

# Renewal Inspection Report

PIONEER VALLEY PERFORMING ARTS  
CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOL  
HADLEY, MA



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Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter Public School  
Renewal Inspection Report

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter Public School (PVPA) is a regional school located in the Pioneer Valley towns of Hadley and South Hadley. Its mission is “to offer its students intensive exposure to the performing arts, within the context of an excellent college preparatory curriculum.” The school reports that it offers the most extensive public high school performing arts program in Massachusetts, with over 50 course offerings each semester in drama, dance, music, and visual performing arts. Its educational philosophy is to “[provide] students with a supportive and challenging environment that is responsive to multiple learning styles, emphasizes learning through the arts, and integrates creative and critical thinking throughout the curriculum.”

Since receiving its charter in 1996, PVPA has steadily expanded. It began its operations by adding a high school grade level in each of its first four years of operation. During the period of this review, the school expanded by adding seventh- and eighth-grade classes and increasing enrollment to 400.

In addition to requiring competency in a college course of study, PVPA graduation requirements include at least eight hours per week of performing arts programs, completion of two performing arts internships and two other internships: one within the PVPA community and one in the external community.

PVPA Board of Trustees operates with a membership consisting of two parents, two teachers, two administrators, five students, and six community members. Student members under age 18 participate in Board meetings but do not vote. Standing and ad hoc Board committees include Executive, Finance, Admissions, Assessment, and Diversity. The two PVPA founders continue to lead the school as Director of Administration and Director of Education. In addition, PVPA is organized into various departments for academic subjects and performing arts, each headed by a director. PVPA records show that the school employs 40 hourly specialists, many of whom instruct in performing arts, in addition to its teachers.

During this charter period, PVPA has initiated several innovative programs, including the Plane Tree Program and the “Arts in Every School” program, and PVPA students have distinguished themselves academically and artistically.

The Renewal Inspection Team (Team) spent two days on site at PVPA on April 25 and 26, 2005. The Team also obtained and reviewed PVPA data and documents prior to the renewal site visit, on site, and after the site visit.

### **Renewal Question 1: Is The Academic Program A Success?**

#### **MCAS Results**

The Team examined the scores attained by PVPA students on the MCAS exams for the period of 2000 to 2004. These scores were compared to the MCAS scores attained by Massachusetts

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school students statewide. Because PVPA draws its students from many school districts – 34 districts according to DOE’s 2004-2005 pre-enrollment report, many of which are themselves regional school districts – no single district could be used to provide a meaningful comparison with PVPA’s MCAS results.

There are limited MCAS data for PVPA eighth graders during the period under review and, with two exceptions, there are insufficient data to report on any subpopulation categories.

1. PVPA has met its Adequate Yearly Progress requirements.
2. Because PVPA’s eighth-grade classes have been small, only 2003 MCAS Mathematics and Science and Engineering/Technology exam results are available for analysis. In 2003, when 12 PVPA eighth grade students took the exams, PVPA students generally outperformed students statewide.
3. PVPA’s tenth-grade MCAS results on the English Language Arts (ELA) exam have consistently improved from 2000 through 2003; the slight decline from 2003 to 2004 is reflected in a slight decline in the school’s Composite Performance Index (CPI) for the exam. For the past two years no PVPA student has scored in the Warning/Failing category of the exam. PVPA’s results compare favorably to the results obtained by students statewide.
4. PVPA’s tenth-grade MCAS results on the Mathematics exam have consistently improved from 2000 through 2004. PVPA’s results compare favorably to the results obtained by tenth-grade students statewide.
5. In 2004, all tenth-grade PVPA students eligible for the free or reduced price lunch program passed the MCAS English Language Arts and Mathematics exams. Collectively, their performance trailed that of all PVPA students who took the exam but compares favorably to the performance of all students statewide.
6. In 2003, all tenth-grade PVPA special education students passed the MCAS English Language Arts exam, and all but one passed the Mathematics exam. Collectively, their performance trailed that of all PVPA students who took the exams but compared favorably to the performance of all students statewide.
7. PVPA did not provide the Team with any individual student success plans for students who have failed MCAS exams. PVPA has offered individualized assistance to such students.
8. Although PVPA teachers make informal use of the MCAS results, PVPA does not conduct a systematic, school-wide analysis of MCAS results.

