

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MINUTES DRAFT

January 14, 2026, at 4:00 PM
Christopher House Logan Square Campus
3255 W Altgeld St., Chicago IL 60647

Attendance

Board Members Attending In-Person: Adnan Assad, Ronit Barrett, Jessica Cardoni, Angela Igbineweka-Obaseki, Roberto Interiano, Jeff Kemerley, Lauren Long, Justin Orr, Carlos Pineiro, Kim White, Candace Williams

Board Members Attending via Microsoft Teams: Desire Bernard-Forbes, Shavon Hale, Alex Maturi

Board Members Absent: Rolando Acosta, Dee Dee Chesley, Mike Edeke, Katheryn Steward

Christopher House Staff Attending: Sarah Collentine, Julie Dakers, Anna Falcon, Seema Rehmatullah, Karen Ross-Williams, Becky Seibel, Traci Stanley, Bonnie Werstein

Guests: Brooke Roark, Jordan Reece, Margo Scoll

Quorum Met. Meeting called to order at 4:05 PM by Chair, Adnan Assad.

Minutes Recorder: Bonnie Werstein

Welcome Presented by Adnan Assad

Adnan welcomed our guests, Brooke Roark, Jordan Reece and Margo Scoll. Adnan Assad called the meeting to order and welcomed the Board members.

Opportunity for Public Comment

The Chair reminded attendees of the Board's public participation guidelines and three-minute time limit per speaker. Two speakers were registered and addressed the Board in the order listed below.

Speaker: Jordan Reece, Middle School Reading Teacher; CTU Delegate (Christopher House Elementary)

Jordan reported a severe staffing crisis at the elementary school, citing the departure since the start of the school year of eight teachers/instructional staff (~one quarter of union staff). They described acute impacts in 4th grade (one classroom without a permanent teacher most of the year) and Special Education (currently three teachers of six; four of five who began the year have departed). They urged the Board to review exit interviews, assess organizational structures and resource allocation, and consider how centralized decision-making may impede school operations. Jordan invited Board members to visit the classroom and requested immediate actions to stabilize staffing this year and systemic changes to prevent recurrence.

Speaker: Margo Schol, Early Childhood Teacher (Christopher House Uptown)

Margo expressed appreciation for Board and leadership advocacy amid federal funding uncertainty affecting early childhood education. She thanked leadership for recent changes benefiting early childhood staff: a two-week winter break; transparent salary scales and a defined career pathway; cost-of-living increase; one-time bonus; and a \$40,000 minimum annual wage commitment for the lowest earners. She highlighted a Science Enrichment Pilot for ages 2–8 featuring weekly push-ins, PD for teachers, and family engagement; shared examples (insect life cycle study; hands-on physics). Margo invited Board members to visit classrooms and requested a future agenda slot to share outcomes and materials.

[Minutes and Consent Agenda, Presented by Adnan Assad](#)

The Board reviewed the November Board Meeting Minutes and no changes were recommended.

Motion was made by Roberto Interiano and seconded by Candace Williams and carried unanimously to approve the minutes for November 12, 2025, Board Meeting Minutes.

Becky Seibel provided an overview of the materials in the Consent agenda packet included.

FY26 DFSS Head Start and Early Head Start Budget Revisions

Budget revisions were needed for both FY26 Head Start and Early Head Start due to a change in the grant period's end date. The initial budgets were for grant period 12/1/25-11/30/26. The budget revisions now reflect the new grant period of 12/1/25-6/30/26, which is a 7-month term.

Budget: Early Head Start Amount - \$535,476. Head Start Amount - \$893,332.

For Early Head Start, 63% of the budget will be allocated to personnel. The remaining 37% will be allocated to other program costs. For Head Start, 88% of the budget will be allocated to personnel. The remaining 37% will be allocated to other program costs.

The Shared Governance Reports and Policy Council meeting minutes were shared and reviewed with updates to the Early Childhood Menus for January 2026.

Head Start Shared Governance Note: Per 45 CFR Part 1301, relevant items are subject to Parent Policy Council review/approval. Staff will ensure reciprocal approvals and file cross-approvals with the official record.

Motion was made by Carlos Pineiro and seconded by Ronit Barrett and carried unanimously to approve the Consent Agenda.

[CEO Report, Presented by Julie Dakers](#)

Julie reported on the Elementary Charter Renewal. She reviewed with the board a timeline showing all milestones were completed to date and that the CPS Board vote has been communicated as projected for February 2026. The Financial & Operational scorecard met or exceeded expectations, and the academic and equity-related areas remain under review. She shared that ongoing advocacy includes campus visits by CPS Board Members, public hearing testimony by staff and parents, and written statements submitted from families to the CPS Board of Education.

