



# Atmosphere academy

## Atmosphere Academy Public Charter Schools Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes

August 26, 2020

Zoom Conference Call  
Atmosphere Academy Charter School  
5959 Broadway  
New York, New York 10463

**Board Members Attending:**

Dr. Michael Lagas  
Mr. Jesse J. Greene, Jr.  
Mr. Mervin Burton  
Mr. James Spitzer

**Board Members Absent:**

Mr. Alan Dillon

**Others in Attendance:**

Mr. Colin J. Greene  
Mr. Peter Markey  
Ms. Elizabeth Nash  
Mrs. Katherine Brennan  
Ms. Camila Gonzalez  
Mr. Bryan Fryer  
Mr. Christian Roman  
Mr. Ben Pah  
Mr. Phillip Byer  
No public in attendance

**Agenda Item 1. Call to Order**

At approximately 5:10PM Dr. Lagas opened the conference call and called the Board meeting to order.

**Agenda Item 2. Pledge of Allegiance**

No Pledge of Allegiance was performed.

### **Agenda item 3. Board Reports**

Mr. J. Greene reported on the Governance Committee call of August 24, 2020. He reported that committee discussed the Board self-assessment, the real estate tax issue at 5959 Broadway, the plan for a board meeting of Atmosphere Foundation, the Foundation tax return, and the need for more board members at Atmosphere Academy.

Mr. C. Greene reported on the Accountability Committee call for August. He reported that that committee discussed the school opening, enrollment and communication to staff and parents in the town hall call.

Mr. B. Fryer reported on the Finance Committee call of June 24<sup>th</sup>. Topics discussed there were covered at this board meeting and included per pupil reimbursement rates, enrollment levels and the budget issues at the early stage of the year.

### **Agenda Item 4. Comments From the Public**

There were no public attendees and therefore no comments.

### **Agenda Item 5. Revision and Adoption of the Agenda**

The board had no objections or additions.

### **Agenda Item 6.1. Board Meeting Minutes**

Mr. J. Greene presented the draft July Board Meeting Minutes for approval by the Board. These were sent to the Board in advance for their review.

Mr. Burton moved to approve the meeting minutes for July 2020.  
Mr. Spitzer seconded the motion.

Vote Aye: Mr. Burton, Mr. J. Greene, Dr. Lagas, Mr. Spitzer  
Vote no: None

Motion adopted.

### **Agenda Item 6.2. Benefits Approval**

Mr. Phillip Byer, CEO of Shulman, presented the health and other benefit program renewals for approval. On the medical benefit area Atmosphere will have a 5 to 9% increase across the different plans and lives insured. Average is about a 7% increase in cost and that is within the normal range for big employee groups.

He discussed the use of the HRA to cover copays and how that can give employees up to a \$750 benefit and help reduce overall cost to Atmosphere. He proposed increasing the HRA benefit limit to \$1,000. Overall cost will probably come down as employees can select cheaper plans with higher copays. Mr. C. Greene discussed the possible range of cost for the program.

He then reviewed a spreadsheet with a range of choices and plans. This discussion included the savings possible from the HRA increase. There were no suggestions to improve the medical plans selected by Atmosphere.

Other plan rates for plans such as vision, dental, short term disability, AD&D and life insurance remain flat year to year.

Overall Atmosphere's risk profile of age and claims remains good, so insurance rates are stable.

Mr. C. Greene asked for Board approval of the plans and the Board moved to approve the plans.

A motion was made to approve the Aetna medical plans, with an average 7% increase in rates, and to approve the dental, vision, life insurance, Short term disability and AD&D with no change or minimal change in rates. Also to approve an increase in HRA limit to \$1,000.

Mr. Burton moved to approve these plans.  
Dr. Lagas seconded the motion.

Vote Aye: Mr. Burton, Mr. J. Greene, Dr. Lagas, Mr. Spitzer  
Vote no: None

Motion adopted.

### **Agenda Item 6.3. Finance Update**

Mr. Fryer reviewed the financial package that included the dashboard and other reports. The Board discussed the status of the repayment to the DOE, which is now complete. They discussed enrollment levels and breakeven enrollment levels. At time of the meeting the enrollment was over the breakeven level. He next discussed the revenue at an enrollment of 590 and the revenue shortfall to planned enrollment levels of 653. Recruiting efforts continue to fill available seats.

The Board discussed the per pupil reimbursement rate, but there is no new news on that rate.

Mr. Fryer and the Board discussed the positive cash flow, and he noted the \$239,000 grant to cover COVID costs that will come in from government agencies which is a big help. All of this is positive news given the growth in staff to support the larger student body.

