

Renewal Inspection Report

Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter High School
Hadley, Massachusetts

Setting

Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter High School (PVPA) serves 264 students in grades 9-12 seeking a secondary education that provides opportunities to integrate high quality performing arts experiences with a rigorous academic program. Hadley is located in an intellectually and artistically vibrant area of Western Massachusetts, surrounded by Hampshire College, Amherst College, Smith College and the main campus of the University of Massachusetts. PVPA makes effective use of the academic and performing arts resources in the area to provide a rich experience for its students.

Demographically, the students attending Pioneer Valley mirror the surrounding area, arriving daily from over 50 towns and cities, some as far as a 40 minute ride away. The student's school day extends to 4:30 p.m., with primary academic classes scheduled in the morning, and performing arts programs filling the 2:30-4:30 p.m. time slot.

Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter High School has defined its mission to provide a diverse, creative performing arts program as well as a quality academic program. Students are expected to pursue excellence in the core academic curriculum as well as in a wide range of performing arts fields, from dramatics and stage design to video and sound production. PVPA intends its program to prepare students to "emerge with greater sense of self-esteem, a direction for their individual creativity, and an ability to successfully meet all challenges as a life long learner" (PVPA Mission Statement). The school's primary focus on the development of individual potential occurs within a strong 'learning community' context, providing support for students who display any of a number of Howard Gardner's "multiple intelligences."

The renewal inspection visit took place May 14-17, 2000, during the run of the school's major musical production for the year, *Cabaret*. The inspection team's introduction to the school began with attendance at the Sunday matinee. The findings from the full three-day inspection visit are presented on the following pages.

**Charter School Inspection Team
for the
Pioneer Valley Performing Arts
Charter High School**

Karen Laba, Lead Inspector

Dr. Laba spent thirteen years teaching science at the middle and high school levels prior to moving to higher education. For several years, she taught in the Science Department at Notre Dame College in Manchester, New Hampshire and supervised pre-service teachers at Notre Dame and at the University of New Hampshire. Dr. Laba has been a curriculum consultant for several projects, including USFIRST, Inc., helping develop both the Junior Invention Challenge Curriculum and the National Junior Robotics competition for middle school students. She served as Curriculum Development Coordinator for the Scientist as Humanist Project in Contoocook, New Hampshire, helping teachers develop classroom units to link the sciences and the humanities. Her doctoral dissertation examined influences on teachers' curricular choices in project-based science classrooms.

Michael Tatistcheff, Inspector

Mr. Tatistcheff is an Advanced Placement Calculus and Mathematics teacher at Northfield-Mount Hermon School, where he has taught for the last 20 years. He won that school's award for teaching excellence (voted by the students), as well as regional and national awards from the College Board and GTE. Mr. Tatistcheff has studied and taught mathematics in China and Australia, is a curriculum consultant to schools within the region, and has served on his local school committee.

Dr. Everett Barnes, Inspector

Dr Barnes is a co-owner and manager of RMC Research, a national research organization working in the fields of education, arts and culture, technology, media, community, and health. Dr. Barnes oversees a wide range of educational projects, including the evaluation of Comprehensive School Reform Designs, professional development for teachers and administrators, and post secondary education.

Cora Greer, Inspector

Ms. Greer has been a high school history teacher for over 30 years. She served as a consultant in U.S. History for the College Board and its Advanced Placement Program and received the College Board AP Recognition Award for the New England Region in 1993. She taught an ITV course for Maine Public Television titled, "Using Documents in the Teaching of History." Presently, Ms. Greer is an instructor at the University of Maine at Machias as well as an on-board lecturer in the History of Maine and the Maritimes for the American Canadian Caribbean Cruise Line.

Brian Smith, Inspector

Mr. Smith is founder and principal performer with Small World Educational Programs, a company that designs and delivers special event educational programs using the performing arts to enrich and enhance curriculum material. Program topics range from alcohol awareness to American history to Lyme disease prevention and literacy skills. He has a degree in history from the University of Massachusetts. He uses his juggling and performance talents in formal in-service programs to instruct teachers in ways to connect formal story telling grammar with early language development. He was the cofounder of Screaming With Pleasure Productions and has performed professionally with a number of regional theater groups.

Stephen Lake, Inspector and Monitor

Stephen Lake has taught in wide variety of schools in England. Originally qualified as a secondary school teacher for mathematics, he has taught all age groups from 3 years to 63 years. Mr. Lake has experience in teaching a wide range of subjects at the primary level and is a qualified swimming teacher. He has been responsible for running an Adult Education Center and organizing swimming instruction for adults in his local town. Mr. Lake has been the principal of both local authority control and grant maintained elementary schools in England. British local authority schools are comparable in governance structure to American district schools, and grant maintained schools are comparable to American charter schools. At present, Mr. Lake is a principal of Full Circle, a British inspection company that evaluates over 150 schools annually under the OFSTED system.

Renewal Findings

I. IS THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM A SUCCESS?

1. Students are articulate, enthusiastic, confident learners.

“I love it here. I’d rather be here than at home.” Grade 11 student

In interviews with students, visits to classes, conversations with parents and reviews of performing arts productions, it is clear that the students attending Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter High School come to school with energy and enthusiasm. Their eagerness is nurtured in challenging academic classes that expect students to reach rigorous goals, but which allow creative methods to emerge, often suggested by students themselves. Parents and students explain that PVPA teachers do “something” to encourage students to do more than the minimum. Students who describe themselves as ‘different’ describe feeling supported by the staff and appreciate the opportunity to revise less than satisfactory work until it meets acceptable standards. Students often initiate projects in academic classes and in the performing arts field, confident that their ideas will be heard and respected at every level.

Narrative references: 1, 6, 18, 26, 30

2. Students are offered a wide range of high quality performing arts courses and participate in them successfully.

PVPA depends on the wealth of professional performers in the region to staff a broad collection of performing arts classes. Drama, comedy, dance and music performance classes are provided on a regular basis. Production classes on stage design, costuming, direction, and technical aspects of an event provide experience in the backstage elements of public presentation. A shelf of videotapes provides evidence of the professionalism central to the performing arts program and to the success that results from combining natural talents with discipline and hard work.

Narrative references: 25, 31, 33, 39, 46

3. Student achievement in academic areas is often excellent.

Student scores on the Stanford 9 indicate a population with slightly above average achievement. MCAS scores indicate higher performance than the state average in English/ Language Arts and scores closer to the state mean in Mathematics, and Science and Technology. Important differences among student groups are evident, with the current seniors showing much higher proficiency than the class of 2001.

