



Atmosphere academy

Atmosphere Academy Public Charter Schools Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes May 26, 2021

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. Alan Dillon (left during executive session)
Mr. Jim Spitzer

Others in Attendance:

Mr. Colin J. Greene
Mr. Bryan Fryer (left after item 6.1)
Mr. Peter Markey (left after item 6.1)
Mr. Benjamin Pah
Mr. Christian Roman
Mrs. Elizabeth Kelly
Mrs. Katherine Brennan
Mr. Gabriel Rosenblum
Mr. Darryl Jenkins (item 6.3 and 6.6 only)
Mr. Michael Roach (item 6.3 and 6.6 only)
Ms. Maider Solores (item 6.3 and 6.6 only)
One 6th Grade Scholar and Parent (item 6.3 only)
One Alumnus (item 6.3 only)
No other public in attendance

Agenda Item 1. Call to Order

At approximately 5:03PM, 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

The Governance Committee met this month to discuss holding a Trustees Day in the fall, where each trustee will have an opportunity to visit the different grade levels. The committee also discussed inviting special guests to see how the school is run and meet faculty members and scholars. Lastly, the committee discussed having board meetings in person again in the near future.

The Accountability Committee met this month to discuss academic data. This data will be discussed further at the June board meeting.

The Finance Committee topics were reviewed during subsequent agenda items, so no report was given.

Agenda Item 4. Comments From the Public

There were no comments at this time

Agenda Item 5. Revision and Adoption of the Agenda

There were no changes to the Agenda.

Agenda Item 6.1. Finance Update

Mr. Fryer presented the financials for the month ending 4/30/2021. Atmosphere's operating and net surpluses are very strong, and show a vast improvement from previous years. Mr. Fryer noted that the financials do not factor in the grant funding that Atmosphere expects to receive.

Cash balance was somewhat low at the end of April, but this was due to a delay in the most recent per pupil payment. Mr. Fryer went over the SUNY financial benchmarks. Atmosphere is currently meeting three out of the four benchmarks. The Working Capital metric is the one that needs the most improvement. Mr. Fryer noted that had we received our per pupil payment earlier, this metric would have been stronger. Mr. Fryer presented our projected metrics for future years, based upon projected enrollment. Based on the data, our Working Capital metric will increase year over year as cash reserves are built up.

Mr. Fryer spoke about the grants that Atmosphere qualifies for. Atmosphere expects to receive around \$4.1 million in grants once they are approved. Mr. C. Greene presented the budget now that the grant funding has been factored in, and the numbers are very strong. He also presented information on the lease with RJC, where the 8th grade building is located, and Atmosphere's expected rent in future years.

Mr. C. Greene discussed Atmosphere's frustrations with their current bank. There are other banks where potential opportunities for Atmosphere could arise. Other charter schools seem to be offered certain products from other banks that Atmosphere's bank has limited. The board discussed potential options for switching banks.

Mr. Fryer spoke about a previous meeting where Mr. C. Greene, Mr. Rosenblum, and Mr. Burton discussed Atmosphere's financial policy, bank accounts, and other strategic items that Atmosphere will continue to change for the better to ensure strong financial performance.

Agenda Item 6.2. Board Minutes

Mr. Rosenblum presented the April Board meeting minutes for approval by the Board. These were sent to the Board in advance for their review.

Mr. Dillon moved to approve the board meeting minutes for April 2021.
Mr. Spitzer seconded the motion.

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

Motion adopted. April minutes approved.

Agenda Item 6.3. Guests

Mr. Roman introduced the guests that joined the meeting.

An alumna of Atmosphere academy from the Class of 2018 joined the board meeting to discuss her experience in high school. Mr. Roman asked the alumna what was taught at Atmosphere that helped her prepare for high school. She noted the systems that are used in the classroom helped her greatly in high school. Mr. C. Greene asked the alumna what her fondest memory or favorite experience was at Atmosphere. The alumna discussed her connections with the staff, and how supporting the staff were while she was at Atmosphere and beyond. The alumna noted that Atmosphere should provide more college workshops to prepare students for high school and beyond. The board asked how prepared the alumna was for high school compared with her classmates. She noted that she was very prepared, and the hard work that she put in at Atmosphere has paid off.

Ms. Maider Solares, 6th Grade Social Worker, discussed her experience before working at Atmosphere. Ms. Solares has prior social work experience that has prepared her to work well with students at Atmosphere. Ms. Solares spoke about her role and responsibilities. Ms. Solares discussed the scholarship programs that she works with, such as TEAK and Breakthrough. This year, Atmosphere nominated 23 6th grade scholars for TEAK and Breakthrough. Ms. Solares also spoke about the social emotional lessons that she has provided for students, and how important they are for their emotional

well-being and success.

Ms. Solores introduced a 6th grade scholar who was accepted to both Breakthrough and TEAK. The scholar discussed his experience at Atmosphere and all of the support that he was given this year. The scholar's mother also discussed her perception of the school and their experience applying to these scholarship programs. The scholar and the scholar's mother discussed the staff commitment to students, and how helpful it has been for them, especially in contrast to the scholar's experience at his public elementary school. Mr. C. Greene asked if the scholar has started considering high schools. The scholar noted that Bronx High School of Science is one that he is interested in.

Mr. Michael Roach, 7th Grade School Counselor, spoke about his experience prior to joining Atmosphere. Mr. Roach had lived in the community for 10 years and knew Atmosphere well, even before joining the team. He discussed his last role supporting ELL students. Mr. Roach discussed Atmosphere's family engagement and the great job that Atmosphere does integrating families into the culture to ensure that their scholars are being supported in the best possible way. Mr. Roach spoke about his goals while working at Atmosphere, especially around having scholars make high school wish lists and preparing students early on for high school applications.

