

APPROVED



# Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter Public School

## Minutes

### November Board Meeting

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#### Date and Time

Tuesday November 9, 2021 at 6:00 PM

#### Location

The November Board Meeting will be accessible to the public remotely.

Here is the Zoom meeting info:

Zoom Account is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: November Board of Trustees Meeting

Time: Nov 9, 2021 03:00 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85408083160?pwd=VDkwU2pvYUE3MDM5OEEdPc210dIJSUT09>

Meeting ID: 854 0808 3160

Passcode: 5489FG

One tap mobile

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Meeting ID: 854 0808 3160

Passcode: 555212

Find your local number: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85408083160>

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### **Trustees Present**

Andrea Nathanson (remote), David Potter, Jacob Rosenblum (remote), Jenna Sardella, LATRINA DENSON, Marty Espinola (remote), Mindi Winter, Neil Hede (remote), Shannon Materka, Shino Pichette (remote)

### **Trustees Absent**

Tonya Ward

### **Trustees who arrived after the meeting opened**

LATRINA DENSON

### **Ex Officio Members Present**

Brent Nielsen

### **Non Voting Members Present**

Brent Nielsen

### **Guests Present**

Fiona Yates, Firas Hashmi, Marcy Conner, Sofia Scanlon

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## **I. Opening Items**

### **A. Record Attendance**

### **B. Call the Meeting to Order**

David Potter called a meeting of the board of trustees of Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter Public School to order on Tuesday Nov 9, 2021 at 6:19 PM.

### **C. Read the Mission Statement**

"PVPA offers its students intensive exposure to the performing arts within the context of an excellent college preparatory curriculum."

Stated by: Marty Espinola

### **D.**

## Approve Minutes

Marty Espinola made a motion to approve the minutes from October Board Meeting on 10-12-21.

Shino Pichette seconded the motion.

The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

## Roll Call

LATRINA DENSON	Absent
Shino Pichette	Aye
Neil Hede	Aye
Tonya Ward	Absent
David Potter	Aye
Mindi Winter	Abstain
Marty Espinola	Aye
Shannon Materka	Aye
Andrea Nathanson	Aye
Jacob Rosenblum	Aye
Jenna Sardella	Aye

We need to follow up with DESE to submit Sofia Scanlon's name for approval.

## E. Public Comment

A parent of a current tenth-grader and an alum has loved her students' time at PVPA. However, this academic year has brought a shift in priorities. A recent disciplinary experience of this parent's child does not reflect the values of the school that this parent has come to know. When asked if there was a policy shift in discipline and school culture, the current Executive Director cited a need to communicate expectations. Based on how recent incidents have been handled, it is the hope of this parent that the administration will be more clear about the changing disciplinary expectations and cultural norms at PVPA. If the school continues to take this disparate approach, the entire school community should be involved in that discussion.

Another parent raises concerns about the PVPA community and its accepting culture. This parent sees her student losing faith in the school and its mission. It is clear that the school is changing—hall monitors, bathroom limits, decreased free time—and it is taking a toll on students. The school has mishandled Title IX incidents. The administration should let students know the actual process of what happens when a student makes a report—students should feel safe. A more punitive approach to discipline has been implemented at PVPA, and it is of concern from a parent perspective. The administration has not been responsive, and it appears that restorative practices have been abandoned.

A third parent has three children in the eighth, ninth, and tenth grades. This parent wishes to raise similar concerns about the sudden change in policy that seems to be happening in the PVPA community. Parents and students alike feel abandoned by the administration. The decline in the use of restorative practices is devastating, and the

school community is not what it once was. The administration needs to communicate about these changes.

PVPA is a place for students to go to be heard. This parent's students have always looked forward to going to school, but things feel different now. We have shifted back from a restorative system to a harsh punitive one. These disciplinary measures are not what PVPA has stood for, and the administration takes on a standoffish attitude when confronted about these changes. The administration needs to communicate these changes if they are being made.

## **II. Executive Director Report**

### **A. November Updates**

We are currently at 398 students and expect to meet 400. Our waitlist numbers are healthy. We have received 80 applications for the 2022/2023 school year so far and expect that we will continue to receive applications through February.

Sandy Courtney has taken on the responsibilities of the position previously held by Charlotte. She has already taken valuable initiative.

The website has been updated with BoardOnTrack information, which will make meeting information more accessible to the community. A production calendar, goal information for PVPA administrators, and an updated copy of the SAP have all been uploaded to the new website.

This year, it has been difficult to fill paraprofessional positions as well as the adjustment counselor position.

The process of creating schedules for next year has begun now. Alyson and Frank have been working on the course catalog with special attention to our mission and the provision of multiple pathway options.

The lack of diversity in history course offerings is currently being addressed by the curriculum team. We are looking forward to changes beginning next year.

The administration hopes to work with teachers that will allow for a master schedule change. It appears, at this moment, that we are not in a place to bargain for a new schedule. This means that management will have to come up with a schedule change within current parameters.