Standardized test scores for groups this small are unreliable over a broad range of evaluations. Instead, the team based its judgment on examinations of student work and observations of classroom performance and expectations. Creative and expository writing samples from a number of students are of high quality. Oral reports and spontaneous presentations indicate

students have strong facility and confidence with language. Fewer examples of exceptional skill in mathematics and science/technology were observed during the visit.

Narrative references: 7, 10, 15, 16, 21, 23, 31, 35

4. The school has a dedicated and talented team of teachers, many of whom perform at a high level.

In both the academic and the performing arts areas, PVPA is staffed with teachers who are passionate about their subject and committed to their students. Many teachers demonstrated great facility in accommodating student interests and needs ‘on the fly’ as classroom lessons unfolded. The level of energy and enthusiasm among some teachers rivaled that of the most lively students. Teachers’ actions speak louder than their words – many teachers spend hours offering extra help, guiding ‘revisions’ of unacceptable work, communicating with parents and constructing engaging lessons. The occasional dull teaching lesson was just that, occasional.

Narrative references: 7, 24, 26, 29, 45, 70, 76

5. Special needs student are full participants in the PVPA program.

One inspector noticed a Special Education Aide in a classroom but after 40 minutes’ class time was unable to determine which student was receiving her services. Integration of special services is seamless throughout the academic program. Teachers already provide small group instruction and individual pacing as needed, whether students are ‘identified’ or not. Special services personnel instruct teachers on strategies that assist not only the special needs student but all students. Special Education Aides also provide services in classes. The integration of these services is such that it is difficult to discern the student(s) with Individual education Plans. Performing arts classes are open to all students, with few modifications needed for identified IEP students because individual attention and support is provided to *all* students.

Narrative references: 25, 26, 27, 41, 85

6. The school does not have a common and consistent application of the standards and benchmarks.

There is general agreement among the Board of Trustees, administrators and faculty that PVPA’s academic standard is equivalent to a “B” in traditional schools. Many teachers make effective use of the standards and benchmarks for their subject, posting them prominently at the beginning of a lesson. However, criteria for measuring the level of student achievement of the benchmarks were quite varied. Teachers each offered their own understanding of “B” quality work, but there was no reliable exemplar to provide consistency across classes and within subject areas. Mathematics teachers use quiz and test scores, as do some science teachers. Infrequent opportunities to compare the level of difficulty among diverse assessment tools limits the usefulness of the standards and benchmarks system as an effective internal assessment measure.

Narrative references: 4, 5, 10, 11, 12, 22, 35, 36, 37, 38, 40, 41

II. IS THE SCHOOL A VIABLE ORGANIZATION?

1. PVPA has consistently full enrollment and a stable staff dedicated to the mission of the school.

Actual enrollment at PVPA in Spring, 2000 is at or very near that projected when the school received its charter. Student enrollment grew at the expected rate, with 74 students accepted each year in the entering class, and vacancies filled from the waiting list as upper class openings arose. Staff turnover has been modest, contributing to a strong, stable culture.

Narrative references: 7, 24, 27, 41, 47, 63

2. PVPA benefits from a strong, active board and sound financial planning and management practices.

The Board of Trustees maintains a policy-making and fiduciary role in the management of the school, as is appropriate. The school head and Academic Director manage day-to-day operations. A separate foundation has been formed to raise funds and coordinate projects associated with the long-term financial stability of Pioneer Valley. Members of the Board represent a broad range of expertise and an intricate network of connections to the greater Northampton arts community.

Narrative reference: 73

3. Current technology resources and use of technology impedes PVPA's ability to achieve its mission.

PVPA's mission calls for students to pursue 'excellence' in core academic areas as well as in the performing arts. One of the contemporary measures of excellence defined in MA curriculum frameworks and national content standards is student's proficiency in the use of relevant technology, particularly in mathematics and science, but also as a research tool and productivity tool in Social Studies and Language Arts. During our inspection, we saw little opportunity for students to practice using computers as integrated learning tools. In the technical areas of the performing arts program, limited equipment made it necessary for teachers to restrict student's hands-on use of essential tools.

Narrative references: 35, 50, 54, 57, 59, 60, 61

4. Teachers and students are coping imaginatively with the considerable problems posed by the condition and location of facilities.

One major classroom building is a ten-minute walk from the main building, so the administrator patrols, cell phone in hand, monitoring student passage from one location to the next. A crossing guard directs traffic to allow students to pass safely across a major road. High ceilings in the decades old main building are used to store boxes and little used office materials, with step

ladders nearby for access as needed. Parents, students, faculty and staff decorate cramped quarters with delightful examples of student work. The commitment of everyone at PVPA makes the available space workable with significant expenditure of creative and physical energy.

Narrative references: 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 62

5. Reliance on a few key individuals in leadership roles in administration, in academic areas, and in the performing arts risks the viability of the organization.

No one can minimize the amazing contribution of the two school leaders to the existence of Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter High School. Parents, students, teachers and Board members credit their dedication and devotion for bringing the school into existence and growing it into an impressive educational institution.

However, internal reviews initiated by the Board of Trustees and evidence noted by members of the PVPA community indicates that the number of tasks to be accomplished has grown along with the school. Teachers indicate a need for and interest in coordination and articulation of curriculum. Parent surveys reveal an interest in refining the ways the school communicates with them. Two new projects, the Odyssey program and Honors courses, require coordination and administration. Discussions of expanding the Visual Arts program suggest additional tasks requiring leadership attention within the organization. Dependence on a few key individuals to manage and maintain oversight at this stage in the school's development is unrealistic for the long-term viability of the school.

Narrative references: 43, 44, 63, 64, 65, 69, 73, 74, 81

III. IS THE SCHOOL FAITHFUL TO THE TERMS OF ITS CHARTER?

1. PVPA has created a community with a commonly held vision and a commitment to using the rigorous disciplined approach to the performing arts as a catalyst for achieving excellence in learning.

Each group we spoke with, parents, students, faculty, Board and administrators, cited a common understanding of the mission of Pioneer Valley: excellence in academics and in the performing arts. Students and their parents applied to attend PVPA because of the performing arts focus. Most of the performing arts classes required students to exhibit discipline, respect and professionalism in order to demonstrate excellence. Student's enthusiasm for the performing arts and the skills and habits learned in those classes are reinforced in the academic program, presenting a common expectation for excellence.