Agenda Item 6.4. Academics Update (presented after item 6.6)

Mrs. Brennan presented academic updates. There has been a significant decrease in failures since the close of Q3, which is positive news. The board asked about summer school and retention, and Ms. Kelly noted that we would cover that topic during her update. Mrs. Brennan noted the Atmosphere has continued to ramp up expectations for teachers to ensure that scholars are meeting benchmarks.

Mrs. Brennan presented the different categories and metrics that teachers are rated on for mid-year evaluations. Domain 1 evaluates planning and preparation. Domain 2 evaluates classroom environment. Domain 3 evaluates instruction and assessment. Domain 4 evaluates professionalism.

The board asked about inter-rater reliability. Mrs. Brennan spoke about some of the measures and data points that go into each score, but noted that there is some variability between each rater. Mrs. Brennan is taking certain actions to ensure that this variability is decreased in future years, such as setting up Leadership Rounds and Officer Rounds where teacher observations are conducted.

Mrs. Brennan went on to discuss the Blue Engine program and Atmosphere's continued partnership. Blue Engine's structure is changing and they are restructuring to offer different models regarding teacher support. This year, Blue Engine has provided lots of support for teachers and Mrs. Brennan alike. They have done classroom observations, created professional development resources, contributed to the growth in quality teaching, and much more. Blue Engine's rating system has shown growth in teacher proficiency, which is aligned with the evaluations that Mrs. Brennan and Mrs. Kelly are building out this year.

The board asked what percentage of teachers get the exposure to Blue Engine. Mrs. Brennan noted that it is about half of the math teachers. The board agreed that Blue Engine seems to be a great program and a worthwhile spending of funds.

The board discussed approving the different programs related to Blue Engine. Atmosphere currently has three program options, all at different price points up to \$110,000.

Mr. J. Greene moved to approve.
Mr. Dillon seconded the motion.

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

Motion adopted. Blue Engine program approved up to \$110,000.

Agenda Item 6.5. Student Learning Update (presented after item 6.6)

Mrs. Kelly provided a hiring update for the board. All Student Learning teaching positions are filled. Three new positions related to intervention have been added as a result of the grant funds that Atmosphere will be receiving. Mrs. Kelly updated the board on retention numbers. Those numbers have decreased in the last few months, which is positive news.

Mrs. Kelly discussed an optional program for learning loss that she would be providing this summer. That program would provide targeted support for ELL and SPED students.

Mrs. Kelly presented the structure of her department next year, which includes a Student Learning Manager and Special Education Manager. They will oversee different areas of Student Learning. The Special Education Manager, which is a new role, will handle all Special Education compliance.

Agenda Item 6.6. Culture Update (presented prior to item 6.5)

Mr. Roman and Mr. Jenkins presented high school application and acceptance data. Mr. Jenkins noted that acceptances recently came out, so many students are still undecided. As of now, Atmosphere has 23 students confirmed to attend charter schools for high school, and 7 students confirmed to attend public schools. Mr. Roman and Mr. Jenkins spoke about some of the specialized high schools that Atmosphere scholars have been accepted to.

Mr. Roman and Mr. Jenkins also presented the school rankings and the number of Atmosphere students that have been accepted into top high schools. Each year, Atmosphere continues to help get more and more students into better ranking schools in the city. These numbers will continue to change throughout the summer as more acceptances come in. The data is currently very strong, and the trajectory can only go upwards from this point forward.

Agenda Item 6.7. Operations Update

Mr. Rosenblum presented on admissions and enrollment. Atmosphere is currently on track to enroll our

maximum allowable enrollment for next year, which is 720 students. Atmosphere received 796 total applications, and is able to offer 293 seats to new families next year. Atmosphere currently has 200+ applicants on the waitlist. While unfortunate that Atmosphere cannot serve every student that applies, it is reassuring that many families on the waitlist have shown interest in attending Atmosphere even if they are accepted throughout the summer

Agenda Item 6.8. Programs Update

Mr. Pah spoke about the Frost Valley trip and the great experience that it provided for Atmosphere's scholars this year. Scholars were able to spend a day in nature and canoe, zipline, conduct nature walks, and much more.

Mr. Pah then discussed Atmosphere's strengthening of the equestrian program by building connections with professional riders who want to support the program. Mr. Pah is currently setting up multiple key partnerships and standardizing the process for building out those partnerships.

Mr. Pah and the board discussed the upcoming Florida trip in July. 20 8th grade scholars will attend.

Agenda Item 6.9. School Updates

This section was skipped due to time constraints.

Agenda Item 7. Consent Agenda

There were no consent agenda items.

Agenda Item 8. Executive Session

At approximately 7:49PM, the board moved to enter Executive Session to discuss:

- a. the proposed acquisition, sale or lease of real property or the proposed acquisition, sale, or exchange of securities, but only when publicity would substantially affect the value.
- b. 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. J. Greene moved to enter Executive Session.

Mr. Dillon seconded the motion.

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

Vote no: None

After the discussion, at approximately 8:43PM, the Board moved to exit executive session.

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Mr. J. Greene moved to exit Executive Session.
Mr. Spitzer seconded the motion.

Vote Aye: Mr. Dillon, Mr. J. Greene, Dr. Lagas, Mr. Spitzer, Mr. Burton
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 8:43PM the Board moved to adjourn the meeting.

Mr. Spitzer moved to adjourn.
Mr. Burton seconded the motion.

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

Meeting adjourned.