

APPROVED



Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter Public School

Minutes

Board of Trustees Meeting

Date and Time

Tuesday April 12, 2022 at 5:00 PM

Location

PVPA 3rd Floor Conference Room

Zoom Account is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: Board of Trustees HoS Interview 2

Time: Apr 12, 2022 05:00 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89552292110?pwd=eWpoZGc1Y1J0bHNGY0NKQldRSjBVUT09>

Meeting ID: 895 5229 2110

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Trustees Present

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

Trustees Absent

LATRINA DENSON

Guests Present

Marcy Conner

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 12, 2022 at 5:08 PM.

II. Head of School Finalist Interview 2

A. Candidate: Brent Nielsen

Have you engaged with unions in the past? If so, how might that influence your work with the PVPA teachers union? If not, how would you plan to work with the PVPA teachers union?

- Brent has worked with the PVPA Teachers' Union since he began in his head of school position. He observed tension between the administration and the union, and he has worked to address that. He understands the history of the Union and worked to construct the bargaining team in his capacity as interim head of school.

PVPA's MCAS scores, in English and especially Math, consistently trail those of other local schools. What steps will you take to narrow the MCAS gap?

- Brent points out that this is not an entirely accurate statement, as the trend has been up and down at different times over the years. Our tenth grade scores are far

better than our middle school scores. Though we have worked hard, there is more that we can do to address disparities in testing scores. One thing that Brent has done is bringing in an outside person to do professional development and shift curriculum in the math departments to ensure that we are preparing students adequately for the MCAS. In a permanent position, Brent would work with the structural leadership team to track and analyze MCAS scores to provide tailored programming. One idea that Brent is exploring is implementing a summer program to bring struggling students up to the standard prior to starting their seventh-grade year at PVPA.

What role do you envision the student body having in decision making processes and what steps would you take to create an environment where students feel listened to, communicated with, and valued by their school administration?

- Similar to many other structures, Brent thinks it is important to utilize the student council. The student council is a strong body of students, and giving these leaders agency to collect information to bring to the administration is a great way to support and increase student participation in the school community.

How do you envision starting this position on July 1st with the Collective Bargaining contract starting with the Union, how do you envision getting up to speed on the needs of PVPA, the staff, the students and the community in time to start moving forward?

- Last summer, Brent had to focus on COVID management in the midst of constructing an administrative team. Many of the Union-related projects introduced and supported by Brent have been completed, and some have not. Brent is ready to continue these efforts this summer. Brent and his team will work on preparing for negotiations over the summer, and the Union has agreed to begin bargaining starting in September in order to ensure that a new CBA can be completed in time for the 2023/24 school year.

How do you approach big decision making, and what is most important to you when weighing decisions?

- Decisions are made all the time in a school, and all of these decisions are important. For decisions that have an impact on a large group of people, sussing out feelings and opinions from the larger community is important. Maintaining a structural leadership team is also a helpful way to make these decisions easier and ensure increased input.

Part of PVPA's strategic action plan is improving our Diversity, Equity, Anti-Racism, and Inclusion. What steps would you take as head of school to prioritize supporting and amplifying the voices of our students and faculty who are part of underrepresented and marginalized groups?

- Brent has done a lot of DEI work as the Director of Student Services. He also worked with the SAP committee to develop the DEI goals outlined in the plan. Fostering a sense of belonging and value in students from historically marginalized communities is important. Diversifying from the top down could be an effective way to do this. The administration did work with an outside firm to ensure that job postings were attracting applicants from diverse backgrounds. More work needs to be done, particularly work focused on staff of color (including professional development beyond what their positions demand).

I would like to hear more about your experience in managing and evaluating staff and faculty; and in developing, implementing and managing budgets and policies.

- One of Brent's first jobs in education was a position as a teacher. He quickly moved on to running a program for students with particular social and emotional needs. The program operated much like a charter school (in terms of funding, budget development, etc), so that experience would be helpful. Brent then set up a similar program at Amherst aimed at keeping students within the district. At Amherst, Brent went through a course for analyzing good teaching practices and evaluating staff. He has been able to transfer these skills during his time at PVPA.

Given what you know about PVPA, where do you think the school needs the most support and how do you plan to tackle that?

- We need to fix our reputation within the valley. Many community members still see us for what we are, but we have developed a reputation in the area that should be corrected. Strengthening our college preparatory curriculum and modifying discipline to create a more positive student experiences are also major priorities. Supports and consistent rewarding of positive behaviors will be a main focus of Brent's administration if selected.

Tell us a story about a time that you made a mistake in a leadership role and how you handled it.

- All of the most challenging mistakes Brent has gone through is not recognizing the necessary level of communication in a school community. When making a change or when an event occurs within the community, communication is extremely important.

How would you describe your philosophy when it comes to discipline, specifically with balancing punishment and restorative justice?

- The best way to manage student behavior, in Brent's opinion, is the use of Restorative Practices, PBIS, and punitive justice in conjunction with one another. Acknowledging and rewarding positive behavior should be the main focus rather than punishment and reactive action. Teaching expectations and engraining school

expectations into students' everyday lives is important. Ensuring that teachers are on the same page will result in more understanding within the student body.

What concrete steps will you take to improve our arts programs?

- Brent has been working with Frank on taking a good look at arts curriculum and reform it. We need to make connections with high-level hubs for arts in the area and work with these institutions to make experiences available to students.

What steps will you take to support faculty retention?

- Teachers often leave because they feel isolated, unsupported, or sense a lack of belonging. Providing opportunities for professional growth will make teachers feel valued, and providing time for creativity and collaboration will increase feelings of connectedness among staff. One thing that Brent thinks is important is increasing teacher salaries and balancing the salary matrix for teachers. In order to do this, we need to increase the working week for staff at PVPA by about 2.5 hours. These steps will lead to a better, more collaborative school environment.

Communication between a school's administration and students, staff, and parents, plays an important role in shaping the school community. Tell us about how you would approach communication as the Head of School, ideally with some examples that have informed your views.

- Brent has reflected a lot this year on feedback about his communication. He revisited some communications from earlier this year and found that, even at times when members of the community are not getting necessary communication, there is a lot of correspondence. It is hard for members of the community to stay updated via email, so it is clear to Brent that email is not enough. This year, he developed a communications team to support different modes of communication that can be used to keep the community updated. The team has developed a website that is in the review process right now. There needs to be a combination of in-person, virtual, and electronic communication.

Question: Why are you (Board members) currently involved with PVPA? If there was one experience that you could change, what would that be?

- Maggie: I have a kid at PVPA, and I came into the school with an idea of what the community would look like. I realized, though, that most of my information was from 6-10 years ago and that the school community has undergone significant changes. I am realizing that many of the pandemic-related changes I saw may not have been pandemic-related, and some feel negative.
- Neil: When I joined the Board, I did so because it seemed that there was a lack in parental participation. In the future, I would like to see a student-focused clear vision of the future. Stability—particularly in administration.

- Jake: I joined the Board because I love and want to support PVPA. I would like to see a more robust Restorative Justice program and open lines of communication between all members of the community.

Jenna - more exposure for our arts productions out in the broader community

Firas - more openness to student concerns

Sofia - really positive relationship between Head of School and stakeholders, to build more trust

Mindi - a true understanding of the workings of MA charter school, the relationships with DESE, and able to bring financial stability

Fiona - good communication, two-way street , echoing what other students have said

Shino - valuing the unique culture of PVPA, that we are here for this

III. 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 6:06 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
David Potter