

APPROVED



Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter Public School

Minutes

Board of Trustee Meeting March 2025

Date and Time

Tuesday March 11, 2025 at 6:00 PM

Location

[15 Mulligan Drive](https://www.google.com/maps/place/15+Mulligan+Drive,+South+Hadley,+MA+01075/@41.94118,-72.5074,17z)
[South Hadley, MA 01075](https://www.google.com/maps/place/15+Mulligan+Drive,+South+Hadley,+MA+01075/@41.94118,-72.5074,17z)

or [zoom link](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82140111111?pwd=QkVzZ0p6a0p6a0p6a0p6a0p6a0p6a0p6)

Trustees Present

Azizah Yasin, Craig Santos (remote), David Cavallin, Kiara Badillo, LATRINA DENSON, Neil Hede, Sasha Viands (remote), Vanessa Ford (remote)

Trustees Absent

Grace Bannasch, Tim Cable

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 Mar 11, 2025 at 6:04 PM.

C. Read the Mission Statement

Azizah read the mission statement

D. D. Approve Minutes

Azizah Yasin made a motion to approve the minutes from 2.11.25 Board of Trustee Meeting February 2025 on 02-11-25.

Kiara Badillo seconded the motion.

Edits were agreed upon to be made.

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

Roll Call

Azizah Yasin Aye

LATRINA DENSON Aye

Grace Bannasch Absent

Sasha Viands Abstain

David Cavallin Abstain

Neil Hede Aye

Vanessa Ford Aye

Kiara Badillo Aye

Tim Cable Absent

Craig Santos Aye

II. Public Comments

A. Public Comment

A time period of 15 minutes for public comment was opened with each individual being given 1 minute each to make a public comment.

Public Comment

Pres of the Board and presiding officer Latrina Denson shared that Public Comment is offered as a courtesy, not a DESE requirement; however, your voices are important to PVPA.

She also expressed that it will be important for us to role model what it means to communicate and set an example for our children who are present.

This pertains to OML, the board will not use public comment as an opportunity to engage in a conversation, but to listen to everyone.

Ask the board, please be mindful of this.

I would also like to acknowledge that all board members received letters from the public sent to the board via email.

Zoom Public Speakers

- Trish Hede – shared that she sent letter to board. Asks letter to be included in the minutes. – The presiding offer acknowledged that the letter was attached to the agenda and would be noted. The letter, which is also attached on the minutes as one of the documents on the agenda and includes the following as summarized.
 - Trish Hede is a parent of a current high school student at PVPA. Her has been involved and a part of PVPA since our older daughter, a '23 PVPA

grad, began school there in the 7th grade in 2018. She sent this letter to share her numerous unprofessional interactions with Brent when he was Interim Head of School, as well as in his current role. Had interactions, situations, & concerns involving both my children, at separate times for completely different reasons. Her family is not immediately affected by the situation that is currently deeply dividing our PVPA community surrounding the allegations against a middle school teacher & Brent's handling of this situation. She attempted to be a part of the search committee for the new Head of School in 2022, but was not chosen, and she still remained engaged in hopes that Brent would possibly feel more secure in his position and uphold the promises. On separate occasions, they had incidents that also involved another administrator who is no longer at PVPA, but Brent was that person's direct supervisor & Brent refused to step in. She also shared her final letter with Brent on the issue. They tell their children they were/are not allowed to speak to anyone in the PVPA administration, especially Brent, ever, under any circumstance, unless they are present due to mistrust of the administration. Feels like on most days, the good days outweigh the bad. She is not in PTO, and she can no longer recommend others attend PVPA. She urged the Board not to rush the agreement or negotiation on Brent's expiring contract as Head of School with no public, measurable accountability, or anything will change, and we will have the same conversations.

- Summit – A student shared that she is reading a letter for a friend in 7th grade who was at the walkout. Summit shared that she stands with her and was frustrated with the current administration not believing her friends and that it was a safe space. The letter shared that it was told to her that throughout the school year, it was reported that the staff purposely sat very close to students while running their hands up and down her thighs repeatedly staring at her chest because he wanted to see the design on her shirt
- Anayra Crespo – 7th-grade student shared in a statement that the teacher would make comments about her tank top, low-cut or tight shirts, and ask if he could see what the shirt said and if she said no would become angry. Anayra discussed the Interviews with students during the investigation and expressed that she was disgusted at the mishandling of the investigation. She also shared that the Head of school said to the class on the day of the staff's return that he (staff member) is human and everyone makes mistakes and shared that the statements were only seen as rumors.
- Alex - who is a PVPA student,- shared that he sent a letter to the board that was attached to the agenda because he was not going to be present. so that the public could review the letter. It is also included as documents on the minutes as requested by the individuals writing the letters. It is also summarized below:
 - Brent Nielsen does not represent the PVPA community. He ignores feedback, avoids open dialogue, and refuses to take accountability for his actions. His past decisions, including handling of complaints, show a lack of

respect for students and families. He should not continue as Head of School if he cannot prioritize the community's needs. Examples shared included his lack of communication regarding the removal of Paideia, and when people were upset about his decision, he did not listen. When the community voiced their concerns, Brent got defensive and belittled them and their families, expressing anger. When confronted with complaints that included allegations of sexual harassment, he chose not to initiate Title IX proceedings as protocol required. Instead, he chose to investigate the incident on his own, didn't meet with parents who were waiting for 2 hours, and asked that during the executive session, the board consider Brent's past actions very carefully

