



Atmosphere academy

Atmosphere Academy Public Charter Schools Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes May 27, 2020

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

Board Members Attending:

Mr. Alan Dillon (by phone)
Dr. Michael Lagas
Mr. Jesse J. Greene, Jr.
Mr. Mervin Burton
Mr. James Spitzer

Board Members Absent:

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
No public in attendance

Agenda Item 1. Call to Order

At approximately 5:08PM 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

Dr. Lagas reported on the Accountability Committee call. Topics covered were hiring and staffing,

employee morale about working at Atmosphere, high school admissions for Atmosphere students, students in crisis, COVID stress on students, staff evaluations and other matters.

Mr. J. Greene reported on the Finance Committee call. Topics covered there were reported to the full Board at this meeting.

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

The board reviewed and approved the April minutes as written and previously sent to the board.

Mr. Spitzer moved to adopt the minutes.

Mr. Burton seconded the motion.

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

Vote no: None

Motion adopted.

Agenda Item 6.2. Finance Update

Mr. Fryer reviewed the financial reports for the month of April and year to date. He focused first on the Statement of Activities. He presented results year to date compared to prior year and noted that he expected a surplus of close to \$300,000 at end of the academic year. Refunds of unused program fees and travel money have helped the outlook. April cash outflow is much lower than last year. Financial performance is much better than last year on an operating basis.

He next reviewed the cash flow report. The expectation is for excess cash at year end. No bridge loan is expected to be needed at year end. The long term cash flow outlook sent to the board was reviewed covering loan repayments and bonus payments.

The Board also discussed interest payments on loans and repayments to DOE to repay excess payments by DOE to Atmosphere.

Mr. C. Greene and Board discussed how the new school year will start, and the impact of remote instruction and uncertainty on cash and financial results reported in the statement of activities. Also

covered was the timing of when the per pupil reimbursement number for the new year will be communicated from the State and DOE.

Mr. C. Greene asked Mr. Fryer to prepare a budget for the June Board meeting that can be reviewed and approved at that meeting.

Ms. Nash, Ms. Gonzalez and Mr. C. Greene discussed the enrollment expected for the new year. Current projections are for 652 students with 141 special education students. Mr. Fryer discussed the revenue implications for the larger student population.

Mr. Fryer left the meeting at 5:46PM.

Agenda Item 6.3. High School Placement Update

Mr. Daryl Jenkins and Mr. Christian Roman reported on the placement of Atmosphere students in high schools. Mr. Jenkins led the initial discussion explaining the team's mission, the placement criteria and the various high school's screening processes. He explained the selectivity statistics of placement at some of the best schools, this included admissions data. He showed charts covering the percent of Atmosphere students going to public, charter, parochial and private high schools. He focused on actual attendance and not just admission to these schools.

They then reviewed Atmosphere student's application patterns. For example, how many apply to one school and how many apply to multiple schools (which could be as many as 7). They also ranked the 1200 specialized public and charter schools, and showed data on how many from the 111 Atmosphere scholars went to each.

They next reviewed why students' apply to certain schools. Interest in the school's focus area is a primary reason. They noted that Atmosphere needs to stress applications to top schools in each category.

The Board asked how the school can help the bulk of the Atmosphere graduates in getting into the best schools. Mr. Roman and Mr. Jenkins explained the assistance Atmosphere provides to students and parents. They also explained the factors that drive the final decision on a high school. These include areas of interest and travel distance, for example.

They reviewed the strategic plan for placement which includes: pushing the top 25% of high schools, commitment to Atmosphere alumni contact and support, and focus on college readiness. Also, they will work to expose 6th graders to the high school choices and reach out to parents early.

Agenda Item 6.4. Admissions/Enrollment

Ms. Gonzalez led this discussion. She showed data on the acceptance and commitment to Atmosphere. Demand has been strong, and we still have greater than 150 students on the wait list. There have been a few that have dropped out but overall the school has had a very positive response from applicants. Lottery winners are responding positively as they are approached by the school.

She explained her process to meet one on one in June with incoming students.

The Board complimented the work on admissions and enrollment.