Narrative references: 13, 24, 27, 31, 33, 66, 67

2. Students make good use of the essential academic skills of critical and creative thinking to support learning in the performing arts. However, the vision to bring the performing arts skills into the classroom are in an early stage of development.

The original charter of PVPA sets as a goal "integrating critical and creative thinking in the arts into the academic area." We saw numerous examples of students using academic skills – script

analysis in drama class, writing, maintaining historical accuracy in set design and costumes -- integrated within the performing arts classes. But, as one academic teacher put it, “we don’t do much singing and dancing” in academic classes. One class used role-playing to simulate ancient cultural conflicts. Students reported writing songs to demonstrate knowledge of vocabulary. Oral presentations are a common teaching strategy, with few instances of reluctant speakers. Student’s enthusiasm for the performing arts feeds their desire to succeed at PVPA, and academic skills are supported in performing arts classes. However, the authentic integration of critical and creative skills acquired in the performing arts classes into the academic program does not seem to be fully understood or realized at this point in the school’s development.

Narrative references: 13, 27, 33

3. PVPA is nurturing a culture that requires students to take personal responsibility for their learning.

PVPA offers students an environment that invites initiative and personal action. Students capable and interested in advanced academic work can be dually enrolled in college courses, taking the regional bus to nearby classes. Within academic classes, we saw teachers providing supports but not answers to students struggling to devise solutions to complex problems. Students learning about the 1920s planned and produced a burlesque show in addition to the regular productions already on the calendar. The Paideia project, an interterm program, invites students to design mini-courses for in-depth exploration of topics of interest. Academic teachers encourage students to devise unique methods to demonstrate their understanding of important concepts.

Narrative references: 7, 6, 24, 30

4. The school’s high regard for individual differences creates an environment that promotes physical and emotional safety.

Many PVPA parents and students we spoke with describe themselves as “different.” They further explained that PVPA welcomes differences, that it allows diverse types of students to prosper and “blossom.” Home team time, a daily advisory period, matches small groups of students and staff for a variety of purposes. Individual teachers and both school administrators were mentioned as positive influences on a culture of acceptance and regard for one another.

Narrative references: 7, 8, 24, 30, 32, 66, 67, 68

IV. IF THE SCHOOL IS RENEWED, WHAT ARE ITS PLANS FOR THE FIVE YEARS OF THE NEXT CHARTER?

1. PVPA has a detailed and comprehensive plan for the next five years that addresses many of the areas for improvement noted in other parts of this report.

The PVPA Application for Charter Renewal outlines a thoughtful review of the school’s first charter term, and describes strategies to address areas needing improvement. Expanding the arts program to include music and the visual arts more fully will enhance the PVPA program. A portfolio assessment system has been designed to create a comprehensive and accurate portrait of

student achievement. Renewal of the school's original plans to extend its programs in the community represents a revival of an original ideal that distinguished PVPA from traditional schools.

2. The school's ambitious plans for a new facility are realistic.

We met no one during our visit who wasn't eagerly anticipating PVPAs eventual move to its own building and campus. Creation of a foundation charged with fund raising and capital planning distinct from the school allows PVPA to function within its current facilities while others attend to long-term goals. Land for the school has been purchased, and fruitful negotiations are under way to complete a funding package for the building. Help from a variety of influential supporters bolsters optimism that PVPA will have the facilities to meet its own standard of excellence by the 2002 school year.

Narrative reference: 75

3. The plans to strengthen the leadership and management structure of the school are encouraging but insufficient.

Current programs stretch the capacity of school leaders to manage and oversee operations, with little time left for planning and preparing for ambitious new programs. While the Board of Trustees has planned to add extra administrative staff, the responsibilities associated with these positions are not clearly defined. It seems unlikely that outsiders or newcomers could familiarize themselves with the existing culture in time to be effective. In the absence of a process to nurture leadership talents from within the organization, the long-term continuity of PVPA programs is of concern.

Narrative reference: 69

4. Plans to improve the evaluation of curricular programs and the effect of other elements of the organization on those programs are insufficiently systematic and rigorous.

The Internal Assessment Committee at PVPA has accumulated a wealth of material from many sources about school programs, parent satisfaction, faculty effectiveness and student performance. No systematic process is in place to corroborate the information already obtained, nor to update the data on a regular basis. It is unclear if planning and management decisions are based on reliable information. During our inspection, many ideas were mentioned to improve articulation of the standards and benchmarks across subject areas and grade levels, but there was little evidence as to the basis on which these ideas are founded or how planned changes would be evaluated. Credible and reliable information on student performance in the academic and the performing arts areas would support and enhance the coherence of the PVPA program.

Narrative references: 70, 71, 72, 83

I. Student

Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter High School expects students to “pursue excellence in the performing arts and the core curriculum.” There is recognition of Howard Gardner’s “multiple intelligences” as a guiding principle in the creation of a learning environment to foster individual growth and development. Classroom experiences are designed to require “creative and critical thinking and integration of information” in order to help students perform at the “highest academic level.” A comprehensive standards and benchmarks system provides the framework that guide student learning goals. Students have achieved academically, and their performance skills far exceed standard expectations.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND GOALS

1. The PVPA charter calls for the integration of the performing arts and academics. A guiding principle in the design of the school program is that the arts are central to education. School leaders cite research on the positive influence of creative expression on self-esteem. Teachers and parents cite instances where classroom activities have used “whatever makes students tick” as motivators to inspire them to achieve excellence in the academic and performing arts areas. PVPA has brought students to learning using their strong desire for the performing arts experience as an essential motivator.
2. The school uses the MCREL compendium of standards and benchmarks as the basis for its curriculum design. The MCREL document is a collection of standards from national education organizations in all academic areas as well as the arts. PVPA reports that subject area teachers have reviewed the MA Curriculum Frameworks and confirmed that the final set of standards used at the school meet the state’s expectations. A few teachers reported constructing their own standards to suit their curricular needs when an appropriate MCREL match was not available. The MCREL standards are comprehensive lists of student expectations, but they do not include definitions of levels of proficiency or quality of student work.
3. As observed during our visit, a typical classroom event begins with the teacher posting the standard to be addressed by the day’s lesson and highlighting the benchmark toward which students should be striving. In general, the class activities were correlated with the posted benchmark.
4. When interviewed, students cited an accurate understanding of the role the standards and benchmarks play in the sequence of the teacher’s lessons. Parents report that the standards and benchmarks are a helpful tool for them to explain the specific skills and proficiencies their children should be working toward in each class. Parents and students reported they felt the standards required work of high quality, but neither parents nor students could cite specific characteristics that determine whether a student product was at or above expected standards.
5. Attainment of the standard is accomplished using multiple strategies, in accordance with the school’s mission to appeal to ‘multiple intelligences.’ One class participated in a simulation

of Inca domination of remote villages, role-playing members of the master and enslaved communities. Small groups of math students explored the features of an assigned function, preparing a presentation of their findings for the rest of the class. Science students reviewed for their AP exam by answering questions and earning steps along a game board drawn in chalk on the classroom floor.

