational efficiency; Mr. Ortiz attributed first-year inefficiency largely to inexperienced staff and expected transition times to improve with coaching.

Mr. Donnelly and Mr. Ortiz further noted that tying teacher contracts to instructional days rather than to the charter's minutes standard is a structural weakness that should be corrected in future contract templates.

Motion to re-work the 2026-2027 academic calendar.

The Board agreed that, because the March 17 calendar does not meet the charter commitment, action was required at this meeting rather than at a later date, and that the corrective action should take the form of a new motion rather than an amendment of the March motion.

Motion: Authorize management to rework the 2026–27 academic calendar so that it provides 83,250 operational minutes, and adopt that calendar as the school's 2026–27 academic calendar.

Moved by: Richard (Dick) Hendee; Seconded by: Kathryn van der Pol.

Motion approved: 4-0

Mr. Saunders voted to approve. Mr. Donnelly voted to approve. Mr. Hendee voted to approve. Mrs. van der Pol voted to approve. Ms. Griffin was absent and did not vote.

Charter amendment.

The Board then considered whether to seek a non-expansion amendment lowering the charter's operational minutes commitment. Mr. Saunders proposed language setting a floor of not less than 79,000 operational minutes, which would permit the school to operate anywhere above that figure. Mr. Ortiz noted that the state minimum is 75,600 operational minutes and that a floor of 79,000 leaves the school comfortably above the statutory minimum while preserving flexibility for the Board to set a higher internal standard in any year.

Mrs. van der Pol provided a handout comparing operational minutes at peer systems: Houston ISD approximately 81,900 (an increase over the prior year); KIPP 82,560; Great Hearts approximately 80,100; and BETA approximately 79,900.

Mrs. van der Pol noted the Commissioner's standard for approving an amendment is the best interest of students, and that if the amendment is denied, administration will need to communicate the resulting calendar changes to families and staff. Mr. Ortiz agreed to review the charter application to ensure operational compliance, and recommended making that review an annual internal control.

Mrs. van der Pol proposed the amended charter language, striking the reference to instructional days and expressing the commitment solely in operational minutes.

Motion: That the Board and management submit a non-expansion amendment to the Texas Education Agency revising the school's charter language to provide that Heritage Classical Academy will operate a school year totaling not fewer than 79,000 operational minutes.

Moved by: Kathryn van der Pol; Seconded by: Richard (Dick) Hendee.

Motion approved: 4-0

Mr. Saunders voted to approve. Mr. Donnelly voted to approve. Mr. Hendee voted to approve. Mrs. van der Pol voted to approve. Ms. Griffin was absent and did not vote.

Next steps.

Mr. Ortiz reported that the Agency's portfolio coordinator advised that the submission requires the non-expansion request form completed by the Superintendent, accompanied by a valid board resolution, a track-changes copy of the charter showing the removed language struck in red and the new language added in red, and a clean copy of the charter reflecting the proposed new language. Mrs. van der Pol noted that the operational minutes figure appears in three places in the charter and that all three must be revised; she will provide the charter language and page references, along with the draft resolution she circulated. Mr. Saunders and Mr. Ortiz will assemble and review the amendment package before submission, and will determine whether the resolution must be signed by all directors. Mr. Ortiz also noted that campus calendars are submitted to the Agency's governance division by September 30, separately from finance-division deadlines, and that he will share the full-year compliance calendar with the Board.

Adjournment

There being no further business, Mr. Saunders adjourned the meeting at 6:26 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathryn van der Pol

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Board Secretary

Heritage Classical Academy