



Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter Public School

Minutes

Board of Trustee Meeting April 2025

Date and Time

Tuesday April 8, 2025 at 6:00 PM

Trustees Present

Azizah Yasin, Kiara Badillo (remote), LATRINA DENSON, Neil Hede (remote), Sasha Viands (remote), Tim Cable (remote), Vanessa Ford (remote)

Trustees Absent

Craig Santos, David Cavallin, Grace Bannasch

I. Opening Items

A. 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 Apr 8, 2025 at 6:04 PM.

B. Record Attendance

C. Read the Mission Statement

Azizah read the mission statement

D. D. Approve Minutes

Azizah Yasin made a motion to approve the minutes from Board of Trustee Meeting March 2025 on 03-11-25.

Sasha Viands seconded the motion.

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

Roll Call

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

II. Public Comments

A. Public Comment

Dylan - Wanted to strongly urge you all to postpone voting to renew Brent's contract until after the results of the dese investigation about the home support teacher have come back. I'm sure you all are feeling pretty uneasy about a lot of things going on right now and those type of things though uncertain it's easiest to go with the status quo which is keeping Brent where he is but doing that is going to continue things going along the path they have and I want you all to trust yourselves to be able to find an option that going to put someone in place that will create the kind of community that you all want here at this school that is inclusive and safe. Give yourselves the maximum amount of time you can to think about this decision. Right now you have a group of parents that could've been great assets to the school that have been alienated and you have children that don't feel safe. Looking around the culture of the school it cannot be what you want if you care about this school, so please give yourself time wait until you have all the information before making a decision about this.

Amber - Asking you to make the decision to not renew Brent Nielsen's contract as head of school. There are many reasons for this which I can't possibly cover in this short amount of time so again I wish you would have a meeting with a long comment period so that everyone can have their voices heard. Brent is not a trustworthy leader he does not inspire confidence in me as a parent to leave my child at school every day. I'm actually scared to leave my child there. There has been a pattern of retaliation by Brent against the families and students who have spoken out about the ongoing situation with the teacher who was accused of sexually harassing students. Brent does not believe children. He says that what they experienced is not true, not valid and he laughs at them when they tell traumatic and painful stories of what they experienced at the hands of this teacher. We now have a bunch of kids who will never want to report again if something happens to them because they know they won't be believed and their then being practice targets for more abuse. I could say so much more. But I will say since the head of school

refuses to keep our kids safe, you have to do it as the board of trustees. If you don't do it you're complicit and you're enabling the ongoing harm that is being done here. You have to do your duty to our children to provide a safe learning environment and remove this head of school.

Amanda - From the beginning of the school year there has been a huge lack of communication from the school administration to the parents. In the fall, parents of the children in the homework support class were not notified at all about the removal and return of the homework support teacher. Parents of students interviewed about the alleged misconduct by Brent were totally unaware that their child was being questioned by the administration, so I think it's kind of interesting by contrast that the email that I received from the school last week to let me know that my child's math teacher is leaving. This is what they've chosen to communicate about. We still have no idea if the homework support teacher is on medical leave, suspension, or if he'll be back tomorrow. Kids walk in there every day unaware and for children who have had negative experiences with that teacher, it's emotionally exhausting. For a school that prides itself on restorative practices and being trauma informed, this is ridiculous. My child even said to me today in frustration I just want to know if he's coming back. She's concerned both for the other current students and for her friends who are incoming students next year. I hope that you can do something about this.

Eleanor - I want you to know that I was scared to speak up here today in fear of retaliation from Brent. Every day at school I'm scared that I'll do something wrong and Brent will use that as an excuse to pull me out of class and yell at me about a situation with a teacher or my Mom standing up to him. I have seen my friends come out of a class sobbing because Brent came in and proceeded to yell at the students about how nothing that was happening was true including anything that he had said. This scared me and many other students and made us feel angry, I recommend that you do not renew his contract so that these students can feel safe while they're at school.