- Maya – A 7th-grade student shared that she and her friend feel unheard by the administration and felt like the students were called liars. She also shared that at the walkout, Brent laughed. This felt hurtful to everyone talking. She also expressed that she doesn't think his contract should be renewed.
- Jules – A junior at another school, appeared virtually and expressed that he was there to support friends at PVPA. Don't know teacher or a lot of kids at school, but has been in situations like this before and felt unsafe and unsupported at school. He shared that kids deserve to feel supported, heard, and believed by the admin at school and educators here should nurture students.
- Maeve – A former student asked to share story anonymously – She shared that at a different school the teacher touched their thigh while helping on schoolwork and said you're my favorite student, and felt like the teacher was too friendly. She felt like the head of school would take the teacher's side and not believe. The student then left that school because the teacher was inappropriate and not believed by head of school
- **In Person**
- Catherine – student. Sophomore. Shared that she felt that Brent was apathetic and had bitterness towards peers. Also shared that Brent ridiculed them and said they were overthinking it while smiling.
- Alicia – Read a letter for Tora Ali, a student in 7th grade. These are real experiences. Had a walkout and will protest until our needs are met. The student said they were unsatisfied with how the school has handled it and the school is not doing anything to keep students safe.
- Eleanor – 7th grade student. Said that they walked out in protest because no longer feel safe and instead was met by smiles and laughter by members of the administration, including Brent.
- Emily Pfeiffer – yielding time to speaker for others to speak.
- Chris – A freshman, shared that since 7th grade, a lot of problems have been unaddressed by staff. Staff do not deal with problems. Chris shared that his parents have sent emails to Brent and not been addressed. He also shared that Brent was making fun, laughing in the crowd. Also shared that these are real lives being put at risk. Harm to students will have a permanent effect.

- Kara – 9th grader – Shared that she feels disgusted with Brent and the administrators. At walkout, the student body is listening. Brent was laughing with another administrator. While a 7th grader accounted being assaulted by the teacher and the student (7th grader) felt like it was their fault because how Brent treated them.
- Amelia – Shared the areas where Mike has touched me. Thigh
- Latrina Denson, presiding officer thanked everyone, especially the students and said that the board honors your (Students) voices, know was difficult to do that this

III. Head of School Report

A. General Report and Updates

Brent made opening statements regarding it being a difficult time for everyone at PVPA and that in his role, he needs to give updates on important things.

Please be mindful of upcoming show dates.

He's been working on a multi-step transportation plan a few years ago to amend the charter to decrease the size of the region to access regional reimbursement funds. This will provide every student who wants it with a bus stop within a mile of their home at no cost. Brent and Marcy will be meeting with the Dept of Ed. and Bus Co. to put together that transportation plan that supports students and costs less than current plan.

Lottery opened on February 26th. Application numbers are a bit lower than in past years. PVPA has maintained very good enrollment numbers.

As Pioneer Valley Excellence in Teaching honors teachers, this year, PVPA will recognize dance teacher, Felice Santorelli, Alum and teacher at PVPA for the past 14 years.

Brent submitted document regarding the Charter School application. We are in the 4th year of our current 5 year renewal cycle.

2025-2026 school calendar has been reviewed for DESE requirements and needs to be approved by the board.

B. School Calendar 2025-2026

David Cavallin made a motion to Approve the 2025-2026 school year calendar.

Azizah Yasin seconded the motion.

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

Roll Call

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

IV. Internal Stakeholders

A. Staff Report

B. Student Reports

Student board member read an 11th grade student council statement regarding the safety of the students and addressing concerns moving forward.

V. President's Business

A. President's Report

Latrina shared that she attended an open meeting law training for charter schools. She will share information with the board and governance committee to make sure we have clarity around rules and making sure we are complying. Especially open meeting law around responding to emails and how to engage as a board together.

We are trying to schedule our board retreat so that we can follow up on the discussions and plans we made at our last retreat. We are all extremely busy and finding a date is challenging but hopefully we can find middle ground on a date.