Changes to the lunch routine have been difficult. The moving parts are incredibly complicated, but things are being figured out. The previous plan left students waiting for a long time and without much opportunity to eat. Now, the plan includes three lunches. The

first is for middle-school students, and the second and third are for high-school students. The high school lunches are separated by class (sciences together, etc). Students are being safe, and the lunch program seems to be succeeding.

Octoberfest, though initially a concern, was a huge success. Teachers and students were interacting enthusiastically, and spirits seemed high.

Management is also considering changes to community time. There was an opportunity for an open mic in the background while students socialized.

Three members of the administrative team are now managing evaluations. They are separated by type of staff—academics vs. arts.

The administrative community is planning for school-wide restorative justice training. This is something that has been missing for the last few years, and we look forward to getting it done.

Alyson shares MCAS results for 7th, 8th, and 10th grades, [linked here](#).

### **III. Board Committee Reports**

#### **A. Finance Committee**

The finance committee met on November 3rd. Marcy presented a financial overview, but it is too early to make a prediction of what financials will look like through the rest of the year. There were no major red flags—only a concern in the cost of transporting students via the bus service. Our next financial update will be in December when we receive tuition numbers. Overall grant funds available total \$1.3 million—Marcy presented what those funds may be used for.

We have used the same auditors for three years, and the cost appears to be going up. Despite the rise in cost, the Finance Committee made the decision to move forward with an engagement letter for the same auditors that we have worked with.

If any Board Trustees (or others) with a finance background are interested in becoming members of the Finance Committee, please reach out!

What are we spending the \$1.3 million in grant money on?  
The finance committee will bring this to a future meeting.

#### **B. Governance Committee Report**

### Marty's Governance Report:

We are still working on expanding the diverse membership of the Board. Shino will be presenting 3 potential candidates at the next meeting of the Governance Committee on Wednesday, November 17th

Mindi, David and I are still working on assembling a diverse group of school community members for the Head of School search committee. The work of this search committee will be time consuming and members will need to be aware of the work involved, all of which will be highly confidential and cannot be open to the public. The goal is to bring at least 3 highly qualified candidates to the Board for its decision in the spring. If all goes well the first meeting of the committee will be held this month.

The question as to what professional assistance can be provided to the search committee is

being explored. Mike from BoardOnTrack suggested strongly that we get some sort of consultation in the selection process. BoardOnTrack has offered to provide some guidance on

what our process should look like but they are not able to offer more than that.

There are two basic options offered by consulting firms that specialize in this kind of work:

The first provides assistance through every step of the search process and would cost between

\$50,000 and \$70,000

The second would provide limited assistance and the specifics of a limited search assistance

varies widely but would cost anywhere from \$5,000 to \$35,000.

We're thinking our first choice might be to explore the assistance offered by Civitas Strategies.

- They have a very modular option that would allow us to pick and choose services, and they have a greater variety in terms of types of involvement than other services.

- Their estimate was anywhere from \$5,000-\$35,000

- Prior to taking any action on Civitas, we will ask what guarantees they can offer if the search fails for one reason or another.

I have asked the Finance Committee to provide guidance on the amount of funds that might be available for the work of the search committee.

We are still looking for members! The public should reach out if they are interested.

### **C. Long Range Infrastructure Planning Committee**

This Committee is Co-Chaired by John Kulas and Mindi. The LRIPC had been meeting regularly prior to the COVID shutdown and had an initial meeting last week. The Committee will be recommencing its work with perspectives from all areas of the PVPA community, but it is currently missing a parent and two teachers—one from middle school and one from high school. We are in the process of recruiting for these volunteer positions.

Meetings will likely fall on either the first or last Monday of each month.

Current Membership:

Mindi Winter  
John Kulas  
Rich Alhstrom  
Marcy Conner  
Brent Nielson  
Frank Newton  
Austin Clark  
Loris Bjorkman

#### **D. Executive Search Committee**

The Executive Search Committee, as was mentioned in the Governance report, has been working on building membership. Once the recruitment process has concluded and a budget estimate has been received from the Finance Committee, the Executive Search Committee will be able to offer a more comprehensive report.

An initial meeting has been scheduled for Thursday, November 18th.

BoardOnTrack has offered basic advice but not much beyond that. The Executive Search Committee needs to make the final decision on what resources we want to access based on the recommendations from Governance.

Marty will write to the community with information about the Committee and send that to Sandy Courtney to include in the community bulletin this Friday.

LATRINA DENSON arrived at 7:27 PM.

### **IV. Internal Stakeholders**

#### **A. Staff Reports**

An agenda item to discuss discipline protocols and expectations should be included at some point in the near future. The staff is also struggling with discipline, and the hope is for increased transparency in the future.

We currently have paraprofessionals who are split between grades. Keeping these staff in one spot would be beneficial to students.

