

APPROVED



# Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter Public School

## Minutes

### Board of Trustees Meeting

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#### Date and Time

Wednesday April 13, 2022 at 5:00 PM

#### Location

Zoom Account is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: Board of Trustees HoS Interview 3

Time: Apr 13, 2022 05:00 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86020982613?pwd=b1d3VW9GTIFMRkN4VTFRd1VUOHdGUT09>

Meeting ID: 860 2098 2613

Passcode: Tj4TA5

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Passcode: 166023

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

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### **Trustees Present**

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

### **Trustees Absent**

Jenyka Spitz-Gassnola, LATRINA DENSON

### **Guests Present**

Marcy Conner

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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 Wednesday Apr 13, 2022 at 5:07 PM.

## **II. Head of School Finalist Interview 3**

### **A. Candidate: Brett Gottheimer**

**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?**

- Brett has never been on the administrative negotiating side of a union contract. He has always been a member of a union as a teacher and is part of an association as an administrator. He acknowledges that this is new for PVPA and that it will take a lot of work.

**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?**

- Brett understands that there is nothing more valuable than classroom instruction. Focusing on instructional skills and tools in the classroom is the most important step in combating lagging test scores. Getting staff access to below-grade-level resources in order to bring students up to speed would be a great first step. Instruction in the classroom first and foremost, ensuring that teachers know what is on the exams second, and working with students as the last step.

**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?**

- Students, teachers, administrators, and the Board should all be on the same page. When these stakeholders are not on the same page, student voice gets lost. Creating mechanisms for students to reach out and provide input would increase opportunity for playing a role in the decision-making process. It is also important to acknowledge that some decisions need to remain in the hands of the teachers, administration, and Board.

**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?**

- At a school like PVPA, and at any educational institution, listening is important. Brett would take the time to understand what is going on and work with all perspectives to find the best way to move forward. Brett would rely on the guidance of stakeholders in the community to help him understand what is important.

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

- At some point, you have to make a call. In Brett's experience, it is best to evaluate all of the outcomes—intended and unintended—and weigh these against one another. Building in a revision cycle and an opportunity for refinement is important. Also, tracking the issue that the decision seeks to address allows a leader to understand when a decision is the right one and when a decision is wrong. Being willing to change a position or revise a decision is absolutely essential. Sometimes you make the wrong choice, and sometimes you have to apologize. That is okay.

**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?**

- Moving beyond a local perspective—even a statewide perspective—can help students to see themselves in their educators. Encouraging this diversity of thought and perspective creates a more positive school community. Equity is not a straight line of improvement. Things have gotten better, but we are seeing a pushback on the progress that has been made. This can make us feel like we are failing, but, in Brett's perspective, this is a good thing. What it means to belong to an identity is constantly evolving, and we need to understand and support that. It all starts with creating an environment where these conversations can happen. It seems like PVPA has been successful in that.

**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.**

- Brett has a lot of experience in observing and evaluating staff across a variety of disciplines. Evaluations can be extremely positive, but they can also be hard. Putting a staff member on an improvement plan is a hard thing to do but is sometimes necessary. With a long history as a teacher himself, Brett has applied his experience in his evaluations. Brett managed a significant budget at his previous institution; he is familiar with invoices, purchases, and record-keeping. Having grown up in a wealthy town in a poor family, he has significant experience managing priorities and identifying time-sensitive needs.

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

- Brett does not know enough yet, but during his conversation with the teachers, one of the large concerns he heard was the standards-based grading system. It seems that the community is not consistent about what a standards-based system means. This needs to be addressed fast, as it has tangible impacts on a student's life. Staff retention also seems like a big issue, and I would start tackling this by looking at current and potential revenue systems so that we can be a competitive institution that is attractive to staff. This is not easy, but it could be the answer to many of the concerns that arise.

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

- Brett gets about 150 emails per day. One time, he missed an important message about bullying behavior from a parent. Another incident occurred after he failed to respond. This failure to respond is a legal concern as well as a student safety concern. Immediately, Brett acknowledged that he had made a mistake. He apologized to the principle, the parent, and the impacted student—as is sometimes important; you can tell students when you are wrong. Following this experience, he

made a commitment to move fast enough to do the job but slow down to ensure that he is careful.

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

- In his position as an assistant principle, much of his job is dealing with behavior management. To Brett, Restorative Practices *make sense*—school is about learning, and restoration is about learning. There is not one student who has done better after an out of school suspension, though it is essential on rare occasions to ensure safety. At some point, students with behavior issues will be allowed back into the classroom—this is the place for Restorative Justice. Contextualizing student experience and implementing equitable systems are necessary to support student success. Brett has a lot of experience balancing FERPA against keeping staff informed.

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

- Brett would start by making sure that every student is in an arts class. Increasing exposure for younger students to the activities of upperclasspeople will influence community buy-in and involvement. All students who audition should be part of an activity like a school play. Respect of technical theater students versus performers is one issue that was brought up, and Brett emphasizes that this can be addressed easily by having all students working together on everything. Understanding is the first step.

**What steps will you take to support faculty retention?**

- Pay is not the answer. It is important to pay staff fairly, but there need to be attractors beyond that. Helping staff grow professionally is a good way to make them feel valued. The way to do this is by putting teachers in positions that they might not be entirely comfortable fulfilling. Keeping up consistent and meaningful communication is another way to make staff feel respected.

**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.**

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### **III. Closing Items**

#### **A. Adjourn Meeting**

David Potter made a motion to Adjourn the meeting.  
Marty Espinola 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 6:00 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,  
David Potter