

APPROVED



Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter Public School

Minutes

Board of Trustee Meeting

October 2025

Date and Time

Tuesday October 21, 2025 at 6:00 PM

Location

15 Mulligan, Dr. South Hadley, MA 01075

Trustees Present

Ann Dargie Gladd, Esq, Azizah Yasin, Emily Whitebear, LATRINA DENSON, Neil Hede, Thomas Roy

Trustees Absent

Matthew Schmidt, Esq

Ex Officio Members Present

Brent Nielsen, Marcy Conner

Non Voting Members Present

Brent Nielsen, Marcy Conner

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 Oct 21, 2025 at 6:10 PM.

C. Read the Mission Statement

D. Finance Committee

The Finance Committee provided an update on the current budget status, a look ahead at state funding changes, and the necessary relationship between the Board and the Friends of PVPA (FoPVPA).

I. Current Financial Status and Budget Timeline

Budget Finalization: The school is approximately three-quarters of the way through the budget cycle. Final numbers are contingent upon end-of-year figures.

Enrollment and Tuition: Budget fluctuations are normal because tuition dollars follow the students based on their community of origin. School districts retain the right to adjust their budgets up until **December** of every year, impacting the school's budget which is formulated in April/May.

Enrollment Report: The first official enrollment report for **October 1st** is being compiled for DESE, which will dictate adjustments to funding over the next few months.

Conservative Budgeting: The committee stated they attempt to budget conservatively, which has historically been successful.

II. State Funding Outlook (Fiscal Year 2027)

Student Opportunity Act (SOA) Sunset: The committee highlighted that Fiscal Year 2026 marks the final year of the **seven-year rollout** of the Student Opportunity Act, which dictates the school's tuition receipts.

Funding Commission: A law has been passed to create a state commission that will make recommendations regarding the **future funding formula** for schools across the Commonwealth. The HoS (Brent Nielsen) attended a meeting in Boston to represent charter schools in this discussion.

Financial Challenges in Public Schools: The state is currently seeing "flux" in school funding. Traditional public schools are facing tighter FY27 budgets due to **declining enrollments** and difficulties in "right-sizing."

Fundraising Trend: Public school business managers are now receiving training on **fundraising**—a task traditionally not necessary for public schools—indicating impending financial efficiencies or constraints across the sector.

Advocacy: The Board will continue to monitor state-level discussions and rely on the advocacy efforts of the **Massachusetts Charter Public School Association (MCPSA)**.

III. Friends of PVPA (FoPVPA) and Fundraising

Friends Update: Marcy Conner informed the Friends organization about the state funding landscape and the new emphasis on fundraising for public schools.

Leadership Change: The President of the Friends, **Maggie Solis**, resigned last week.

Need for Collaboration: There is a recognized need for increased collaboration and communication between the Board and the Friends regarding fundraising priorities.

Historical Context of FoPVPA: The HoS noted that **Bob Brick**, one of the original founders of PVPA and co-director for 15 years (1996-2011), will attend an upcoming Friends meeting to provide historical perspective.

Original Purpose: The Friends organization was created *before* the school (circa 1995) to serve as a nonprofit entity to secure **financing from large donors** for the founding of the arts-focused charter school, particularly at a time when traditional public schools were eliminating arts programs.

Bob Brick's attendance is intended to refocus the Friends on their core historical purpose: **fundraising**.

IV. Action Item

Audit Vote Required: The Finance Committee reported that a vote is required to accept the audit for the years ending **June 30, 2025 and 2024**.

Motion Request: A call was made for a motion to accept the audit.

Azizah Yasin made a motion to Move that we accept the audit for years ending June 30, 2025, and 2024.

Neil Hede seconded the motion.

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

Roll Call

Neil Hede	Aye
Ann Dargie Gladd, Esq	Aye
Thomas Roy	Aye
Emily Whitebear	Aye
LATRINA DENSON	Aye
Azizah Yasin	Aye
Matthew Schmidt, Esq	Absent

E. Approve Minutes

Azizah Yasin made a motion to approve the minutes from Board of Trustee Retreat 2025: Sunday, July 27, 2025 on 07-27-25.

Neil Hede seconded the motion.