## **B. Student Reports**

### 10th-Grade

Communication and outreach between the administration, students, and teachers feel important. The 10th-Grade representatives sent out a survey recently to their peers, which received a significant number of responses. The students feel, generally, that their teachers are willing to listen and are concerned about student voices. On the other hand, it is evident, based on the data, that students feel overwhelmingly negative about communication between the students and the administration. Student complaints and ideas seem to fall flat when they are presented to administrators.

### 12th-Grade

The 11th-Grade also conducted a survey. Based on the results, it is clear that The community does not feel well informed. Hearing the news about a positive COVID-19 test, as well as a lack of communication about the COVID-19 policy at PVPA, has raised concerns among the student body. Students want to know which administrators they can approach about certain issues. Groups that rely on lunch to meet have been hindered by the new lunch schedule. The administration should keep this in mind as we move forward. Transparency and open communication need to be prioritized as we move forward.

### 11th-Grade

Communication between the administrators of our school and the student body is very important to improving the experience of students. Students want to know that decision-makers are in touch with them, that the administration is present and is observing their experiences, because they know that it is very difficult to govern from afar.

During lunch, students often walk up to Brent or Mr. Roundtree and speak to them about their concerns. They notice the presence of the administration, watching and seeing firsthand our school's issues. And, this makes them feel like their concerns are being heard, that they have a say in the operation of their school.

I have heard many students ask 'what is the board?'. 'What do they do?'. 'How come we don't know these important people, these people who make important decisions about PVPA?'

Now, I realize that some of you live far away, and are unable to come to PVPA. That is understandable.

But, I would propose that we organize a time for available board members to come and visit the school. It would mean a lot to the students if members of the board came to the

school, walked around, talked with students, and maybe gave a short presentation about what the board does/ who you are. This would do a lot to show the students how much you care about PVPA. It would allow you to hear from our students and to see firsthand and our school's challenges and triumphs.

I think that this would do a great deal to improve the board's relationship with the students and would be beneficial for everyone.

Now, I would like to discuss another important topic. At the beginning of this meeting, we all heard the mission statement. PVPA seeks to provide intensive exposure to the performing arts while also having excellent, college preparatory, academics.

These two clauses are our foundation, yet it is my belief, and the belief of many of my fellow students, that our school is not living up to the standards of our mission statement. We feel that students are not being adequately prepared for college, and that our arts programs have been going downhill for the past several years.

During the past few years, we have enacted many policies that have sought to make our school more like traditional public schools, in the hope that they will improve the academic performance of our school.

But they have not, and these policies have led to the cutting of arts programs and a decrease in the quality of the arts at PVPA. Many students will tell you that our productions now cannot compare to those that occurred years ago. Our visual arts programs lack the funding to replace their supplies, and all four arts branches are struggling.

In the field of academics, we are lacking crucial courses such as world history (which I am very glad to hear we are working on adding), and our classes lack rigor. Deadlines are pushed back endlessly, and through no fault of the teachers, many courses lack a curriculum or any sort of organization. In some courses, students are just not learning. To add to this, our math MCAS score curve was well below the state's. The unfortunate truth is that our school's classes are not adequately preparing our students for college.

On mid semester reports, many teachers' narratives consisted of descriptions of generally what was happening in the class with the names of students copied and pasted into them. I recognize that it is a lot of work for teachers to write personalized responses, but if we want to use the standards based grading system, we need to do it how it was intended - with personalized narratives and evaluations that give good feedback - not as an inconsistent and erratic normal system. Either we should do it right or not at all.

We need to focus on what actually matters, such as increasing the quality and relevance of our arts programs and increasing the rigor and organization of our academic programs. We need to follow the policies that have been written, and we need to walk the walk, not just talk the talk.

Now, I don't wish to complain without offering solutions. We know that all at the school are truly doing their best, and are working very hard for our school. And, we know that improving our arts and academic programs will be a difficult challenge and a long road. But, awareness and the identification of needed improvements is the first step that we must take if change is to come. So, tonight, I speak to you to bring awareness and to bring issues to light, so that we can start looking for practical and effective ways to improve our school and make it a better place for everybody. Thank you.

## V. President's Business

### A. Board Visit with Teachers and Staff

David has been working on planning this event. The idea is to try to meet with teachers and staff immediately after school, but this may change based on availability.

### B. Board Support for School Events

David will be doing his best to assist with school events, and other Board Trustees are encouraged to make the same effort. Donated food is welcomed during this week of rehearsals after school for our dance production.

### C. Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

The hope is to use discussions during Board meetings to create new language in response to goals set in the SAP.

Brent shared that diversity is increasing among the staff, which the board is pleased to hear.

### D. Educational Excellence

David thanks Alyson for sharing MCAS data and affirms a student representative's concern about PVPA's performance in comparison to the rest of the state.

### E. Strategic Action Plan

## VI. Closing Items

### A. Adjourn Meeting

Jacob Rosenblum made a motion to Adjourn at 8:11 PM.

Mindi Winter seconded the motion.

The board **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

There being no further business to be transacted, and upon motion duly made, seconded and approved, the meeting was adjourned at 8:11 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Jacob Rosenblum