The threat of a Freeze of Federal Funding for Child Care is currently a concern, and we are monitoring the risk to state-administered reimbursements (childcare assistance). To date, we have not had a change in funding flows, and our local funders report that we should continue to operate as usual; Of CH's \$2M in childcare funding there is risk exposure for the remainder of FY26 estimated at approximately \$1.1M. The Board asked questions about the level of risk to our families, staff and organization. Julie stated that the team will continue to monitor developments on federal level.

Julie provided an update of the Head Start Partnership with Concordia Place that launched on December 1, 2025, with 17 slots. Christopher House will provide monitoring, training, and implementation support. The benefits include impact expansion and development of scalable tools; risk mitigated through structured oversight and monitoring. This partnership is in alignment with the current Strategic Plan's fourth pillar, Community Impact.

[Executive Committee Report, Presented by Adnan Assad](#)

Adnan reported that the Executive Committee completed the FY2025 CEO Performance evaluation in alignment with policy. The Board will enter a closed session at the end of the meeting to discuss the outcome and recommendations.

Adnan invited Ronit Barrett to introduce Brooke Roark who highlighted her longstanding leadership in community building and service. For more than 15 years, Brooke has supported her local school as an LSC Representative and has mobilized neighbors through Coonley Cares to provide holiday meals, Halloween treats, and Thanksgiving turkeys to families in need, demonstrating her commitment to compassionate, action oriented leadership.

Brooke Roark thanked Ronit for the kind words and described her experience as a former teacher and instructional coach, her current work supporting schools, and her role as an educational surrogate parent for students without family representation at IEP meetings. She also spoke as a parent of four children, including children with learning disabilities, and reflected on how her personal and professional experiences have shaped her understanding of the challenges schools face in meeting diverse student needs. Ms. Roark emphasized her belief that every child deserves a high-quality education and expressed appreciation for the school community and staff.

Motion was made by Roberto Interiano and seconded by Lauren Long and carried unanimously to approve the nomination of Brooke Roark to the Board of Directors for a three-year term 2025-2028.

[External Affairs Committee Report, Presented by Jeff Kemerley](#)

Jeff reviewed with the Board that Year-to-Date fundraising was tracking ahead of last year overall; individual giving slightly below last year; strong performance in foundation/corporate grants.

The 35th Annual Benefit is scheduled for May 1, 2026 and sponsorships are the primary revenue driver. The Board members were asked to support outreach to previous and prospective sponsors.

Jeff discussed the benefit planning and included a potential “Golden Ticket” raffle and asked for volunteers to help by serving on the Auction Committee and to assist curating live auction items.

[Finance Committee Report, Presented by Carlos Pineiro](#)

Carlos reported the good news in hearing that the CPS Financial & Operational Scorecard exceeded expectations across metrics and provides positive input for charter renewal.

The refinancing with IFF that we closed in October has improved the income statement and removes prior covenant pressures.

The committee is reviewing depository services and have two RFP’s under evaluation and once that is completed the committee will begin discussing an investment strategy and endowment support.

The organization’s liquidity remains adequate (~50 days cash on hand) with a stretch goal toward 90 days; focus on preserving/strengthening liquidity to navigate funding timing and risks.

The Early Childhood enrollment and revenue is on target relative to budget; FY26 projected slight deficit on an income-statement basis but positive on a cash basis.

The City of Chicago Early Childhood RFP is expected in the spring and staff are preparing scenarios to maintain current funding and evaluate partnership/expansion opportunities. The Elementary School’s Teacher Collective bargaining agreement will end in August and charter renewal terms are ending in June 2026. All of these items will help to inform FY27 budget planning that will kick off in March.

DBEIJ Task Force Committee Report, Presented by Candace Williams

On the Agenda: Self Board-Assessment

[DBEIJ Task Force Report, by Candace Williams](#)

Candace reported on the planned Board engagement events in February, June, and during the October retreat (dates forthcoming). She invited Board Members to All-Staff In-Service on February 6 at Intentional Sports; opportunity for informal engagement with faculty/staff.

The Board self-assessment will be launching to inform future training, development, and program engagement opportunities. Candace proposes that the self-assessment not be anonymous to allow for direct follow up to ensure 100% participation.

Motion was made by Jeff Kemerly and seconded by Kim White and carried unanimously to move into closed session.

Closed Session

Personnel Matters: The appointment, employment, compensation, discipline, performance, or dismissal of specific employees

Motion was made by Carlos Pinerio and seconded by Candace Williams and carried unanimously to go back into open session.

Motion was made by Kim White and seconded by Candace Williams and carried unanimously to adjourn meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 6:05 PM

Key Decisions:

- Approval of November Board Meeting Minutes and Consent Agenda
- Appointment of new Board Member, Brooke Roark