APPROVED

Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter Public School

Minutes

Board of Trustee Meeting

January 2026

Date and Time
Tuesday January 13, 2026 at 6:00 PM

Location
15 Mulligan Drive
South Hadley, MA 01075 or
via zoom at Zoom Account below

https://us02web.zoom.us/meetings/84358817954/invitations?signature=GhoI-QbxafibRDCLo8p4GE5P9Lzz8_w1eF4lOo9vQ6k

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Trustees Present
Ann Dargie Gladd, Esq (remote), Azizah Yasin, Emily Whitebear (remote), LATRINA DENSON, Matthew Schmidt, Esq (remote), Neil Hede, Thomas Roy

Trustees Absent
None

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 Jan 13, 2026 at 6:08 PM.

C. Read The Mission Statement

Azizah Yasin reads the mission statement.

D. Approve Minutes

Thomas Roy made a motion to approve the minutes from Board of Trustee Meeting on 12-09-25.
Neil Hede seconded the motion.
Perspective Student Representative Alex Solis pointed out that the minutes from the December 9th meeting under the President's business repeated information multiple times.
Thomas Roy amended the motion to approve the minutes, deleting the duplicity. Neile Hede Second.

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

Roll Call

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

Azizah Yasin made a motion to approve the minutes from Special Board Meeting on 11-21-25.
Thomas Roy seconded the motion.
During the discussion of the minutes on November 21, 2025, Azizah Yasin Azizah Yasin moved to approve amended minutes to reflect the board's intent to not return to public session by adding language at the end of the sentence as follows:

Azizah Yasin made a motion to Move to go into executive session to discuss and vote on executive session minutes from March 26, 2025: “Executive session under G.L. c. 30A, section 21(a)(3) to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining (collective

bargaining with UAW, Local 2322) or litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public body and the chair so declares, **and not return to public meeting.**
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

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

II. Public Comment

A. Brief comments and/or questions welcomed.

The President opened up with Public Comment by reading the following statement:
The Public Comment is a time to for us to hear directly from the community. We genuinely value every opinion, as your feedback is crucial to our work as we provide service and support to PVPA students, families, and staff. Please note that the Board generally does not respond directly during Public Comment to ensure that we give full consideration to each issue before formulating an official response.

When asked if there are any comments from the public no public comments were shared

III. Business

A. Open Meeting Law Complaint

The President shared that she received three OML complaints,
Emily Pfeiffer on November 23, 2025 and Sasha Viands on December 3rd.
I have included them in your packet. I conferred with Council, who indicated that when receiving an OML complaint, it needs to be put before the board. The counsel has recommended that the board authorize the Board President, with the assistance of counsel, reply on behalf of the Board. The board president asked to include the Vice-President and, in doing so, change the recommendation to "the board authorize the Board President and/ or the Vice-President, with the assistance of counsel, to reply on behalf of the board".

In speaking with counsel, he advised that he did not believe the complaints had merit, with the possible exception of the timing of the agenda posting for the 11/21/25 meeting, and that the president would look to see whether the copy of the agenda included with the complaint was the original posting or an amendment. If we made an error, we will acknowledge that. Otherwise, counsel indicated the complaints do not appear to have merit and that we respond accordingly.

The Board President asked for a motion to authorize the Board President and/ or Board Vice-President with the assistance of counsel, to reply on behalf of the Board.

Several members commented that Board on Track has been experiencing issues today with pdf downloads of the documents. All board members were able to review the complaints.

Ann Dargie Gladd, Esq made a motion to Authorized Latrina Denson and/or Azizah Yasin to reply with assistance from legal counsel to the November 21st & 23rd open meeting law complaints.
Matthew Schmidt, Esq seconded the motion.
Neil Hede asked whether Board members will be informed before the response is issued. The Board will be informed of the response. There will have to be a follow-up with legal counsel based on the timing of the response. Legal counsel will have to respond to the clerk in the Attorney General's Office, and this is time-sensitive.
The board **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

Roll Call

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

Thomas Roy made a motion to Authorize Latrina Denson and Azizah Yasin to respond with legal counsel to Dec 3 OML complaint.
Neil Hede seconded the motion.
It was inquired during the discussion by Thomas Roy if legal counsel has discussed that recordings are not an official record of meetings, but are supplemental in nature, and confirmed that legal counsel has been assisting in the understanding.
The board **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

Roll Call

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

IV. Student Representatives

A.