Emily - Latrina it's your prerogative to limit public comment. It's also absolutely within your power to extend it. I want to call out the fact that you personally are refusing to grant adequate time for this community to be heard. You refuse to add an agenda item to any of the meetings you've presided over during this crisis. you cut people off after their terribly limited speaking time and act as though it isn't up to you. This just like Brent's accountability is 100% up to you. and contrary to what you claim on the agenda while you can't create a dialogue here during public comment you absolutely do have the power to respond later in the meeting. You've chosen to respond in any meaningful way and now you're avoiding the discomfort of having to replace a head of school which also is your responsibility. I think maybe you too hope if we're unhappy will leave and the bad news is many will but you know these kids aren't lying. You know you're enabling it to continue because that teacher isn't the point. The administration that covers it up said all these kids are making up stories and retaliates against students is, and you protecting that makes you the problem. That means the problem won't be gone next year. My kids

graduating. Did you feel relief when I said that? Don't. Because if this administration and you are still here the problem doesn't leave with me.

Janette - My family is one of the families that the head of school Brent Nielsen said if you're not happy here you can leave when we raised our concerns about a teacher being accused of inappropriate behavior with students, well we're leaving. This is even though the school has particularly excellent teachers who my daughter will miss. My family will add to the rising percent of families removing their kids from PVPA. PVPA's tuition rates have been going up, especially under the leadership of Brent Nielsen. This should be particularly concerning to the board and the PVPA community because PVPA is performing much worse under Brent's leadership in comparison to similar charter schools. I want to use the rest of my comments to put into the record just one example of how PVPA students using their own words describing their own experience directly contradicts what the board and Brent has been telling the PVPA community about how they handled the students claims about the teacher being accused of misconduct. The board claims that no students demonstrated any concern about the return of the teacher accused of misconduct however students who witnessed how a class reacted after Brent and Veronica shared with the class that the teacher was returning reports that the reaction from the students was strong and immediate. Students expressed many concerns over the teacher returning. They expressed fear for their safety and disbelief that their first hand experience was being ignored. One student in the class left the room in tears. This PVPA student provided the board with their first hand account in a letter. I want the minutes of this meeting to record how the members of this board under the leadership of Latrina Denson and Brent have sent a clear message to the PVPA students under their care that they do not believe them.

Carissa - I am here to say that having been communicated to about the things that were going on at the school I shared some information I asked questions I heard from multiple people and I am very disappointed in how the school has handled everything that is going on and is in fact not trauma informed and I say that as a trained professional therapist. I also want to say that I have been getting feedback from people that there is a witch hunt going on because I'm sharing information. And I want you to be very aware of the narrative that are being spun about community members who are trying to be involved in the school which is part of the school's mission to have community and alumni involved so when we try to get involved and we're told that we're just nostalgic alums who have no idea what's really going on or this is a witch hunt, you're being given a narrative that is very easy excuse for behavior that is happening rather than an opportunity to lean in and do the hard work of looking at your failed leadership and the need for new leadership. I am here as a alum who is a working professional who works with kids who is working with kids who left your school under the current leadership because of the leadership as a therapist not associated with PVPA at all through a different community network and the kids left because of your current leadership. I want you to have the where with all the courage to acknowledge that this leadership isn't working and purely a professional reflection that it's time for new leadership this is not a personal jab though I'm sure there

will be ways that this will come back at me personally because that is how this administration functions I hear

it. I hear it from multiple people who don't know each other who are sharing with me. People are being yelled at, people are being ignored. We can do better this school can do better the people on this board can do better.

Lauren - I am an alum and also a staff member and I just want to reiterate that one thing to keep in mind as we all create a safe space and environment for students and families for current staff, students and families that PVPA has made a lot of strides for change and we should continue to hold ourselves accountable as a place for students and families but we also need to not romanticize the past because there were a lot of issues with former administration that I feel like get forgotten about or memorialized in a way that is not necessarily great. I say this as an alum who loved PVPA enough to come back and work here. We need to remember that some things change for the better but we need to do that while also creating safe spaces. So I think it's important to not hold on to PVPA as it was because there were flaws.