6. Some students were engaged in independent study projects, a result of the flexibility of the academic program at PVPA. An advanced math student worked with a mentor teacher to pursue an understanding of statistics. Another student negotiated with teachers and advisors to take two courses offered at the same time, attending each class alternate days but responsible for completing all activities and benchmarks to receive credit. Other students reported devising creative ways to demonstrate achievement through dances, songs, or skits. Students reported they felt quite comfortable presenting these alternatives to teachers, and that teachers expected the alternative to meet standards comparable to the conventional assignment.
7. Students frequently reported feeling supported at PVPA. They cited instances where teachers offered multiple opportunities for students to succeed. Parents confirm that the school staff appreciates learning differences and works with students rather than forcing them to use one common approach to excellence. Inspectors observed that in most classes all students participate actively. There were clear expectations for students to use critical thinking and analytical skills as tools to understand central concepts of the subject, but they were encouraged to apply those thinking skills in a variety of ways.
8. The inspection team observed that PVPA students are supported not just by their teachers but by their peers. During visits to ‘home team time,’ a regular advisory period during the day, students shared sensitive concerns and received sincere encouragement and empathy from their classmates. One student, not involved in the musical production, announced with great emotion that he had seen the show and he was “really proud” of the production and those who put it together.
9. School leaders reported that a number of the students who left PVPA did so because they did not expect the rigor they found at Pioneer Valley. Exit interviews revealed that some applicants thought an arts school would be ‘easy.’
10. Identifying what PVPA defines as an acceptable level of achievement has been difficult. All school personnel explain that they expect students to do high quality work, what everyone defines broadly as equivalent to a “B” in traditional settings. Conceptions of “B” work varied from teacher to teacher within a department, and among academic subject areas across grade levels. Mathematics teachers use quiz and test scores and numerical averages. Some teachers use collections of checks, check-plusses, and check-minuses over time to approximate “B” level work. In the judgment of the inspection team, the student work we examined was of high quality, but we had no reference points such as rubrics or exemplars to evaluate the consistency of teachers’ assessments.
11. Teachers themselves reported being uncertain what their colleagues consider “B” level work. Report cards are narrative, which parents describe as helpful and informative but they were

somewhat unclear how ‘masters’ and ‘standard’ levels equated to traditional grades. When colleges required letter grades on transcripts, PVPA guidance staff translated narrative reports into letter equivalents. It was impossible to determine what standards of achievement guided these translations. As it moves into its next charter term, PVPA will be challenged to achieve greater consistency about proficiency levels among teachers without stifling the options for creative strategies that students and parents applaud.

12. The need for consistency in standards is highlighted when PVPA allows students to choose to strive for ‘advanced’ or ‘honors’ credit in academic courses. School documents also mention ‘full credit’ and ‘satisfactory credit’ in their assessment description, but the requirements for each level of performance remain unclear.
13. A central element of the Pioneer Valley charter is the goal to integrate the creative and performing arts into academic programs. During the visit, the team noted numerous instances where students demonstrated use of academic skills in performing arts classes – using literary analysis skills in reviewing scripts for drama class, understanding anatomy to enhance work in dance and voice classes. We observed far fewer instances of students using performing arts in academic classes. We observed or were told about role-playing to simulate historical events or chemical processes and musical variations on oral reports, and students cited the benefits of studying medieval history while presenting Shakespeare’s play. Nevertheless, the coherent integration of capacities developed within the performing arts program into academic areas is incomplete. Some academic teachers cite lack of knowledge of specific skills that would be suitable to integration efforts. Others complained that too little time is available to allow for a comprehensive exchange of ideas. Some performing arts teachers expressed similar confusion about the particular skills intended to be transferred, and equal frustration at the lack of time available for teacher-to-teacher interaction. PVPA has not yet fully realized this aspect of its mission.

ATTAINMENT AND IMPROVEMENT

14. Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter High School students have taken the Stanford 9 at each grade, MCAS at grade 10, and PSAT and SATI for college application purposes. The number of students taking each test does not allow for broad generalizations and the limited time frame makes longitudinal inferences difficult.

Stanford 9

| Subtest/ Year | 11/97 | 11/98 | 11/97 | 11/98 |
|--------------------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| | Grade 9 | Grade 10 | Grade 10 | Grade 11 |
| Total Reading | 67.9 | 65.5 | 71.8 | 68.3 |
| Total Math | 59.1 | 55.1 | 59.6 | 57.0 |
| Language | 56.4 | 55.8 | 59.8 | 58.6 |
| Listening | 58.0 | (not tested) | (not tested) | (not tested) |
| Basic Battery | 61.4 | 61.1 | 65.0 | 63.1 |

*Scores reported as Normal Curve Equivalents

15. Stanford 9 scores on the table above are sorted by cohort. Each cohort shows a slight decline from one year to the next, though changes are small and not significant, particularly given the small sample size. The data does suggest that the current graduating class (2000) has demonstrated slightly higher achievement than the group following them, the class of 2001, but again, sample numbers are not significant. During the 1999-2000 school year, students took the Stanford 9 in the spring rather than the fall, and scores were not available for review by the inspection team.

MCAS Results

| | Level | May 98 (state) | Spring 99 (state) |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| English Language Arts | Advanced | 10 (5) | 2 (4) |
| | Proficient | 45 (33) | 36 (30) |
| | Needs Improvement | 32 (34) | 40 (34) |
| | Failing | 13 (28) | 22 (32) |
| Mathematics | Advanced | 4 (7) | 5 (9) |
| | Proficient | 25 (17) | 19 (15) |
| | Needs Improvement | 35 (24) | 29 (23) |
| | Failing | 36 (52) | 47 (53) |
| Science & Technology | Advanced | 0 (1) | 2 (3) |
| | Proficient | 36 (21) | 22 (21) |
| | Needs Improvement | 54 (42) | 45 (39) |
| | Failing | 10 (36) | 31 (38) |
| | | (Class of 2000) | (Class of 2001) |

16. MCAS scores for two groups of PVPA students show variable achievement. In English Language Arts, more PVPA students score Advanced and Proficient than state averages in both years. Fewer PVPA students received “needs improvement” and “failing” scores than state averages both years, with the Class of 2000 recording significantly fewer (45%) deficient students than the state average (62%). Scores for the Class of 2001 in English Language Arts were closer to the state means.