Agenda Item 6.5. Reopening Plan

Mr. C. Greene reviewed work underway to prepare to reopen the school. Actions include “zoom” town hall in June discussing the reopening, a full orientation in July using “zoom”. “Zoom” will now be a primary tool since the security concerns have been addressed.

He then reviewed some of the stresses of not having in-person classes. There has been an emotional toll on students. Q3 student performance will be normal. Q4 results may show the impact of no in-person classes. A few students and families have totally disengaged, and this challenge will need to be addressed. The school is pressing for strong performance to overcome these challenges.

Mrs. Brennan explained how teachers have been impacted and how teachers must keep the pressure on the quality of work.

The school has received no state guidance on reopening so far. Mr. C. Greene discussed a ladder approach to returning to full in-person classes. If supported by state policy, this would mix days of remote and in-person classes. Other elements being planned are mandatory masks, all staff in school buildings during normal hours, school acquiring enough masks and supplies to support the strategy, hand washing protocols, and commercial cleaning protocols and staffing.

Also being reviewed are sick policy, communication policies, needs of high risk individuals, technology levels and readiness, no locker practice, daily personal cell phone storage practice and other matters.

The school leaders discussed how they have learned to use Zoom effectively. They noted the need for careful organization of materials to make this tool most effective. The school expects more use of it avoiding travel and therefore aiding efficiency.

The Board asked about summer school, and the leadership team said yes there will be summer school for English and Math. They expect more students due to the impact of COVID.

Agenda Item 6.6. Hiring Update

Mr. C. Greene reviewed staff departures and changes for the new school year. He listed new hires, open positions, and staffing level plans given the health and economic uncertainty. Some positions will be deferred due to the operating environment and financial uncertainty.

The offers rejected were also reviewed to understand reasoning and to set strategy going forward.

Teacher certification requirements were also discussed.

Agenda Item 6.7. Remote Instruction Update

Mr. C. Greene reviewed the data dashboard material on student performance. He discussed the apparent impact of COVID and remote instruction on student grades. The number of students with performance difficulties has risen, and the school is taking action to reverse the trends.

Ms. Nash outlined the action plan to remedy the trends. These included: small group instruction, greater interaction with the students' families, review of data and assessment of weaknesses. She also noted the criteria for which students will qualify for the revised help and the design of the intervention groups.

Ms. Nash also discussed actions the school will take where attempts at outreach are unsuccessful.

Mr. C. Greene explained that Atmosphere is communicating with SUNY regarding the actions it is taking and the opening plan for the school.

Agenda Item 6.8. Accountability Measures Update

Mr. C. Greene reported on the accountability measures the school is using and developing. These methods and improvements are intended to assess student performance in the absence of statewide standardized tests.

Agenda Item 6.9. Graduation Update

Ms. Gonzalez reviewed the 2020 graduation plans with the Board. Current plans are for a drive through outside the Riverdale Jewish Center facility. The event will run from 9AM to 3PM. Students will get their diploma, have a picture taken and be recognized. All participation will be timed and spaced out so crowding together will be avoided by this technique.

Agenda Item 6.10. Special Updates on Videos: " In the Atmosphere" " Names Not Numbers"

Mr. C. Greene and Mr. Roman updated the Board on videos important to the school and the student development. Mr. Roman presented the important Holocaust film "Names Not Numbers" which has interviews of survivors. He also showed part of the film and explained the story.

The second film reviewed by the Board celebrated the graduation of the Atmosphere students. It showed a student day, demonstrated how students get inspired, how scholars learn, and each student's participation and involvement in the education system at Atmosphere.

Agenda Item 7. Consent Agenda

There were no consent agenda items.

Agenda Item 8. Executive Session

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At 8:17 PM a motion was made to enter Executive session to discuss the proposed acquisition, sale or lease of real property or the proposed acquisition, sale or exchange of securities, where publicity would substantially affect the value.

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

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

Motion adopted.

At 8:44 PM a motion was made to exit Executive Session.

Mr. J. Greene moved to adopt the motion.
Mr. Burton seconded the motion.

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

Motion adopted

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 8:46 PM the Board moved to adjourn the meeting.

Mr. J. Greene moved to adjourn.
Mr. Spitzer seconded the motion.

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

Meeting adjourned.