

APPROVED



Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter Public School

Minutes

Board of Trustee Meeting February 2025

Date and Time

Tuesday February 11, 2025 at 6:00 PM

Location

[15 Mulligan Drive](https://www.google.com/maps/place/15+Mulligan+Drive,+South+Hadley,+MA+01075/@41.811111,-72.511111,17z)
[South Hadley, MA 01075](https://www.google.com/maps/place/15+Mulligan+Drive,+South+Hadley,+MA+01075/@41.811111,-72.511111,17z)

or [zoom link](#)

Link to PVPA Board of Trustees 2 11 2025 Meeting Video

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/14mpDqoGRABT70cmvMOhUpZQFT3k8POK6?usp=sharing>

Trustees Present

Azizah Yasin, Craig Santos, Grace Bannasch (remote), Kiara Badillo (remote), LATRINA DENSON, Neil Hede (remote), Sasha Viands, Tim Cable (remote)

Trustees Absent

David Cavallin, Vanessa Ford

Ex Officio Members Present

Marcy Conner (remote)

Non Voting Members Present

Marcy Conner (remote)

I. Opening Items

A. Record Attendance

B. Call the Meeting to Order

LATRINA DENSON called a meeting of the board of trustees of Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter Public School to order on Tuesday Feb 11, 2025 at 6:10 PM.

C. Read the Mission Statement

D. Approve Minutes

Tim Cable made a motion to approve the minutes from Board of Trustee Meeting January 2025 on 01-14-25.

Sasha Viands seconded the motion.

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

Roll Call

| | |
|----------------|--------|
| Grace Bannasch | Aye |
| Craig Santos | Aye |
| David Cavallin | Absent |
| Sasha Viands | Aye |
| Neil Hede | Aye |
| LATRINA DENSON | Aye |
| Kiara Badillo | Aye |
| Azizah Yasin | Aye |
| Vanessa Ford | Absent |
| Tim Cable | Aye |

II. Public Comments

A. Public Comment

Ali Wicks-Lim - have an 8th grader at PVPA, parent trying to get 7th grade girls safe.

Received your letter. Having a hard time believing that 14 year old girls were telling the truth to their peers. We have been asking for the Board to go back and interview them to give them an opportunity to be heard. Disappointed in the schools actions and disappointed. Reports of teacher acting angry and commenting on the actions in the US tight now in a manner that is not consistent with with school. We as parents have no one to turn to,

Jeanette Wicks-Lin - a parent that has signed the letter complaining about the behavior of Brent Nielsen. Taken aback by letter and sent emails directly to members to see if they

shared President Denson's view in the letter. Students are currently gathering in groups to protect themselves. No acknowledgment of Brent's unprofessional behavior with comments like "if you are unhappy you can leave the school" Have received some responses. Would like you to share at this meeting if you stand by President Denson's comments.

Amanda Strout - 7th grades at school. "No student has demonstrated concern about the teachers return". My daughter on Dec. 6th asked what happened if teacher returns to his behavior after supervision. Brent was dismissive to her. Brent requested to speak to my daughter later. This comment has been reported by Veronica and Alysohn that it did happen. At least one child had shared concerns.

Emily Pfeiffer - vote to approve updated bylaws to ensure that they contain what is necessary by DESE and hold what the members require. The Committee is pushing changes that have not been fully explained. Students and teachers are being removed from the Board. The Governance Committee has been making decisions about who is allowed to join. Attorney - bylaws are incomplete - meeting can be called by 2 members. Time for clarification. The members can have control of the meeting and agenda. Vote tonight - hard to tell what has been moved and edited. What to make sure Board really understands edits before approving.

Amber Cano-Martin - parent of 89th grade students - one of 13 signers on complaint. Also received the letter from Latrina - dismayed by what I see here. Complaint was that initial investigation was done incorrectly as Brent conducted interviews with no parents present. Can an young girls be honest about what happened being questioned by an adult male. We have asked time and again for the Board to take the time to re-investigate. It means the school does not believe girls, the teacher continues to teach and I have a queer child of color. He is on the Admins hitlist. Very scared. Please reconsider actions.

III. Head of School Report

A. Brent's Report

Started second semester. Already started planning for next year with schedule and budgeting. Frank Newton, Director of Arts dept. & the Arts Dept. have built in 2 year cycle for arts classes. Next month Frank will attend this meeting talking about a 5th Arts dept. Technical Arts.

Going on in the school - two half day professional days - seemed to go well bringing staff together.

Last weekend - WOFA - hats off to Bisko and the whole dance department.

Production season under way - very busy spring.

Tentative academic calendar for 2025-2026. Union has reviewed and we hope to have it for approval next month.

IV. Internal Stakeholders

A. Staff Report

Tim - David send regards. Well into 2nd semester. Half day PD work well from teacher perspective. Mirror what Brent has shared - WOFA was excellent last weekend.

More next month....

B. Student Reports

No students present.

V. President's Business

A. President's Report

Some members have disclosures that need to be completed - Board on Track sent out information. We need to select a date for a min- retreat next month if possible. Half a day on a Sat or a Sun. Any dates in March? Latrina will review dates and select a few to share for final decision.

VI. Board Committee Reports

A. Governance Committee

By-laws revision from Feb 2nd are attached to the agenda. Last revision was in 2017 and DESE recommended review and update. After vote they will be sent to DESE. This work has been taking place for the last year and a half. The track changes were shared in the document. Aziza will point out the DESE recommended changes:

Voting responsibilities

Board composition

Officers - serve for 6 months vs 1 year

Correct operations

Glossary - should not have a glossary

Articulating responsibilities and positions that are aligned with conflict of interest laws.