17. In Mathematics, both groups of PVPA students recorded achievement levels close to the state average. Twenty-nine percent of the Class of 2000 scored “advanced” or “proficient” compared with 24% across the state. Seventy-one percent of that same group were ranked “needs improvement” or “failing,” compared with 76% across the state. The Class of 2001 matched the state average in both categories, with 24% scoring “advanced” or “proficient” and 76% receiving “needs improvement” or “failing” ratings.

18. Science and Technology scores were similar to those in Mathematics. Thirty-six percent of the class of 2000 received “advanced” or “proficient” scores, better than the state average of 22%. Only 64% of PVPA students in that group earned “needs improvement” or “failing” science scores, less than the 78% of students across the state who ranked in those two classifications. The Class of 2001 again matched state averages, with 24% scoring “advanced” or “proficient” in science and technology, and 76% sorted into the “needs improvement” or “failing” categories.
19. Since PVPA draws students from so many communities, it was not appropriate to compare PVPA scores with those of sending districts. It is therefore impossible to determine how student achievement within the academic program at PVPA contrasts with the achievement of students in comparable public school populations.
20. MCAS scores are only preliminary measures of student achievement, and the scores of charter school students cannot be determined to show patterns because of the school’s short term of operation. The preliminary results of PVPA students, however, do not meet the school’s expectation that all students will “pursue excellence.”
21. Thirty-six students in grades 11 and 12 took the SATI aptitude test in preparation for college application. Using the most recent scores from the results report, verbal scores ranged from 360 to 800. Mean verbal for PVPA was 564, with a median at 565. Mathematics scores for the thirty-six students reported by the school ranged from 340 to 700, with a mean at 505 and a median of 495. Therefore, the “average” PVPA student meets national averages for these tests.
22. Internal measures are based on a comprehensive standards and benchmarks system. As mentioned in the previous section of this report, there is a lack of clarity about levels of achievement within the standards system. Students receive narrative progress reports describing their attainment of particular standards and the benchmarks by which their work was evaluated. Students can opt to produce more work or pieces of higher quality in order to receive “advanced” or “honors” credit for a course. Standard achievement is defined by most as comparable to a “B” grade.
23. Samples of student work reviewed by the inspection team suggest that writing is a strong area for PVPA students. In some cases, student writing was sophisticated and accomplished, demonstrating a high level of understanding and application. Samples from literary analysis as well as history and social studies were provided for examination.
24. Some parents credit high levels of student achievement to the efforts of teachers to guarantee that no student falls through the cracks. The culture at PVPA establishes a high regard for each individual, and parents and students report this respect for each student as distinguishing PVPA from traditional public school environments. Teachers challenge/ cajole/ invite reluctant students to take risks and aim for high performance levels. Parents confirm that these efforts have succeeded with their children, preventing any “lost kids.”

25. Similar achievement expectations are evident in the performing arts classes. Students of all ability levels engage in performance activities and are held to high standards to be judged successful.
26. Student participation in class activities was generally high. In most classes, students were engaged and involved in the lesson. Assignments were completed as directed, and little off-task behavior was observed except in a small number of poorly managed classes. Students reported feeling it was “ok” to try even if they didn’t succeed because teachers would work with them to revise and review material as often as needed. Similar sentiments applied to performing arts classes as well as academic classes.

INDIVIDUAL NEEDS AND DEVELOPMENT

27. It was difficult if not impossible to distinguish special needs students at PVPA. At this school, everyone is recognized for their unique traits, and teachers strive to give every child a learning experience suited to their individual needs. Small group activities were in use in many classes, a strategy helpful to students with learning difficulties and supportive of all students in general. No designation of “special needs” applies in performing arts classes, which involve all students in all activities.
28. Nineteen students at PVPA have 504 plans with special accommodations for their learning disabilities. One deaf student has an interpreter, who blends in with ‘regular’ PVPA students who take American Sign Language to meet their world language graduation requirements. Similarly, other accommodations blend into the regular school program because of PVPA’s strong commitment to the success of each individual.
29. Teachers tutor students outside of class, and students may revise assignments many times in order to achieve excellence. Identified students have access to additional supports and tutors, such as extra time on tests and books on tape. Parents explain that PVPA teachers focus on the student more than coverage of a topic.
30. Attention to the needs of each individual has led to a flexible program that allows students to initiate projects that provide unique opportunities to learn not available in traditional settings. Students can develop independent study proposals, dual enrollment at local colleges, and cross-enrollment within PVPA.
31. PVPA’s flexibility does not diminish the rigor of its expectations for student achievement. Parents and students assert that PVPA has “better teachers” because they do not “let good students do just enough to get by.” The teachers at PVPA expect everyone to do their best, to strive for “excellence” in academics as well as in the performing arts. Being encouraged to “express yourself” does not mean anything goes – students and parents assert that high standards prevail in whatever means students choose to demonstrate their competence. Teachers correct student errors firmly and promptly but with care and consideration.
32. The separation of ninth grade students into their own collection of classrooms for the academic period of the day is a clear example of PVPA’s efforts to accommodate unique student needs. Some students who left PVPA in the early years had clearly not become

oriented to the culture of the school. Gathering entering ninth graders in their own center allowed teachers and students to structure frequent interaction and conversation that led to clearer understanding of reasonable rules for behavior and for academic performance. During a part of their day, ninth graders become their own community within the larger PVPA community of learners and performers.

33. Focusing attention on individual needs and supporting the success of each student has not minimized variations in talents and abilities. All performance events are open for audition to all students at PVPA. Many performances are non-competitive, occurring within a class or organized around a theme or special occasion. Everyone participates according to his or her interests. Major performances are competitive, however, with several rounds of auditions for major parts. Those selected for starring roles have demonstrated exceptional skill, aptitude, and ability to perform to expected professional standards. Participation in the production offers them opportunities for professional guidance and development of their talents to whatever levels of excellence they can achieve.