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

Roll Call

Neil Hede	Aye
LATRINA DENSON	Aye
Ann Dargie Gladd, Esq	Aye
Thomas Roy	Aye
Emily Whitebear	Aye
Matthew Schmidt, Esq	Absent
Azizah Yasin	Aye

F. Approval of Minutes

Azizah Yasin made a motion to Move that, yeah, okay, so then we move to accept that the executive session minutes be included. March, 4, minutes with the correction, deleting Grace, name twice Executive Session Meeting For Board of Trustee Members on 03-04-25.

Neil Hede seconded the motion.

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

Roll Call

Ann Dargie Gladd, Esq	Aye
Matthew Schmidt, Esq	Absent
Thomas Roy	Aye
Emily Whitebear	Aye
Neil Hede	Aye
Azizah Yasin	Aye
LATRINA DENSON	Aye

G. Approval of Minutes

Azizah Yasin made a motion to Move to accept the executive session minutes from March 11th.

Neil Hede seconded the motion.

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

Roll Call

Azizah Yasin	Aye
LATRINA DENSON	Aye
Thomas Roy	Aye
Ann Dargie Gladd, Esq	Aye
Emily Whitebear	Aye
Neil Hede	Aye
Matthew Schmidt, Esq	Absent

Azizah Yasin made a motion to Move to amend the March 11th minutes to include the attached minutes.

Neil Hede seconded the motion.

The discussion confirmed that the reason for attaching specific correspondence (letters submitted during a past public comment period) to the minutes is to cure an Open Meeting Law (OML) defect.

Technicality: While the letters were previously included by attachment to the agenda, the state (DESE) instructed that they must be officially attached directly to the minutes to fully comply with OML regulations.

Context of Letters: The letters were submitted by individuals (such as Trisha Hede) who yielded their time in the public comment session so that their statement could be entered in full via the letter. This process made the letters part of the official meeting record, necessitating their formal attachment to the minutes.

Bias Concern: A Board member raised a concern that selectively attaching letters (if there were other unattached letters with differing viewpoints) could create a perception of bias, though in this specific instance, no other written comments were submitted in lieu of speaking.

II. Future Public Comment Policy and Minutes Standards

Future Policy Development: The Board President (Latrina Denson) intends to work with consultant Julia Bowen to develop additional guidelines regarding public correspondence.

Proposed Guidelines: The goal is to establish a policy stating that the Board welcomes all letters but will not necessarily bring them to a public meeting for all people to see.

Public Record Clarification: Trustee Neil Hede clarified that any letter sent to the PVPA Board of Trustees is considered a public record and cannot be deleted, regardless of whether it is formally read or attached to minutes.

Standard for Recording Public Comment:

Counsel and the Charter School Association advise that minutes only need to summarize the substance of what was said during public comment.

It is necessary to acknowledge the name of the speaker (adult or minor) but not required to record the discussion with "minutia."

Recording as Verification: The Board noted that the new practice of recording meetings will serve to solve potential disputes, as the recording can be referenced to verify the exact statements made during public comment.

Next Step: The next item of business is likely the motion to formally amend the minutes to incorporate the required attachments, or moving to a new agenda item.

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

Roll Call

Ann Dargie Gladd, Esq	Aye
Thomas Roy	Aye
LATRINA DENSON	Aye
Azizah Yasin	Aye
Emily Whitebear	Aye
Matthew Schmidt, Esq	Absent
Neil Hede	Aye

Azizah Yasin made a motion to To amend the following minutes to include the executive sessions minutes for: May 13, 2025.

Neil Hede seconded the motion.

[May 13 Minutes with amendments linked here](#)

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

Roll Call

Neil Hede	Aye
Emily Whitebear	Aye
Azizah Yasin	Aye
Ann Dargie Gladd, Esq	Abstain
LATRINA DENSON	Aye
Thomas Roy	Aye
Matthew Schmidt, Esq	Absent

II. Public Comment

A. Brief comments and/or questions welcomed.

No Public Comment

III. Head of School Report

A. Head of School

Brent Nielsen: Welcomed new members and provided an update on what performances and activities, the school climate, the renewal process, and lastly plans for celebrating the 30th anniversary of PVPA. as shared below:

Timeline and School Climate: The speaker welcomed new trustees and acknowledged the late October timing, which is a difficult period for high school students as they transition from the excitement of the start of the year to the pressure of homework and grades (mid-semester grades close on Friday).