Communication over last year and a half. Also recommendations over organization of by laws - tried to streamline information. Added additional language to include Board norms that were approved at the Board retreat last fall.

2.7 - Governance Committee responsibilities - vetting new members qualifications, interest, ability to be neutral. Also including on-boarding - missing a streamlined training to ensure members are trained in DESE regs, Board of Track, conflict of interest. Gov Committee chair will have responsibilities of on-boarding.

Questions about the relationship with the Friend 5.1 - t

Special meeting language was shared by the attorney and was received after this meeting was posted.

Teacher perspective - DESE recommendation to remove them - not a requirement. What applies to charter vs regular district. Why?

Would like to see reason why recommendations were made vs requirements.

Conflict of interest laws were the basis for some changes - DESE is strongly asking why changes have not been made.

Grace - been approached by parents, faculty and students about the removal. DESE was simply a recommendation - vital stakeholders for conversations. Students are non-voting so will never create an issue with conflict of interest law. Any past precedent where state ethics commission has raised issue with teacher being on a board was violating the law. Has this been an issue in the past? Staff cannot vote on certain items - so they are following the law.

Negotiations are one instant. We can clarify when someone recuses themselves. There can be problems if someone does not take their training seriously. This is a concern for the community.

When students turn 18 they become voting members and go through the training. Kiara has also received some communication - don't think we should erase their voice.

Neil - on board with most of it. Section that needs to be 2.3b duty to comply - agree with but not the same language and the rest of the document - maybe it should be in an on-boarding doc rather than by-laws. Subject to individual interpretations -a lot of us not present at retreat 4 vs 10 members. Language you wouldn't normally see in legal doc. Special meeting would like to see language before voting.

Sasha - on-boarding - applicants - clarity around process of who sees what. Decreasing number - is there a way to streamline process so it doesn't lie with just one group of people. Are we using a matrix or grading system to filter out candidates? Process has been informal - trying to give more structure - committees are where the work is done - expectation is that the Board is differential to the committee and the work and recommendation. Gov Committee chair has been seeking Board members - all committee members participate in process which has not happened in the past - making

a more formalized process - when it makes it to the Board should have answers to any questions that may arise. Is there a process to communicate who has applied and been rejected - we want to have interest - in order to increase number the Board needs to make themselves present so that we have information to make decisions. Volunteering in the community is important. Where is the commitment? How are we showing up? Encouraging others to become a part of the Board?

Any applicants this year? There have been a couple. Some were unable to commit to time and some were unresponsive. Emotional connection - important to be able to engage neutrally. Conducting business of Board need to be versed in regulations and requirements but need to be able to separate our emotions and be objective. DESE talking about who should have a voice and who should have voting rights. The collective of the Governance committee vets individuals to make sure no personal agenda or gain is the motivation for joining the Board.

Grace - agree with so much of what Azizah has said. As someone who is immersed in these laws. Why are we getting rid of students when it is non-voting? Positions are not going away, they are just becoming non-voting ex-officio. DESE distinguishes between and voting and non-voting and they were stating we should use the term representative vs Board member. Representative is aligned with someone that does not vote.

Tim - distinction between voting and non-voting - removing the vote removes the incentive for the Board to listen to voices. Concerned about community as a whole that community matters - been here since founding of the school for a reason. Understand the law - take it seriously. When founded there was no Collective Bargaining Agreement that now creates the conflict. The BOT is responsible for bargaining and maintaining the contract. Teachers recuse themselves from the vote on contract matters. We need clarity around the challenges that create conflict of interest.

Will seek more information from DESE and our attorney.

Sasha - encourage alums to look through charter document due to upcoming renewal. Need to think about building blocks when making these decisions.

Craig - we need to work with DESE and awareness when they make a recommendation several times - what happens when you don't follow the recommendations - especially when you need their help. Can be in a difficult position if you do not follow their guidance.

Latrina - will return to DESE and has heard the tone coming from them and respecting everyone's thoughts - how do we preserve history and also change with the times. We need to be able to move forward with the times. Write another option that shifts away from "representative" to describe employees and voting members - to DESE. Not sure if they will state this makes sense and that they have already given us recommendations.

How do we reconcile the conflict of interest? Not all recommendations are truly recommendations. This work has been going on for a long time - will update the date on the doc to be the Governance Committee meeting review.

To what extent can public participate in a committee meeting? Can existing members join the Gov Committee? Chair can open up discussion if they choose to - must give permission to speak. Board members are encourage to join committees and that is our role for the year. Changes can be made in successive years.

No vote.

B. Head of School Support and Evaluation

Timeline update. Modified the survey for clarification purposes.

Process:

Self Evaluation: We have to share the self evaluation with Brent by Feb 14th. He has 3 weeks to complete it. Due on Mar 11th.

Evaluation: The Board and his direct reports will receive the evaluation on Mar 14th and will have until April 4th to complete it.

Create Goals: Full report will be shared with the Board by April 8th. HOS will draft goals by May 27th. Final draft will be shared by committee to full board by June 3rd. Board approval on June 10th.

Next meeting will be doing contract renewal for HOS - need to give notice by end of March.

VII. 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 7:55 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Azizah Yasin

Documents used during the meeting

- PVPA Bylaws Revised Draft Updated 2.2.2025.pdf