II. Classroom

Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter High School has expanded from a sound foundation to provide a rigorous academic program for its students. Despite confusion about the criteria for acceptable performance, students, parents and teachers are convinced they hold students to high standards. As with all school settings, time is the perpetual limiting factor in refining and revising curriculum and achieving the charter ideal of integration of the performing arts and academics.

CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT

34. PVPA has adapted standards and benchmarks from the MCREL compendium of national and state standards for all subject areas. MCREL includes standards for the academic areas as well as the arts. Where MCREL standards are not suitable for PVPA, teachers have modified them to better meet local needs. Some modifications have been motivated by a need to align local standards with MA state curriculum frameworks that were introduced after MCREL had been implemented as the guiding document.
35. The standards in Mathematics are generally aligned with the specific course standards defined by the state frameworks. Weaknesses exist in observations of student proficiency with typical technology tools, namely graphing calculators, in entry level courses. Upper level students demonstrated proficiency and in some cases mastery of these tools. Upper level students were held to rigorous standards, comparable to those required of students in more selective settings. Students in entry-level courses appeared more diverse in interest and in aptitude and the level of performance was less demanding.
36. Emphasis in the Language Arts program is on writing and literature. Students analyze a broad selection of world literature, American drama, and Latin American literature supplemented with poetry and creative writing. There is a great deal of crossover between the academic offerings and performing arts courses, providing students with complementary perspectives on literature. There is no evidence or indication whether teachers intend this crossover or if they coordinate analytical vocabulary or standards. The PVPA English Language Arts program generally aligns with the MA curriculum frameworks in the literature competencies students are expected to acquire.
37. Science standards and benchmarks at PVPA reflect the general expectations of the MA curriculum frameworks. However, many of the proficiencies state that students should “know” standard vocabulary, steps in biochemical processes, or algorithms suited to solving problems. This contrasts with proficiency verbs used in the state documents that describe students actively engaged in inquiry, analysis and design of investigations. Not enough information was gathered during the visit to determine if the PVPA statements reflect the type of experiences students have in science classes.
38. The Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks for History/ Social Science are relatively recent documents. The PVPA standards and benchmarks are clear and comprehensive and based on the MCREL document, and teachers are planning to review and revise the school’s standards

to align with the MA expectations. This is the first year of the History/ Social Studies MCAS examination, so data to assist in defining needed changes has yet to be obtained. Course offerings in History/ Social Studies at PVPA are consistent with both state and national standards.

39. The MCREL document contains content standards for common subject areas, including fine arts, but does not include a compilation of standards for the performing arts. The PVPA Performing Arts faculty have defined their own standards and benchmarks, or in some cases general outcome goals, to guide student work. A sample of the standards reviewed during the inspection reveal that students are expected to use creative and critical thinking and problem-solving skills within a disciplined structure requiring hard work and commitment. The state does not have frameworks for the performing arts so questions of alignment are moot.
40. Coordination of the performing arts “curriculum” presents a challenge to PVPA administrators. On the one hand, students benefit from a diverse mixture of full and part time instructors drawn from regional sources, each of whom brings their unique vision of excellence and demands for performance. On the other hand, students might be well served by some degree of consistency in standards of achievement from year to year, when different instructors are hired to offer unique programs.
41. Student assessment in the performing arts program varies from teacher to teacher, adapted to the particular course requirements. In many cases, students were unclear how they would be evaluated, though all felt they were living up to high expectations. Assessment in the performing arts presents another challenge for PVPA school leaders, magnified by the inclusion of students of all levels of previous experience and natural talent in all aspects of the program.
42. In the academic programs, there is a broad array of assessment strategies. Mathematics classes have quizzes and quantitative tests. Students in science classes take written tests and write lab reports. English Language Arts students write essays, complete mechanics and grammar worksheets, and write poems and creative stories. In most cases, the level of work expected of students met high standards and encouraged students to use analytical and interpretive thinking skills. The specific criteria on which student work is graded could not be clearly described consistently.
43. Implementation of the curriculum and assessment strategies are monitored by the school’s Director of Education. Teachers spent some time reviewing MCAS results to identify strengths and weaknesses of the existing curriculum, but it was unclear whether actions to address those concerns have been taken.
44. Plans are in place to implement a comprehensive portfolio assessment system next year. School personnel hope that this portfolio will provide a more complete picture of each student’s achievement and progress during his or her tenure at PVPA.

TEACHING

45. According to teacher biography data provided by the school, all academic teachers have degrees in and/or teaching experience in the subject to which they are assigned. Many teachers are recent graduates, and some have completed a career change from a related field to enter teaching. Still others have significant experience teaching at the high school level. With few exceptions, academic teachers provided a well-paced, coherent, worthwhile learning opportunity for their students.
46. Performing arts faculty, both part time and full time, have impressive biographies with extensive experience in their particular specialty. Based on our observations, there was a range of competence with the mechanics of teaching lively high school students, with the majority of instructors providing strong direction and presenting students with a meaningful learning experience.
47. Both academic and performing arts faculty employed a broad range of teaching strategies with confidence and competence. A social studies class smoothly and efficiently moved from a teacher-focused introduction of content to small group simulation to whole group question and answer debrief. Cooperative groups of students in English Language Arts identified suitable roles for each member, negotiated tasks, and prepared a presentation of their findings to the other class members. In science, students rotated among five stations gathering data individually and returned to their semicircle for whole group discussion of their interpretations. World Language students were immersed in their new tongue, using French, Spanish and American Sign Language to carry on conversations, create poems, and discuss events of the day. Inspectors observed only a few classes where students were passive recipients of information given in a lecture format.
48. Teachers frequently made mention of connections between current topics and previous class material. Where suitable, connections to alternative perspectives were pointed out, particularly connections to the central event at the school during our visit, the production of *Cabaret*. Teachers demonstrated a clear understanding of the fragile nature of teens' abilities to recall even recent discussions of academic content.
49. Most faculty managed their classrooms competently. Attendance was taken, assignments collected or reviewed, and standards and benchmarks defining the class focus for the day were clarified. Class disruptions were minimal, with late students politely excusing their interruption.
50. Students demonstrated a higher level of intrinsic motivation for the performing arts classes, and thus classroom management became an unimportant issue. There were a few cases, however, in which students were inattentive and unfocused, partly due to a long wait for their turn at equipment that was in short supply.