Recent Events:

PTO Soup Night: A successful event for mostly new families (students and parents).

Cultural Performances: The Latinx Student Union and Afrobeat dance class performed at the Holyoke Courts Cultural Celebration. A group of musicians is scheduled to perform at the Eastern Hampshire District Court.

Upcoming Events: Oktoberfest and the Senior Class Jazz Cafe Fundraiser (penultimate event) are scheduled for Friday.

Staff Development Focus:

A Curriculum Day is scheduled for Monday, featuring an in-person workshop with **Dr. Pamela Jones** from the **Educators Freedom Dreaming Collective**.

The year-long PD focus is on **restorative practices, implicit bias, and institutional racism**, including coaching sessions for the School Culture Team and administrative team.

Performance Season: November marks the start of the production season, beginning with the largest event, the **Fall Dance Showcase**, which involves over 125 students and sells out capacity over two nights.

30th Anniversary: The school is celebrating its **30th year**. A committee is being formed to plan celebrations, with over 15 people interested in participating.

II. Charter Renewal and State Mandates

Charter Renewal Visit: The renewal visit for the school's charter was held early, on **September 9th**, and was reported as going "swimmingly."

Renewal Timeline:

January 6: Receive the draft summary review from DESE.

January 13: Deadline for factual corrections.

January 16: Deadline for a formal response (if necessary).

MCAS/Graduation Requirements: A commission is exploring a new standard for high school graduation following the removal of MCAS as a graduation requirement. The current proposal involves state exams at the end of core 9th and 10th-grade courses (ELA, Algebra, Geometry, Lab Science).

III. Facility and Student Culture Discussion

Transportation Success: The implementation of a new, **free transportation program** has been highly successful after five years of work.

Buses increased from 3 to 16, reducing crowding and improving student behavior.

75% of students now arrive by bus in a smooth 15-minute window, and afternoon dismissal is completed quickly (by 3:25 PM).

The change has improved attendance and opened access for students to after-school activities.

Diversity and Middle School Unrest: The school is grappling with the challenges of a significantly changing student demographic (now ~54% white), which has led to tension and conflict, particularly in the middle school.

The administration is addressing recent unrest, dysregulation, and conflicts among students.

A recent optional staff meeting was held to gather input on the impact of current issues.

Staffing & Strategy:

The school is actively hiring an **Assistant Dean of Students** (a new position created this year) and another key staff member following abrupt departures.

The administration plans to continue working with involved students/families and hold **listening sessions** with staff and parents by grade level to better understand their experiences and concerns.

The board is considering general surveys for families and students to gather broader feedback on their experience with administration, discipline, and special education services.

IV. Action Items (Policies for Approval)

Title IX Policy: A revised Title IX policy was introduced for approval, aligning the school's procedures with the latest regulatory changes (reverting to pre-2020 standards).

Administration of Medication Policies: The Administration of Medication Policies for 2025-2027 were introduced for approval.

Next Step: I can provide the exact language for the motions to approve the Title IX and Administration of Medication Policies, if needed.

B. Title IX Policy Approval

Azizah Yasin made a motion to Move ot approve the Sexual Harassment Discrimination updated Policy.

Neil Hede seconded the motion.

[Sexual_Harassment_Discrimination_Policy_updated_9_1_2025_.docx_1_.pdf](#)

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

Roll Call

LATRINA DENSON	Aye
Neil Hede	Aye
Azizah Yasin	Aye
Thomas Roy	Aye
Ann Dargie Gladd, Esq	Aye
Matthew Schmidt, Esq	Absent
Emily Whitebear	Aye

C. Administration of Medications Policy for 2025-2027

Azizah Yasin made a motion to Move to approve the Administration of Medications Policy 2025-2027.

Neil Hede seconded the motion.

[Draft_Administration_of_Medications_Policy_2025-2027__1_.pdf](#)

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

Roll Call

LATRINA DENSON	Aye
Emily Whitebear	Aye
Neil Hede	Aye
Azizah Yasin	Aye
Matthew Schmidt, Esq	Absent
Thomas Roy	Aye
Ann Dargie Gladd, Esq	Aye

IV. Board Committee Reports

A. Governance Committee

DESE Board Member Approval: The Chair reported that the delay in approving new board members by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) was a result of a **statewide mass approval process**, confirming it was not due to any lapse on the part of the school.