VI. Board Committees

A. Finance Committee

Marcy gave the finance committee report re:

1. The 5 year financial review from DESE. Overall PVPA is financially healthy.

2. A proposal for a new theater department. Working with "Friends of PVPA" to raise some needed funds.
3. FY26 Capital Budget. The Finance Committee approved the portion to make improvements
4. Vote by DESE to approve charter amendment re: the current bus contract

B. Friends of PVPA Liaison Report

Kiara shared that Friends of PVPA is working on the donation letter for needed upgrades. Kiara and Azizah are working to figure out the relationship of Friends and fundraising.

C. Head of School Evaluation Committee

We are going through the process of head of school self evaluation. Latrina will compile everything to share out.

VII. Governance Committee

A. Recruitment Update

Azizah shared that after the advice of counsel, in an effort to expand the board, governance committee will hold board candidate interviews of all those who have expressed interest in becoming a board member. This will be a public meeting. Each candidate will have 20 minutes to be interviewed using the same questions for each. After this meeting the governance committee will vote to move candidates forward to the full board for the vote.

B. Bylaw Revisions

Azizah shared that there has been extensive work done on DESE recommended revisions. Latrina and Azizah have included language recommendations in line with our newly agreed upon board norms. Our attorney recommended language to qualify a special meeting. We also reviewed and revised our teacher/student voting status based on DESE recommendation. We have included them as Representatives with voices that matter at every meeting.

We have to be careful how we communicate with each other outside of scheduled meetings. The draft presented today is what the governance committee has approved to move the revision of the bylaws as drafted.

Neil stated that open meeting laws were created to ensure transparency, accountability and public participation, not for us to hide stuff. Prevent secrecy and encourage public trust and that is what we need to strive to do.

Azizah Yasin made a motion to approve the bylaws as drafted with 1st paragraph of 2.3b will be removed.

Neil Hede seconded the motion.

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

Roll Call

Tim Cable	Absent
Craig Santos	Aye
Kiara Badillo	Aye
Neil Hede	Aye
Sasha Viands	No
Grace Bannasch	Absent
Vanessa Ford	Aye
David Cavallin	No
LATRINA DENSON	Aye
Azizah Yasin	Aye

VIII. Vote to go into Executive Session

A. Vote to go into Executive Session

Azizah Yasin made a motion to enter into executive session and not returning to public session.

Kiara Badillo seconded the motion.

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

Roll Call

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

• Latrina Denson - At the last executive session, I agreed to send head of school evaluation documents from the last two years for your review and then on the 11th we will vote on whether or not to give the head of school a letter of intent about renewing his employment contract, as well as what the letter will state. I will then seek review of the letter by legal counsel before sending the letter to the head of school.

• Neil Hede - We need to support Brent. He is managing a whole school – he is responsible for the students, parents, staff. We are managing the head of school, and he needs more support. We must communicate expectations and provide opportunities for training and networking with his colleagues. We should also provide check-ins throughout the year, not only at the end of the year or end of term. This should not be adversarial; we are here to support him and want him to be successful. We, as a board, have fallen short in not having the intermittent checks and balances. He needs to hear from us and needs our feedback.

- Latrina Denson - I agree, we haven't supported him the way we should, and he's out here on his own. We should also look at ways to support his mental wellness as a leader and ask about the support that is provided. The head of the school and the evaluation committee, and the board have to provide more support and accountability.
- Marcy Conner - There is EAP available
- Neil Hede - When you are a boss, you have to have a poker face, slow to react (smiling, laughing), not realizing outwardly how he is presenting and perceived
- Kiara Badillo - He can show compassion more – before moving into the business meeting of the agenda, he shared from the heart that it is a tough time, difficult what we went through, but I need to go through this. This sets a tone that he is understanding.
- Neil Hede - Everything seen about his leadership there is not enough to say he should not have a contract extended. Letting someone go is a serious act. I think that we should renew but hold accountable with support on our part. There are students and parents who are hostile, but there is also probably an equal number who are happy here.

Neil Hede made a motion to That the the board of trustees accept the letter of intent to renew Brent Nielsen's contract.

Azizah Yasin seconded the motion.

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

Roll Call

Kiara Badillo	Aye
Sasha Viands	No
Azizah Yasin	Aye
Vanessa Ford	Aye
Tim Cable	Absent
Craig Santos	Aye
LATRINA DENSON	Aye
David Cavallin	Absent
Grace Bannasch	Absent
Neil Hede	Aye

IX. 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 7:04 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
LATRINA DENSON

Documents used during the meeting

- 2025_02_11_board_meeting_minutes.pdf

- Board Letter 3-11-25.pdf
- Board Speech 3_11_25.pdf
- Head of School Report to the Board - 3_11_2025.pdf
- 2025-2026 School Calendar - DRAFT.pdf
- PVPA_Bylaws_Revised_Draft_Updated_2.2.2025 (1).docx