RESOURCES

51. Pioneer Valley students are housed in four buildings plus several portable structures. The main building is a decades-old structure with charm and style but few modern amenities. The main office is filled with file cabinets, storage boxes, and a modest counter and desk. The Education Director's office is closet-sized, using every inch of the high ceilings for storage shelves and supplies. A hallway serves as a common area for students to gather between classes, with posters filling the wall announcing school meetings, community activities, and graduation events. The School Director has no space for an office but uses a cell phone to keep in touch with personnel in multiple locations.
52. Classroom space in the Russell Building is adequate, and teachers and students have decorated the nooks and crannies with student work. The building is not handicapped accessible, which may present challenges in the future.
53. School space in the North Annex, shared with the Hadley Senior Center, is roomy and convenient, though science classrooms lack permanent sinks and some safety equipment. Desks and tables provide suitable work surfaces for science activities and flexibility for use as regular classrooms.
54. The ninth graders are housed in the West Annex, approximately ¼ mile from the Russell Building and a ten-minute walk along paved sidewalks. Classrooms in the West Annex are adequate, though not roomy. Some rooms are cheerfully decorated with student work, others sparser. A computer lab with ten networked computers and a reliable heavy-duty printer is available to students and teachers.
55. Teachers and students make do with the available performing arts space. Risers and folding chairs serve as audience seating in front of the stage. Studio space is cramped but pleasantly decorated. Storage space is minimal for all programs.
56. PVPA leaders have made creative use of local resources. Physical education students take Rock Climbing at a nearby indoor climbing gym. A partnership with Hampshire College allows PVPA science students to complete labs using state of the art equipment and facilities. School vans provide transportation as needed for small groups.
57. Because of scheduling constraints with the Hampshire College science facilities, only one semester of the two-semester Biology course is scheduled for lab activities. The other section of the course is restricted to paper and pencil investigations and analysis of data from sources other than students' own work.
58. Access to instructional materials varies within courses in the academic program. Some courses use textbooks, but others rely on Xeroxed copies. English teachers distribute classroom sets of reading books and literature collections for short-term use.
59. The physical facilities dedicated to mathematics instruction lack sufficient board space and technology. Only one classroom has a complete set of graphing calculators and there are only two projecting calculators. As a result students cannot work at the board in small

groups nor are they developing skill in the use of graphing calculators, limiting their potential for achieving “excellence” in mathematics.

60. Students do not have access to common technology resources in English Language Arts classes and Social Studies classes. The MA Curriculum Frameworks include oral presentations as important aspects of communication skills for English Language Arts students. They also recommend that students become critical viewers of communication from many sources. It is unlikely students will achieve proficiency in these areas without frequent, seamless access to presentation software, internet research tools and systematic analysis of web media.
61. Performing arts students face limits in fully benefiting from the PVPA program because of scarce technology. Students in a video course became distracted and unruly waiting for the instructor to load material onto the single system they were trying to learn to operate. Music students lack instruments and storage space.
62. In spite of the limitations noted above, we found students to be generally engaged and enthusiastic about their work. We encountered teachers passionate about their subject and their students and clever in their ability to make do in a less than perfect setting.

III. School

Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter High School benefits from the wholehearted devotion and commitment of its two leaders who were crucial to the founding of the school. Their passion and vision have guided the development of a coherent curriculum in both the academic areas and the performing arts fields. The Board of Trustees maintains a policy and fiduciary role within the school, contributing their time and expertise by serving on numerous committees to refine the PVPA program to better serve its students and parents. PVPA also benefits from a dedicated and stable staff, many of whom were founding teachers who have invested their time and energy as well as their professional expertise to the achievement of the school's mission. Parents praise PVPA for its ability to help their children blossom within a safe and supportive community.

63. The Director of Administration at Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter High School is described by one parent as a “miracle worker” for his ability to discourage unproductive behavior and attitudes among teenagers who have had difficult relationships with other adults. He serves as facilities manager, disciplinarian, public relations director, parent liaison, recruiter, “hall” monitor, and even has a part in the spring play!
64. The Director of Education has made an equally essential contribution to the school. She is intimately involved in recruiting and scheduling performing arts professionals to work with high school students, hiring, evaluating and retaining qualified academic faculty, overseeing school services for college bound students and special needs students, and designing and implementing an orientation program for ninth graders. Meanwhile, she has been instrumental in fostering and nurturing a culture that respects the creative arts in the same way it respects academics.
65. The Board of Trustees, following an internal review of administrative duties, has recognized that the continuity of PVPA depends on successful completion of each of the essential tasks presently performed by the two school leaders. They recognized that two individuals cannot remain solely responsible for their execution. They have authorized the addition of two administrative positions, one half position beginning immediately and the other 1.5 position scheduled for the next school year. The duties to be allocated to the new positions were not defined for the inspection team, nor was it clear whether those positions would be filled from within the organization or by newcomers.
66. The sense of community and climate of the school flow from the school leaders, through the committed faculty, to the students who adopt its values and carry them into each aspect of the school day. The leaders explain that they accept personal responsibility for each student, and “never want to see any kid fall through the cracks.” Maintenance of this strong school ethos is dependent on the commitment of the personnel in leadership positions at the school.
67. Parents and students also reported a strong sense of community at PVPA and cited anecdotes showing that the school works equally hard for high performers, weak and

unmotivated students and all those in between. They credited the climate to the beliefs modeled by the teachers and school leaders.