Board Retreat and Training: A board retreat is scheduled for **November 18th** (in-person and via Zoom), which will serve as a training session led by **Julia** and will likely cover essential governance topics.

Streamlined Onboarding: The leadership is planning a more **streamlined, ongoing onboarding** and education process for all board members. The goal is to provide continuous support and "friendly reminders" on critical regulations due to the complexity of rules like **Open Meeting Law**, **Conflict of Interest**, and bylaws.

Governing Documents Review: The Governance Committee plans to review and update selected policies and procedures, specifically addressing a disconnect between the language in the **Student Handbook** and the **bylaws** regarding grievance processes. The goal is to make guidance more accessible and clearer than just a link.

Complaint/Grievance Templates: The Chair and Vice Chair discussed receiving templates from **Robert Carpenter** (Board President of the Massachusetts Charter Public School Association, MCPSA) for clearly defined **complaint and grievance submission processes**. These templates outline the proper sequence for submitting a complaint (e.g., talk to the teacher first, then administrator, etc., before submitting to the Board), which will help ensure the Board receives concise and actionable information.

II. Recruitment and Community Engagement

Recruitment Strategy: Recruitment of new board members is a priority. The Chair emphasized the importance of board member **visibility** and **energetic disposition** at school events (e.g., PTO Soup Night, productions) to attract interest.

The Chair noted success at the PTO Soup Night, where two parents (one an AmeriCorps volunteer) expressed interest in exploring board membership.

Community Education: A core goal for the year is to **educate the community** about the board's role and responsibilities (what it **is** and **is not**) to set clear expectations and address misperceptions, misunderstandings, and potential mistrust.

Communication Protocol: The board needs to clarify the protocol for handling emails directed to the board (the "gray area"), seeking guidance from DESE and the MCPSA to establish accurate communication procedures.

Governance Committee Quorum: The Chair noted that the Governance Committee was unable to meet last month due to a lack of quorum but anticipates being able to move forward with committee assignments and business now.

V. President's Business

A. Board Retreat, November 18th 4-8pm

Board Retreat Planning and Governance Focus

I. Board Training and Resource Use

External Consulting Value: The President emphasized on the value of advice received from **Robert Carpenter** of the Massachusetts Charter Public School Association (MCPSA), noting it is often more useful than guidance from DESE, which is restricted from providing legal advice.

MCPSA Funded Retreat: The upcoming Board Retreat, scheduled for **November 18th** (starting at 4:00 PM), will be led by **Julia Bowen**, a consultant. This training is being covered by designated funds from the school's membership fees to the MCPSA, highlighting a practical use of the \$25,000 annual fee.

Attendance at MCPSA Trainings: The speaker encouraged board members to attend MCPSA-sponsored trainings whenever possible (even for short periods, and if available remotely/via recording), citing the value of learning from peers at other schools.

II. Retreat Logistics and Objectives

Logistics: The retreat is scheduled for **4:00 PM** at the current meeting location.

Catering: The plan is to order food (e.g., pizza, calzones, salads, and dessert) from a local vendor (Family Pizza). **Action Item:** Board members are requested to communicate any **dietary restrictions** to Marci (via email or paper form).

Governance Focus: The primary goal of the retreat is to establish a strong, **sustainable structure** for the board to ensure continuity of work regardless of external disruptions.

Key discussion areas include:

Addressing specific **governance questions**.

Improving **board cohesion**.

Clarifying the **roles and rules** of the board.

Navigating **challenging situations**.

Developing **clear and concise communication and internal procedures** (to supplement bylaws).

Upcoming Initiatives: The retreat is intended to facilitate momentum for significant upcoming work:

Strategic Planning: Organizing board members into working groups for strategic planning.

Assessment Cohort: Creating a small working group to develop a community assessment/survey instrument (as previously suggested).

Bargaining: Preparing for the upcoming bargaining cycle.

Succession Planning: Solidifying the board's succession plan, which was incomplete in the previous year.

III. Board Communication and Policy Approval

Executive Session: The board will need to enter into **Executive Session** during the retreat to review prior executive minutes. The board will follow up with legal counsel, **Mark Terry**, regarding this process.

Attendance Confirmation Protocol: The speaker stressed the need for board members to confirm attendance promptly, using multiple methods (Board on Track, calendar invites, and direct messaging), acknowledging the volunteer nature of the role.

