

APPROVED



# Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter Public School

## Minutes

### Special Board Meeting

Head of School Deliberations

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#### Date and Time

Tuesday April 26, 2022 at 6:00 PM

#### Location

PVPA 3rd Floor Conference Room

Join Online:

<https://zoom.us/j/98158607236?pwd=cG1OQkd2TTEvT2RWYTl4RXN4TzdBZz09>

Meeting ID: 981 5860 7236

Passcode: PVPA2022

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#### Trustees Present

Andrea Nathanson, David Potter, Jacob Rosenblum (remote), Jenna Sardella, Jesse Pompei (remote), LATRINA DENSON (remote), Maggie Solis, Marty Espinola, Mindi Winter, Neil Hede, Richard Pouliot, Shannon Materka, Shino Pichette, Sofia Getoff-Scanlon, Tonya Ward

#### Trustees Absent

*None*

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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 Apr 26, 2022 at 6:03 PM.

### **C. Public Comment**

#### **Community Member**

This individual has been a member of the community as a Mock Trial coach and as a Board Trustee since 2013. These have been a rough few years for PVPA, with our administration at the center of this difficulty. Publicity has caused a number of issues. We should choose a person we know and who has experience at PVPA. Brent Neilson is the right choice.

#### **Frank Newton**

During the search process, we found two candidates who are not prepared to take on the institution. Brent is the person I am supporting for the position—he has shown his investment in students.

#### **Mary Colwell**

I support Brent for the position of Head of School.

#### **Jenn Santerre**

I wholeheartedly support Brent for the position. He is the right candidate because he has always given staff and students his undivided attention and support.

#### **Lauren Reuter**

I have worked at PVPA and attended as a student. I have seen Brent in many capacities and would like to offer my full support.

#### **EJ Lafleur**

Brent brings the stability that we need at PVPA. My more comprehensive reasoning is spelled out in the email that I sent to the Board.

## **II. Head of School Candidates Deliberations and Decision**

### **A. David Potter**

This search process has brought us three candidates who are qualified for the position and enthusiastic about work at PVPA. I feel confident that, whatever direction we choose, we will end up with somebody who has the capacity to support the stability that we have been seeking.

Each Board Trustee will have two minutes to present their rankings and reasonings for the candidates presented.

**David**

Brent has shown his commitment to PVPA and its mission. My candidate rankings are Brent, Brett, and then Erica.

**Marty**

I reiterate what David has said.

**Shannon**

I have talked to a lot of teachers, and there is not a clear mandate. Staff seem to be torn on who they are choosing to support.

**Jennifer**

My ranking is Brett, Brent, and then Erica. The Middle School staff has indicated a desire for change, as many students are going to be leaving from PVPA in the coming months. Putting somebody new in the position will provide the fresh start that we need.

**Maggie**

My ranking is Brent, Erica, then Brent. I was unimpressed with Brent and was very impressed with Erica, but I worry about Erica's experience. Brent has done a good job in his role.

**Firas**

I have talked to many students, and it is clear among the student body that the rankings are Brett followed by Brent and then Erica. Brett has a lot of experience and an arts teaching background. He has shown a strong capacity to admit when he has made a mistake. He provided concrete ideas, offered action steps to student council, and seemed enthusiastic.

**Jake**

We should pay attention to the aggregate data from the interviews. My ranking is Brett, Brent, and then Erica.

**Latrina**

Brent has shown up time and time again during the crisis we have experienced at PVPA and around the world. It seems like there is some return to stability. Brent is my top choice, and Brett and Erica follow in a tie.

**Jesse**

It is very hard for me to rank the candidates. Between the two candidates, I would rank Erica first and Brett second. Erica seemed to have done her research. I want to honor the feedback of students and staff—they are the ones to decide whether we are ready for a change.

**Tonya**

I was on the Executive Search Committee, and I came out of the interviews with full support for Brent. He has shown loyalty to the school and has managed publicity well. He has made an effort to minimize negative press. My ranking is Brent, Brett, and then Erica.

**Mindi**

Brent has taken on this role for us several times now. I worked with him closely through the COVID closure of the school. He worked tirelessly on reopening the school and supporting students who needed it. Brent was in the building every day during the COVID-19 crisis. All three candidates were nice, but this is a superintendent/principle position. We need somebody with the necessary experience. My ranking is Brent, Brett, and then Erica.