Candice - Thank you to every single person since December that I have met who has been supportive to my family and my daughter. And to every single person who spoke here today and gave their honest feedback about the need for change with leadership. I'm 1000% in agreement. I'm very choked up because I'm really sad. We came into PVPA because we heard wonderful things about the school, the mission statement, what it says in the handbook everything sounded like exactly what we wanted. My daughter has dreamed of going to this school, we were hopeful. It has been the exact opposite of what we wanted. And not for any issues with teachers. The teachers have loved my daughter and been there for her in many ways but the one person who hurt her has not been held accountable and has been given more respect and more kindness than she has by administration who has been poor with communication stating that there has been a misunderstanding of the facts. If there has been a misunderstanding of the facts then how come that can't be clarified? How come we can't find a way to meet and communicate about that? A good leader should be able to communicate. The leadership in this school cannot communicate. They are extremely poor at it and that's a problem because the school that needs to grow and change as Lauren had stated I agree with you, it needs to grow and to change and to always look to improve and be better. That can't happen when your leadership is not good. Your leadership is what makes your school what it is and you've got poor leadership your school is not going to grow. It's going to continue to go down. So I'm telling you as a parent, your number one job when you bring a child into this world is to protect them and keep them safe and sadly I've been extremely disappointed in the way the school has handled protecting my child. If it were not for the fact that she begged us to finish out the school year because she's involved in a play that she's committed herself to we would have already removed her because protecting my kid is the most important job I could ever do. I'm also telling you this because like other parents are saying that we choose to go to this school because it's the lesser of two evils is what I hear. I hear parents saying well I heard it's better than the public school in my town or I'm not going to do anything, I'm going to homeschool because parents are scared. People are afraid of what's going to happen to their kids in schools and we put our blind faith and trust when we reported to the school about what was going on. We trusted and this is what has occurred. Still to this day there has been no communication or feedback about what is happening with this man. He could come back into the school at any time. People

don't know. Communication doesn't work at this school and it has not changed with Brent. You need a leader who can communicate. I live in Holyoke where the schools have horrible stereotypes of being really rough awful schools but I met the administration and I absolutely love the high school admin and they run a much tougher school. I would feel safer sending my kid to Holyoke school because at least I would know that the staff and admin truly cares and wants to protect my child. There are rough kids in those schools that come from really tough backgrounds and there is a lot of disrespect and rude children just like at PVPA and every other school but I know damn well that that school cares about my kid and would communicate with me anything that they are concerned about and if I'm concerned they would say hey Mrs. Judd I hear you and we're going to work together to solve this problem because we care about your kid.

III. Head of School Report

A. General Report and Updates

Brent acknowledged that a student board members received the West Region student of the year award from the National Honors Society. Brent shared that things are moving forward in providing bus transportation for everyone. In February, our amendment was approved which changes the size of our region which allows us to move forward. We have to get a transportation plan approved by the board and submit it to the department.

This includes a new transportation policy, updates to the enrollment policy and the plan itself including how we will be financing this will wind up being a savings every year after reimbursement that we will now be eligible for under the new plan. 15 buses, that cost less. Stops will be no more than a mile and a half from every student's home that wants to access it. Likely within a 1/4 mile of every home.

Brent shared a presentation with data re: years of available data of student enrollment and withdrawals and also compared to other charter schools. He also shared historical information about PVPA.

B. New Arts Program

Director of Arts, Frank shared really exciting technology evolution at PVPA. A new Arts program featuring a new curriculum of Technical Design and Production Department is launching in the 2025-2026 school year. It will involve full time film, lighting and sound, stage design, stage management, sound design engineering and more!

IV. Internal Stakeholders

A. Staff Report

Teacher Tim expressed their appreciation to the administration for opening up the lines of communication. Things are starting to improve and move forward. 10 years of teaching and he loves it. The challenges along the way, it is difficult.

It is MCAS season and performance season! Tim asked for continued support of the students through the rest of the year.

B. Student Reports

Student Rep shared that students are working very hard on all end of year shows.

V. President's Business

A. President's Report

Latrina gave an update on the virtual meeting law to continue having an option for virtual meetings. It has been renewed for 2 more years by the MA Charter Assoc. We are getting more information as to what that means in other policy and guidelines and conducting virtual meetings related to open meeting law etc. When you get emails about trainings etc, try your best to attend.

Latrina attended the MA Charter schools laws meeting and she has some information to share and need to get some clarity on what to share. We are looking at who else is being appointed to be a part of DESE and that we have people who are looking at the best interest of public Charter schools. The funding we receive from the state for facilities is extremely lower than public schools collectively in the state. Also looking at other funding that we need. We are continuing to lift our voices in support of public charter schools.

B. Board On Track Contract Renewal

Our Board on Track Contract ends on June 30th so we need to renew a 3 year contract for \$12,995 per year.

C. Friends of PVPA

Kiara shared her board work with the Friends of PVPA and introduced Maggie who shared information and updates of the Friends of PVPA.

VI. 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 8:06 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
LATRINA DENSON