Rationale: Timely confirmation is critical for managing quorum and ensuring time-sensitive policies can be approved (e.g., policies recently received must be approved by the end of the month, meaning a final opportunity for a vote is likely next week).

B. Charter School Renewal Meeting with DESE

Brent provided an update for DESE, which summarizes the visit.

C. Confirming meeting attendance

Confirmation Importance: Latrina thanked those who confirmed their attendance and stressed the critical need for **timely confirmation** from all board members for future meetings.

Methods of Communication: Multiple methods will be used to notify members of meetings, including **Board on Track confirmations, calendar invites** (as previously used by predecessor David), and additional messages/calls.

Planning and Volunteer Time: Because the board is composed of volunteers and all members are busy, advance notice of attendance/absence is necessary to ensure meetings are productive and that the board utilizes its time effectively.

II. Time-Sensitive Policy Approvals

Policy Urgency: Attendance is particularly crucial when the board has **time-sensitive policies** that require a vote.

Example Given: The policies introduced at the current meeting must be approved by the **end of the month**. This means that the window for approval is tight, potentially leaving only the following week to finalize the vote.

Contingency Planning: If a lack of quorum prevents a vote, the board must be prepared to look at alternative times to ensure the necessary policies are approved on schedule.

D. Committee Recommended Assignments

New Member Absence: Trustee Matt was absent due to a death in his family.

Resignation Acknowledged: It was acknowledged that the recent resignation of Trustee Grace (who previously served as Clerk). Grace, an alumna of the school, cited persistent conflicts with her Town Clerk duties in Shutesbury, preventing her from consistently attending meetings. Her service and expertise, particularly with Open Meeting Law, were praised.

II. Committee Assignments (2025-2026)

Based on interview conversations, the leadership presented a draft slate of committee assignments, with the option for any Trustee to join additional committees or request a change.

Committee Chair Assigned Trustees Notes

Finance

Neil (Treasurer)

Tom: Tom was assigned based on prior experience.

Governance

Aziza, Anne, Tom

Focused on governance, bylaws, and continuous education.

Friends of PVPA

N/A (Liaison Role)

Emily

Emily volunteered for the Liaison position, which is noted as being in the original bylaws but requiring renewed emphasis and sustained focus. Role involves reporting to the Board and communicating Board priorities (especially fundraising) to the Friends.

Head of School Support/Evaluation

N/A (TBD)

Speaker (Chair), Aziza, Matt

Ad hoc committee responsible for the Head of School's review.

Negotiation

N/A (Ad Hoc)

Speaker (Chair) - Latrina, and Aziza

Responsible for upcoming negotiations with staff; includes support from Brandon, Marcy, and the school attorney.

Infrastructure and Facilities

John (Community Member)

Neil (Volunteer)

Discussion ensued: The committee currently includes heavy staff representation. While a community member (John) acts as Chair, the committee needs an active Trustee to serve as liaison or member. Neil volunteered for this committee.

III. Committee Composition Discussion (Infrastructure and Facilities)

Committee Make-up: The committee currently includes community members (e.g., John, as Chair) and several staff members (including facilities personnel, teachers like Martin Bridge, and administration/staff like Marcy Martin).

Board Representation Need: The committee needs active Board of Trustee representation to ensure liaison and accountability, as a Trustee previously held this role. Neil volunteered to join the committee.

Committee Size and Effectiveness: The HoS noted that the current number of members (seven) often makes it difficult to achieve quorum and make decisions, indicating a need to potentially readjust the composition.

Head of School Support/Evaluation Committee: Scheduled to meet **next Wednesday**.

Finance Committee: Scheduled to meet **next Thursday**.

VI. Closing Items

A. Adjourn Meeting

Azizah Yasin made a motion to Move that we adjourn.

Neil Hede seconded the motion.

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

Roll Call

Thomas Roy Aye

LATRINA DENSON Aye

Neil Hede Aye

Emily Whitebear Aye

Azizah Yasin Aye

Ann Dargie Gladd, Esq Aye

Matthew Schmidt, Esq Absent

There being no further business to be transacted, and upon motion duly made, seconded and approved, the meeting was adjourned at 8:00 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
LATRINA DENSON

Documents used during the meeting

None