**Andrea**

My ranking is Brent, Brett, and then Erica. Thinking about the fiduciary responsibility of the Board, I am confident that Brent has the ability to lead the school strongly.

**Rick**

Turnover is the most negative thing that is being said about the school. Brent, as a person who has stepped up for PVPA many times in the past, would be my top choice. If we take another candidate and they decide to leave, will we ask Brent to step up again? My second choice would be Erica because of her comprehensive arts experience. It seemed that she researched PVPA and had great energy. She just lacked the administrative experience.

**Neil**

I do not like this process. It feels like we are voting without voting. Leaders must lead and must have people willing to follow them. Brett received the number one spot based on the surveys. Erica came out as number two, and Brent came out as a very clear number three. I will wait until we vote to express my list.

**Shino**

I was very impressed with Erica, but I feel that she does not have the experience we need at this time. She is ranked third for me. Brent has great experience and priorities, and I have great trust in his ability to run the school. I am very concerned about the community feedback we have received about Brent. That being said, this has been a difficult time. Brett and Brent are my two choices for the position. Brett's decision-making process and approach to discipline seem great, and I am concerned about his lack of mention of Restorative Justice and employment history.

**Sofia**

My ranking is Brett, Brent, and then Erica. Student feedback seems to represent a general consensus. Somebody who will place emphasis on student voices is important

moving forward. Brett seemed committed to listening to student concerns, strategizing, and offering creative solutions.

**Fiona**

My ranking Brett, Brent, and then Erica. Brett showed a willingness to listen and learn and ability to accept his mistakes. During his Board interview, Brett went as far as to communicate what a student representative said during that portion of the interview process.

**Firas**

I was told, repeatedly, that this process was dependent on evaluating candidates without taking into account past experiences. David, is this correct?

**David**

There is no way to eliminate people's experiences. Everything—including the history of school leadership—can and should be considered. There seems to be strong support for all the candidates.

**Firas**

It is impossible to forget what we have learned about a candidate through lived experience. I just must point out that having a candidate employed at the school can sway who speaks at open comment, so we should be mindful about the weight that we give to the public comments.

Members discuss implementing a test voting system to gauge how the Board is leaning. David Potter made a motion to Agree on the rankings of Brent Nielson first, Brett Gottheimer second, and Erica Manville third.

Tonya Ward seconded the motion.

This decision will affect us for many years. We need to be careful about how we carry out this process.

There is value in coming up with a shared decision and backing it as a Board. I don't know if we are there yet. I think that there is value to backing a new candidate unanimously, so we should take more time to come to a consensus.

As a Board, we must keep in mind the big picture.

We should not consider this motion right now. We need more time to discuss the candidates individually.

I would like to hear about support for candidates different from the one I ranked first. I want to ensure that more voices are heard in this process.

I was in all of the interviews for all of the candidates, and it seemed that the students did the best jobs in terms of their ability to thoroughly assess the candidates. Most candidates answered the same during the interview process. We know Brent the best, and it is difficult for me (Mindi) to evaluate Brent because I have a long relationship with him, but I tried my best to avoid that. In Brett's first interview, he did not know what DESE was. That is a huge concern.

Question to teaching staff and students: would any of these choices result in the loss of teachers and/or students?

Answer: Staff and students both plan to leave if Brent is selected for the position.

The motion did not carry.

**Roll Call**

LATRINA DENSON	Aye
Sofia Getoff-Scanlon	No
Andrea Nathanson	Aye
Neil Hede	No
David Potter	Aye
Mindi Winter	Aye
Tonya Ward	Aye
Shino Pichette	Abstain
Jenna Sardella	Abstain
Maggie Solis	No
Jacob Rosenblum	No
Richard Pouliot	No
Jesse Pompei	No
Marty Espinola	Aye

Richard Pouliot made a motion to Agree on the rankings of Brent Nielson first, Erica Manville second, and Brett Gottheimer third.

David Potter seconded the motion.

We have had a lot of turnover. Brent has led this school through its most difficult time, and he said that he would stay at PVPA through the next five years to wait out the next charter renewal. It is important, however, to say that many students were concerned about the comments Erica made during her interview.

Question: why should Erica be ranked higher than Brett?