The finance update closed with a discussion of the risks the school faces and the timing of possible events.

#### **Agenda Item 6.4. 5959 Broadway Property Tax**

Mr. J. Greene reviewed the high real estate tax bill received from the landlord of the 5959 Broadway facility. The Board discussed the expectation of a tax rate abatement and how this would be addressed with the landlord. Mr. J. Greene shared a document that reviewed the history and defects in the lease that only became apparent when the first tax bill was presented to Atmosphere. The strategy of how to deal with the landlord was reviewed and, also, whether this can be recovered from the city as it is “additional rent” under the lease. Atmosphere will pursue these avenues of possible solution.

#### **Agenda Item 6.5. Enrollment Update**

Ms. Gonzalez reviewed the efforts to drive enrollment. She discussed the responses of families to follow up calls and the reasons for not committing. At the time of this board meeting enrollment was at 560 students.

Ms. Nash discussed her efforts to recruit and support special education students.

Ms. Gonzalez closed her discussion with a review of the students now pending and likely to decide on whether to attend in the next few days.

Mr. Pah reviewed the advertising campaign and how many acted on the ads with completed applications.

Mr. C. Greene reviewed the efforts made to retain students. He also reviewed why people leave Atmosphere. Some are not a good fit for Atmosphere’s culture, for others there is a big travel inconvenience and for some there is too much workload on the student.

Mr. C. Greene noted the positive news coverage on channel 12 of Atmosphere’s preparation to open and the positive response in terms of applications that followed.

He expects it will take 2 months for all of this enrollment uncertainty to settle down.

#### **Agenda Item 6.6. Reopening Update**

Mr. C. Greene reviewed Atmosphere’s preparation for reopening with the Board. All relevant documents and guidance has been revised to meet current rules and health requirements. He informed the Board that the school was prepared to open as planned. His efforts are focused on keeping parent frustration with the uncertainty down as much as possible.

Ms. Nash reviewed the staff readiness. They have some concern but are confident of the school’s efforts to keep everyone safe. She discussed some of the glitches that have come up ,and technology issues and challenges that have been dealt with.

Mrs. Brennan discussed classes and topics on Zoom that the Board can listen in on. She framed the

reaction to preparation plans as confident and calm at this point. She then reviewed the achievement classes and participants.

She next reviewed attendance. It is behind last year, off by about 4%. It is now running 81 to 92%, which is up from the start of remote learning.

Ms. Nash expects the attendance to get better as the school rolls into the full open fall session.

Mr. C. Greene was complimentary of the staff readiness to go forward with the program. He believes that was helped by the no layoff practice and sustained compensation levels the school employed.

Mr. Roman then reviewed the social justice and standards of the school, and how efforts are underway to stay true to that effort given the COVID limitations. He and his team are dealing with the frustrations and anxiety that result from all the limitations. They are working to solve problems and remove inhibitors.

#### **Agenda Item 6.7. Explorers Program**

Mr. Pah next explained how the Explorer program works with the other motivational programs to keep student attention and motivation high. They explained to the Board that the Explorers programs are travel programs designed to enlarge students' horizons and reward performance. They explained that this is aligned with the STARS and Warriors programs, which reward performance also but by a different method.

STARS and Warriors, it was explained, are needed to help learning, reduce misbehavior, create a pattern of development and integrate the culture. These are aimed at a broad swath of the student body.

The Explorers programs are small group awards such as sailing, equestrian events, polo, Island School and other aimed at a more limited population.

He then gave an update on the work with Custom Ink. He reported on the school store selling school brand clothing to raise money for the school or the Foundation. He also described how the student uniform program is running and the financial impact on and for the school. He then discussed the Custom Ink spending on the commercial Atmosphere participated in.

Mr. C. Greene closed with a discussion of the achievement levels and noted the disruption in learning that COVID actions have caused. He stated that there is a lot to do to get students back on track, and much opportunity to improve.

#### **Agenda Item 7. Consent Agenda**

There were no consent agenda items.

#### **Agenda Item 8. Executive Session**

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There was no Executive Session.

**Agenda Item 9. Unfinished Business**

There was no unfinished business.

**Agenda Item 10. New Business**

There was no new business.

**Agenda Item 11. Adjournment**

At approximately 7 PM the Board moved to adjourn the meeting.

Mr. J. Greene moved to adjourn.

Mr. Burton seconded the motion.

Vote Aye: Mr. Burton, Mr. J. Greene, Dr. Lagas, Mr. Spitzer

Vote no: None

Meeting adjourned.