Student Representative Reports

The Board is excited to finally have Perspective Student Representatives who will have to be approved by DESE from the Student Council.

The president asked Head of School, Brent Nielsen to introduce each student.
There are four representatives, one from each high school grade level:
9th grade - Richter Lautzenheiser
10th grade - Danicka Pease
11th - Ethan Burt
12 -Alex Solis

Head of School Nielsen also shared that the new Student Activities Coordinator, KJ Reese, will be working with the Student Council.

The President shared that the board would be providing training to the new student representatives to help them understand their role as board members, while also providing professional development skills, which will help them when they graduate.

All student representatives who were present were asked to talk more about themselves, their grade, art, and anything else they wanted to share.
Alex Solis, Class 2026, and Danicka Pease, Class 2028, were both present.

Introductions:
Alex - Class of 2026 - Visual arts/tech theater interest. Interested in music and visual arts as well. Alex shared that the senior class is finishing the semester, and some are late in submitting college applications. He also shared that students are working with KJ Reese on the Jazz Cafe, March 27th, as a fundraiser, and that the Senior prom and trip are in planning stages.

Danicka Pease - Class of 2028 - Visual arts major, and takes pictures at the shows. Danicka shared that students are busy planning the 9/10 dance and that the Second semester is about to start.

The Board shared that they are hoping that the students feel this is a worthwhile leadership experience. Have been missing the students and their voice.

V. Head of School Report

A. PVPA General Updates

Brent Nielsen, Head of school shared the following report:
PVPA is heading into the last week of the fall semester, which includes a 4-day weekend for students coming (MLK Day and Prof Development). 7 new students staring at new

semester - 3 seventh graders did Fastbridge testing today. 4 high schoolers coming in tomorrow for orientation.

He shared that he is excited about the changes made in scheduling - great improvements - increase in student satisfaction, and receiving them before departure at the end of the school year. This year, ahead of schedule: 2026-2027 calendar already approved, scheduling work starting, evaluating overcrowding, and seat count. The PowerSchool schedule for 2026-2027 can start as soon as auditions are completed in early May. Well on track to meet goals with scheduling.

The recent curriculum day worked on Arts Integration and culture work. Arts integration is being worked on, and staff are providing exciting work for students. During the curriculum day, Petula did ceramics, and the staff responded well.

Productions - MS Beatlejuice Jr - amazing work by all involved - AJ, Mike Finke, and the cast - everyone! New ticketing platform where patrons buy online ahead of the show; both shows were sold out. Amazing show! Donations that have purchased equipment in the theater have also had a big impact on the quality of the productions. Fall visual arts show last week - see work of kids I don't usually see - amazing talent. Raised funds for arts supplies - all of the work and support to transform the theater into a gallery is incredible. This week is the Fall Music Showcase - Friday night is the non-auditioned ensembles, and Saturday is the auditioned ensembles. The talent is amazing. In the near future is the WOFA show on February 6th and 7th.

Something new being planned is our 30th year celebration fundraising gala -on April 12th, there will be a formal event at Wycoff Country Club. The festivities will include the Amherst Jazz Orchestra, a cocktail hour with PVPA students playing, some Jazz history (April is Jazz history month), dance lessons (big band music/dance), silent auction - We will be seeking donations. Save the date, coming soon.

B. Review for PVPA Charter Term 2021-2026 update

Head of School Brent Nielsen provided the following summary overview and shared the document which is attached below:

Summary of Review - Linked Here and included in the documents.

The Summary Of Review: data for accountability measures/plan, student achievement, financial data and site visit. All information compiled into 42 page document - today was the deadline for factual corrections and a formal response due by Friday if so choose. SOR is submitted to the Commissioner of Ed for decision: renew, renew with conditions, or non-renew. Shared with MCPSA for review - a formal response is not necessary, and their summation was that there will likely be an unconditional renewal.

The first round of renewals for the new Commissioner - no reference for what he will focus on. Full draft cannot be shared publicly, but will share an outline of the report:
1. Renewal history; amendments, demographics (do we have a diverse population?)
2. Faithfulness to charter - mission and design key elements
3. Recruitment - ELE learner is still low.; although the Spanish-speaking student population has increased. The most significant population in our region are Spanish speaking - have concentrated efforts at these events. The ELE student population has not changed.
4. Faithfulness to Charter - mission & design elements - meets expectation
5. Access & equity - meets expectations
6. Retention rate - students who leave after a year and during the year. 25% after 8th grade do leave -intentional HS plans other than PVPA.
7. Rate of suspensions - meet -

Emily Niemann, Dean of Students has expressed concern over dis-proportionality of special education and low-income students being suspended. DESE has not pointed this out, however we will be taking a further look at the data.