Answer: as far as Erica Manville, the things that stood out to me were the potential for connections between the school and local community arts organizations. Her energy and desire and desire to connect the school to the community inspired me.

Brent also said during his interview that he may stay for less time, "depending on how happy people are." This gave me pause during the discussion.

As a member of the administrative team, we feel that Brett and Erica's qualifications are not adequate.

Through this process, we have a lot of feedback from many stakeholders. We need to consider it all.

During the student council interview, Erica Manville made the statement "I am not a white savior." The Student Council did not feel that this was okay.

Erica has been in her job for a long time. She can offer us longevity.  
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

**Roll Call**

Mindi Winter	Aye
Richard Pouliot	Aye
Sofia Getoff-Scanlon	No
Jesse Pompei	No
Shino Pichette	Aye
Andrea Nathanson	Aye
David Potter	Aye
Marty Espinola	Aye
Maggie Solis	Aye
Jacob Rosenblum	No
Tonya Ward	Aye
Shannon Materka	Abstain
Jenna Sardella	Abstain
LATRINA DENSON	Aye
Neil Hede	No

Break from 8:11 to 8:20

**III. Executive Session**

**A. Open Meeting Law (Chapter 30A Section 21 (a))**

Marty Espinola made a motion to Move into Executive Session Pursuant to Open Meeting Law (Chapter 30A Section 21 (a)).

Jacob Rosenblum seconded the motion.

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

**Roll Call**

Shino Pichette	Aye
David Potter	Aye
Jacob Rosenblum	Aye
Sofia Getoff-Scanlon	Aye

**Roll Call**

Jesse Pompei	Aye
Mindi Winter	Aye
Maggie Solis	Aye
Andrea Nathanson	Aye
Shannon Materka	Absent
Richard Pouliot	Aye
Marty Espinola	Aye
Tonya Ward	Aye
Neil Hede	Aye
Jenna Sardella	Absent
LATRINA DENSON	Aye

During our last two heads of school, salaries ranged from \$110,000 to \$120,000 depending on budgetary constraints and hiring processes.

Administrators start at \$85,000, and the Finance Committee believes that \$130,000 would be a reasonable ceiling for the salary of the Head of School.

Neil Hede made a motion to Begin negotiating a three-year contract at \$121,000 per year.

David Potter seconded the motion.

A three-year contract would be preferable because we have been talking about the need for stability.

A four-year contract could also be effective to carry us through the charter renewal cycle.

If we do set the contract at three years, it will make hiring/firing decisions more difficult, and those decisions are stipulated as having to be made based on favorable evaluations.

If there have been concerns about performance, we should stick with a shorter (three year) option.

If we are going to do three years, we might as well do four. However, we may not want to lock ourselves into that. The hiring decision was a difficult one, so keeping the contract at one year might be a way to compromise.

Two years may be reasonable as a middle level.

We should evaluate how long it may take to institute organizational change to a level of stability.

**MOTION WAS WITHDRAWN**

The motion did not carry.

Shino Pichette made a motion to Start negotiation at a two-year contract with option for one-year extensions based on favorable reviews at \$120,000 per year with a cap of \$123,000.

David Potter seconded the motion.

If, for some reason, the candidate wants to negotiate the salary, do we want to authorize Marcy to go to David for permission to go higher?

Could we offer at \$120,000 and put a cap at \$123,000?

**MOTION WAS WITHDRAWN**

The motion did not carry.

David Potter made a motion to Start negotiation at a two-year contract with option for one-year extensions based on favorable reviews at \$120,000 per year with a cap of \$125,000.

Marty Espinola seconded the motion.

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

**Roll Call**

Richard Pouliot	Aye
LATRINA DENSON	Aye
Shino Pichette	No
Jacob Rosenblum	Aye
Maggie Solis	Aye
Jenna Sardella	Absent
Jesse Pompei	Aye
Neil Hede	Aye
Sofia Getoff-Scanlon	Aye
Mindi Winter	Aye
David Potter	Aye
Tonya Ward	Aye
Andrea Nathanson	Aye
Shannon Materka	Absent
Marty Espinola	Aye

**IV. Closing Items**

**A. Adjourn Meeting**

There being no further business to be transacted, and upon motion duly made, seconded and approved, the meeting was adjourned at 9:13 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Jacob Rosenblum