68. Students describe a strong sense of physical and psychological safety at PVPA. Respect for differences is infused in the school culture. Home team time offers a safe place where students can share accomplishments and failures with their peers and receive appropriate praise and sympathy in return. One student shared concerns about his Cabaret performance. Another worried that her summer job would fall through (resulting in a promise from a classmate to link her with another potential employer). The culture at PVPA becomes a shared belief in the value of individual differences and creates a climate where students feel safe to share their thoughts and concerns openly and honestly.
69. A subcommittee of the Board of Trustees evaluates school leaders. Their review includes comments from teachers, parents, and students. Criteria for judging the leaders' performance were not examined in depth by the visiting team.
70. The Director of Curriculum evaluates teacher performance. She visits classes several times during the year, designating one announced visit as the formal review. Teachers are judged at three levels – 'exceeds,' 'meets,' or 'needs work' – within nine categories on the Teacher Review Checklist. The checklist is comprehensive, covering content and pedagogy as well as efforts to adhere to the school's mission. Teachers say they are pleased with the constructive comments they receive from these visits.
71. The Internal Assessment Committee, composed of parents appointed by the Board of Trustees, reviews PVPA programs. They are charged with gathering data on all elements of the school by surveying and interviewing parents, students, teachers, and staff. The committee reviews the information it receives and prepares a summary and recommendations that are presented to the Board. The Board may then choose to act on the Assessment Committee's suggestions or table them.
72. The current chair of the Assessment Committee reports great difficulty recruiting and retaining enough parents to complete the program evaluation successfully. The original committee members received some training from an assessment consultant, but most of those individuals have been unable to continue their participation. The new members have attempted to gather credible information to report to the Board, but the data is inadequate to the purpose. The unsorted information contains some serious concerns from various constituencies, but there is no systematic process in place to corroborate the initial findings. The Committee Chairperson worries that the surveys and interviews have become a vehicle for parents and students to vent their complaints rather than a means of gathering useful data.
73. The Board of Trustees makes final decisions on program and fiscal issues. Until last year, the Directors of the school were members of the Board. Now they attend as non-voting members, offering their insight on school issues as needed. Daily decisions are left to the judgment of the Director of Administration and Director of Education.

74. Curriculum decisions remain at the grade level/ subject area level. “Factions” (subject area departments) consider alignment and coordination issues as they arise and generally take actions based on consensus decisions. Broader concerns related to cross grade level and interdisciplinary activities are addressed by the Director of Education in consultation with appropriate faculty.
75. Plans to build and occupy a new facility in 2002 are well underway. A professional fundraiser has been hired to put together the approximately \$9 million needed for the custom-designed building. Land has been purchased nearby, and efforts are ongoing to seek philanthropic gifts, contributions from organizations and donations from private donors in the region. The goal is to create a self-supporting foundation that can serve the school as well as related performing arts groups.

FACULTY AND STAFF

76. Members of the academic faculty have been relatively stable during the four years PVPA has been in operation. Teachers report difficulty retaining personnel in some positions, and attractive opportunities in the vibrant economy have lured others to depart to everyone’s dismay.
77. Faculty salaries are low, ranging from \$25,000 to \$40,000, below those of other area public schools. The stability of the staff is even more remarkable in light of this disadvantage. No faculty member spoke of salary when discussing their work. We did not determine how salaries increase or how teacher evaluations are related to compensation levels.
78. PVPA has developed a complex hiring process for new faculty. Applicants go through several rounds of interviews with administrators, teachers, and students, including presentation of a sample lesson to a special group of student volunteers. During the final stage of selection, the applicant is invited to spend the day shadowing a teacher in their subject area, and asked to teach a class to ‘real’ students. The process is designed to ensure that the applicant understands key aspects of the PVPA culture, and to help the school decide if the applicant is likely to be a good match. The process will be tested several times in the near future when open positions must be filled.
79. Relationships between members of the staff appear to be as supportive and respectful as those mentioned previously between faculty and students. Academic faculty meet more frequently than performing arts instructors because of the design of their schedules and the part-time nature of many performing arts positions. Ninth grade faculty are in daily contact because of their location in the West Annex, separated from the main campus.
80. Inter-faculty communication is weak, likely due to location and schedule differences. Performing arts instructors and academic program faculty have few opportunities to meet, except for a couple of crossover teachers who have assignments in both divisions.
81. Opportunities for professional development occur on an ad hoc basis rather than related to ongoing school improvement efforts. As is common in young schools, most professional development activities have focused on clarifying internal goals and procedures and

examining the emerging school culture. School leaders recognize a need to provide more training directly connected to overall school improvement plans, particularly as new programs like the portfolio assessment system are implemented.

82. Much of the work to achieve an effective learning program has been accomplished through the determination and commitment of key faculty members. Several teachers complain that too little time is available to collaborate with colleagues on teaming, content integration, and assessment. Despite these complaints, work in these areas has occurred. Currently, weekly meetings with grade nine teachers, special education personnel and the ninth grade guidance counselor have proved an effective vehicle for addressing recurring issues.
83. A number of teachers expressed the belief that an external program assessment would be a valuable source of information to guide short and long term decision-making.

PARENTS AND COMMUNITY

84. Parent-teacher communication occurs via quarterly progress reports and parent conferences. Narrative report cards provide more detailed information about specific student achievements than traditional numerical grades. Some parents interviewed during the inspection said that teachers were generally prompt in returning phone calls. They attributed this to teachers' "caring" about the success of their students.
85. Parents praised the communications they received from guidance and special education personnel. They also commended the school Directors for their quick attention to parent concerns. There is an active group of parents of special needs students.
86. PVPA uses the application process and the orientation meetings associated with that process to acquaint parents and prospective students with the rigorous expectations for achievement. Parents report that information provided at the initial orientation meeting was extremely helpful in guiding their decision to submit their child's application.
87. Concerns about a high number of departing students during the early years of the school led to expanded efforts to advise parents of the requirements for success at PVPA. Still, teachers and school leaders estimate that about 10% of the students are attending PVPA as a way to escape their traditional public school, rather than choosing PVPA for what they could gain from its specialized learning opportunities. Information gathered from exit interviews with departing students show clearly that students without a commitment to the goals of the program are unlikely to succeed.
88. Newsletters are prepared by the school and mailed monthly. They contain program information, announcements, activity reports and policy decisions from the Board of Trustees. Parents and students agree that they are a useful means of communication.
89. The parent volunteer program has been less successful than hoped, in part because many students come to PVPA from a significant distance. Problems filling assessment committee vacancies are representative of the difficulties associated with a specialized regional school.

90. The relationship between PVPA and the surrounding community has improved over the years, beginning with suspicion and moving toward acceptance. PVPA leaders invited students from the nearby town high school to take performing arts classes without charge. Since most of the performing arts courses begin at 2:30 pm, the scheduling was amenable to this suggestion. Only a few students accepted the offer in the first years but there is optimism that more will come as PVPA becomes established.
91. PVPA students are the school's most active community outreach providers. Wake Every Breath (voice) students have performed at churches and in a benefit for Kosovo. Members of the theater class performed at a fund raising event to aid the homeless. Other groups of performers and musicians from PVPA have visited area charter schools and the senior center.
92. Now that the school has grown to its full enrollment, plans are in place to reinvigorate the community outreach efforts of PVPA. Given the talent, enthusiasm and energy observed by the inspection team among all members of the PVPA community, these outreach efforts are likely to enrich the Hadley/ Northampton region.