8. Compliance - not rated.

In compliance with monitoring reviews - Program resolution systems (special education and civil rights) - charter term 2021 - 2025 has received 11 complaints. 3 were not in authority, and 8 were fully investigated. PVPA was found in compliance on 5 of the 8 complaints (includes 4 complaints filed last year for the same issue - dismissed). Corrective actions for 3 complaints were made, and PVPA is in 100% compliance. This is exceptional compared to other schools - we found another school that had 27 corrective action complaints.

9. Dissemination - PVPA must share its innovation with other schools - no dissemination with schools in South Hadley - this was not clear in the law.
10. Academic Program success - not requiring assistance - moderate progress towards goals - MCAS scores generally above state average. We know we are struggling with Math & Science. All schools are struggling since the pandemic; it is hard to recruit and retain math, science, and special education teachers. Looking at how to attract highly qualified teachers.
11. Chronic absenteeism - state has not flagged but needs improvement
12. Organizational viability - not fully in compliance with OML. In general, the Board has met its work in supporting the school. All volunteer boards have issues - some grace from the community goes a long way - no one is acting in any intentional way to obscure anything. The Board has been working to continue training for members.
13. Accountability Plan Performance - next year, need a new accountability plan for the new charter term - met. Fell short in expectations in % of students attending college and graduating on time - pandemic hurt. The goal was to have 95% attending college - we hit 93%.
14. Finance - not much to say....green low risk, yellow moderate & red high risk. All green. Financial stability has been good for the last 13 years.
15. Evidence Gathered - classroom environments were conducive to learning in 16 out of 17 classrooms visited.

The full report will be available soon. The Commissioner's recommendation will be made by the end of the month. The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education is not required to vote if a clean renewal, but may choose to do so.

It was asked by the board if the classroom visits were preselected or random, and confirmed that the Classroom visits were random.

It was discussed and requested by the board to have the data to back up 8th grade retention info/assumption.

Nielsen also shared that although MCAS performance is effected by staff retention, another very important piece is attendance. Studies show that the students who do best on standardized testing are those without attendance issues.

The president shared that Head of School Nielsen and she discussed future opportunities to have a Board committee focused on data, and how the Board can support student achievement

Nelsen shared that the End of the month will begin bargaining for a new three-year contract - next meeting Board will need to appoint/authorize a bargaining committee.

VI. Officer and Committee Reports

A. Finance Committee Report

The Finance Committee Report was shared by Niel Hede and Marcy Conner, sharing that:
Overview from meetings: 2nd quarter financials are on track.
There is an established transportation fund until we get the reimbursement from the state.
Enrollment was down 5 students, and tuition was a little under budget. The above foundation rates are always in flux, and we keep an eye on them.

The MA state budget timeline was reviewed, as well as the cycle of tuition reporting over the four quarters of a year. The state timeline, with the final budget being settled in June, makes it hard for the Finance Committee to know what tuition will be when creating the budget in March/April. The Finance Committee has done very well with their conservative approach and has earned u all the green dots in the charter renewal. If it is not hard enough for forecasting tuition, the cycle of reporting provides changes throughout the year based on changing demographics. We truly do not know what our total tuition for the year is until mid-June (the end of our fiscal year).

The Student Opportunity Act, which made changes to the education funding formula, is coming to an end. There is maneuvering in the state right now to make changes to the foundation budget - some that could be detrimental to charter schools.

Board members asked for clarity regarding the Student Opportunity Act, which it was shared by Marcy Conner. The Student Opportunity Act was established in 2019 and went in effect in 2029 to increase the state's education funding system to provide resources for high-need districts, low-income, English learners, and students with disabilities.

Board members asked who the decision makers are who are making the changes. It was then shared that any changes will be bills that pass through state committees of the legislature - MCPSA is doing a lot of advocacy. It was shared that the Board needs to use caution in disseminating political information - it cannot advocate for a particular side of an issue.

