



Atmosphere academy

Atmosphere Academy Public Charter Schools Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes October 28, 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

Board Members Absent:

Mr. James Spitzer
Mr. Alan Dillon

Others in Attendance:

Mr. Colin J. Greene
Mr. Peter Markey
Ms. Elizabeth Nash
Mrs. Katherine Brennan
Mr. Bryan Fryer
Mr. Christian Roman
Mr. Ben Pah
Mr. Robert Branch
Mr. Bronson Branch
Ms. Lena Litvak
Mr. Daryl Jenkins
No other public in attendance

Agenda Item 1. Call to Order

At approximately 5:07PM 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

There was no governance committee meeting this month.

Dr. Lagas reported on the accountability committee meeting. The main topics were the resignation of Camila Gonzalez and high school placement reports.

Mr. Fryer reported on the Finance committee meeting. Those financial reports were discussed at this full board meeting. Additional topics discussed were the changes in the 401K program by the administrator. At that meeting a representative of the administrator was on the call and discussed their procedures, rules, and rationales for making change in the investment offerings. They also presented choices that Atmosphere could consider to change the risk profile for Atmosphere employees. The Committee took the information under advisement. The Committee also discussed real estate taxes, enrollment levels, and a garnishment issue regarding one of the landlords.

Agenda Item 4. Comments From the Public

There were no comments.

Agenda Item 5. Revision and Adoption of the Agenda

The board had no objections or additions.

Agenda Item 6.1. Finance Update

Mr. Fryer updated the board on financial performance and related matters. He reported on the school scorecard, and the year to date surplus and the surplus dynamics over the year. He then reviewed financial leverage ratios and noted the improvement that has been achieved.

Looking forward he discussed the student enrollment levels and the cash flow trends noting that the cash flow is strong, except for the period around Christmas when cash levels touch lows. Cash flow management tools will be implemented to help over that period of time. Mr. C. Greene reviewed the rent dynamics about to occur at Marble Hill and 5959 Broadway due to expansion build-out programs.

The Board also discussed the review with Slavic, the 401K plan administrator, at the Finance Committee meeting. The issues are the brokerage window, the remaining investment choices, and the fee structures. Mr. Burton and Mr. J. Greene agreed to review the facts regarding these issues and report back to the full Board with recommendations on what to do.

Agenda Item 6.2. Board Minutes

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

Mr. J. Greene moved to approve the meeting minutes for September 2020.
Mr. Burton seconded the motion.

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

Vote no: None

Motion adopted.

Agenda Item 6.3. Student Interview

The student, Bronson Branch, is planning to apply to a selective boarding high school and wanted a recommendation from the Atmosphere Board. He and his father spoke to the Board and expressed their desires, motivations, skills and commitment to academic performance. The Board agreed to give him a strong recommendation. Mr. Jenkins coordinated the call and discussion.

Agenda Item 6.4. Culture Update

Mr. Roman reviewed the status of culture program at Atmosphere. He presented charts that showed the merit and demerits of students. He then explained how those were earned in the operating model now in use. His discussion covered all grades. His assessment was that 93% of students are meeting core value honors and about 7% are not. Operating under Covid-19 procedures has created some instability, but Mr. Roman was confident that there would be stability by the end of the second quarter.

He next discussed his team's outreach to students and families.

He reviewed absentee rates and profiles. Causes of absences were listed and then methods used to enforce the attendance policy.

Advisory class topics were reviewed with the Board. Bullying, 9/11 remembrance, how to send emails, are typical topics.

He then reviewed extracurricular activities which included sports, student government ideas, continuing

work with SAR school, how to leverage vendors to execute the school plan and other activities.

Mr. C. Greene and Mr. Roman reviewed the Stars Scholarship program. Graduates of Atmosphere can qualify for limited college scholarships if they invest time supporting current Atmosphere students with tutoring and other support time. A few select students have qualified and the financial implications were reviewed. The Board discussed how Atmosphere Foundation (AF) can be funded to support this obligation. These ideas included Atmosphere branded clothing sales with contributions going to the Foundation. The board discussed the legal reviews that need to be undertaken by the AF board to prepare AF to take on this responsibility. Also reviews needed to assure tax compliance for all parties.

Mr. Jenkins then reviewed the graduate placement work and the partnerships the school has developed to support this effort. He discussed the tests students need to take and selected school situations and timing. He also informed the Board of the upcoming Atmosphere Zoom call fair regarding high schools.

Agenda Item 6.5. Academics Update

Mr. C. Greene informed the Board of the difficulties of instruction in a Covid-19 environment and remote learning. Keeping students motivated, attentive, and doing their assignments on time while remote has been difficult. The plan to deal with this is to refocus on procedures, grades, tracking performance and follow-up with students and parents. Weekend check ins with parents will be included in that process. Actions will be data-driven. Students in the most trouble will get special focus. Additional supervision of teacher gradebook management will also be a focus to make sure the trends are addressed promptly.

Agenda Item 6.6. Achievement Update

Ms. Litvak reviewed the latest information on student performance regarding NYS proficiency. She noted high growth in proficiency in math and English performance from 2019 to 2020. Each grade has grown year to year. Math has grown slower than English but is still strong. English language learners were among the fastest performance-growers.

She described the testing patterns and the achievement class programs for the Board. Mr. C. Greene noted the need for smaller teams and more teachers to execute the achievement program under Covid-19 conditions. More work is needed to build out the achievement team.

Agenda Item 6.7. Programs Update

Mr. Pah described how various programs were being administered under Covid-19 conditions. Trips are increasing with full safety protocols. Small teacher-student ratios are being utilized. Buses are running at 40% of capacity. These trips have helped student morale and confidence.

He next reviewed the online store model using Atmosphere Foundation. After discussion it was decided to review this with legal counsel once again.

Agenda Item 7. Consent Agenda

There were no consent agenda items.

Agenda Item 8. Executive Session

The board moved to enter Executive Session to discuss the medical, financial, credit or employment history of a particular person or corporation, or matters leading to the appointment, employment, promotion, demotion, discipline, suspension, dismissal or removal of a particular person or corporation.

Mr. Burton moved to enter Executive Session.
Mr. J. Greene seconded the motion.

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

After discussion the Board moved to exit Executive Session at 8:11PM.

Mr. J. Greene so moved.
Mr. Burton seconded the motion.

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

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 8:12PM 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

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Vote no: None

Meeting adjourned.