B. Governance and Vice President Report

Vice President and Governance Committee Chair Azizah Yasin started her report by doing a recap of the retreat led by Julia Bowen.
VP Yasin discussed the importance of the board connecting with the school community. In addition, she shared that the President and Vice President are looking at additional board leadership trainings for board members, both in-person and virtual, and that she will defer to the President to share about upcoming training opportunities.
VP Yasin shared that we have had some challenges that we need to proactively address, including the clerk position and note-taking, and at the last meeting, she knows that there was a vote to have Board members rotate taking minutes or using recordings to transcribe. B

VP shared that the PVPA Board of Trustees Nomination Application has been updated and is now live.
Board recruitment is ongoing, and we are looking for skill sets in finance and/or with an education background.

VP Yasin reiterated the importance of Community outreach and encouraged the board to be on campus, attend productions, and get to know each other. Including volunteering with PTO, concessions, box office. VP Yasin is going to work with the governance committee to think of additional Board norms concerning accessibility and how we serve the school. and expressed the importance of sharing the attendance of productions by creating a calendar or asking people to let her know when they are going to attend a production. Some productions/events that can be attended include:
Open house - Jan 31st,
Sr last day - clap out - May 26th

June 3rd grad show
June 4th graduation
Sunday, May 17th - 30th anniversary celebration

Lastly, VP Yasin asked that the full board make the following events a priority:
(1) 30th Anniversary Gala (2) Graduation and/ or Grad Show

C. Friends of PVPA Update

Emily Whitebear, Board Liaison to the Friends of PVPA shared the following report:

Jess Robinson is the President and would like to attend a meeting. The FOPVA meeting talked about the CD investments and the companies that will be conducting studies/work for the building. Looking for a Treasurer for next year. QuickBooks/finance update and bank access for others. Trying to narrow down contracts for lighting - Artis & Environ - and HVAC. Form 990 deadline.

Whitebear shared that it was nice to share information and connect. A lot of work is taking place, also looking for members. Fundraising for larger targeted items - supporting building needs and the arts.

They are focusing on fundraising without disrupting PVPA fundraising to ensure that larger financial support is being sought.

There are currently three members - President Jess, Treasurer Fred, and Secretary Tonya. Fred is leaving at the end of the year. Desperately need members, operating on a bare minimum.

FOPVPA owns the building and is responsible for supporting the school with fundraising. Need lots of members to do the work - catching up after years of no activity. The Board asked for an updated set of bylaws, and it was noted that the updated Fall 2024 bylaws would be shared.

The board and Friends of PVPA would like to continue the discussion regarding how this Board supports the FOPVPA?

The president asked that she invite Jess Robinson to attend the next meeting, and we would add her to the agenda during the Friends of PVPA report.

D. President's Report

President Latrina Denson shared the following:

There are opportunities for training. The next training opportunity would be for the Board on Track and how to take minutes. This would be led by Brianna Stashkowski. Possible dates? 1/27, 2/3 & 2/24. Brianna Stashkowski. **February 24th had the most interest.**

Pres. Denson shared that she and VP Yasin met with Robert Carpenter about how to fill the void of not having a clerk. He provided two suggestions (1) Asking for a waiver from DESE (2) Paying a staff member or someone to take minutes.

Because we are waiting to have the new bylaws approved by DESE, he suggested that we follow up with DESE to see if we can get a waiver of our bylaws. The old bylaws say that you must be on the board for 1 year in order to be the clerk. The new bylaws have been changed to 6 months. VP Yasin has reached out to DESE, and we will work with Robert Carpenter to receive an answer from them.

Robert Carpenter also suggested that the board hire and pay a stipend for a staff member or someone to take minutes. This is the process that his board provides, and it has been the best process for them.
The Board President discussed the possibility of hiring a staff member with Head of School Nielsen, who is researching possible options.
In the meantime, we will continue to reach out to DESE regarding a waiver.

Pres. Denson announced a Fundraising Best Practices training for board members on January 15th at 12 pm. January 15th with MCPSA - Robert Carpenter.

Pres. Denson requested that the Governance Committee update the Board norms and discuss standard operating procedures to be placed on one document as an SOP for the board, based on the work with Julia Bowen, which were already agreed upon during our training

Pres. Denson discussed opportunities to appreciate the staff. The board discussed working with Emily' Whitebear's daughter, who owns a business as a baker, to provide cookies for staff on February 24th, and also do something for Teacher Appreciation on May 4th.

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 8:59 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Marcy Conner