### **Other Assessments**

9. PVPA uses no standardized external tests other than the MCAS exams to assess student performance from a developmental perspective.

10. PVPA relies primarily on internal standards and benchmarks to evaluate student performance. The standards and benchmarks are appropriately clear and challenging. They are aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, and there is a scope and sequence for each academic and performing arts curriculum. Rubrics assist students in demonstrating mastery of course materials. Members of the school community were familiar with and supportive of PVPA's use of standards and benchmarks to assign course credit and promote students. PVPA's records show that approximately 95 percent of students have met the course standards and benchmarks in each of the past three years, and the percentage of students who exceeded the standards and benchmarks has increased each year during that period.

### **Curriculum and Classroom Observations**

11. PVPA offers a college preparatory program combined with an extensive performing arts curriculum.
12. Although student portfolios are compiled in some classes, PVPA does not use the portfolios to evaluate student performance and award academic credit.
13. In the classes observed by the Team, the instructional methods used by PVPA teachers were varied, individualized, appropriate to the subject matter, and effective. Students were engaged, respectful, and responsive to their teachers.
14. Classroom resources are adequate. Teachers use a variety of instructional materials; however, few textbooks were observed to be in use and computer technology does not appear to be integrated into the curriculum.
15. PVPA has developed innovative programs to support student learning.

### **Renewal Question 2: Is The School A Viable Organization?**

1. PVPA provides a supportive, informal, inclusive learning environment in which students and teachers respect and support one another. Members of the PVPA community reported that they feel safe and secure at the school. The Team observed that the location, configuration, and operation of the open-campus high school pose safety challenges; however, these should be substantially reduced when the high school is relocated to South Hadley in July 2005. PVPA has assembled a staff of well-qualified and committed teachers.
2. PVPA has operated at full capacity during this charter review period and currently has a large waiting list of students. The school has taken steps to recruit minority students and support diversity within PVPA. In 2003, the school had a relatively low dropout rate and high retention rate compared to schools statewide.
3. PVPA's audited financial statements show that the school's financial condition is sound. The school plans to establish, and to transfer some of its assets to, a nonprofit entity that will

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assist the school with fundraising. The school has planned for the increased lease payments that its new facility lease requires.

4. PVPA's Board of Trustees meets regularly and is actively engaged in school governance. Board minutes indicate that the Board regularly receives and discusses information pertaining to the school's finances and annual audits as well as other school matters. However, the Board President sets goals for and monitors the performance of individual school directors without formal Board participation.
5. The Board's current practice of allowing Board members who are school staff and administrators to vote conflicts with the requirements of its current by-laws. Last fall the DOE provided PVPA with a detailed critique of its by-laws; recent revisions approved by the Board but not yet submitted to DOE do not completely address all of DOE's concerns. The Board's practice of allowing members to participate in the discussion of matters in which they have a financial interest is not consistent with the requirements of the state conflict of interest law. The Board has not fully complied with the state's open meeting law.

**Renewal Question 3:  
Is The School Faithful to the Terms of its Charter?**

1. PVPA has adhered to the general principles contained in its 2001 Accountability Plan.
2. PVPA's Board of Trustees has not engaged in formal strategic planning during the current charter period. However, in recent years the Board has set five goals, which were intended to be more specific and measurable than the broad objectives contained in the 2001 Accountability Plan, and assessed PVPA's progress toward these goals.
3. PVPA has undertaken and documented activities to disseminate models for replication and best practices to other public schools, as required by the charter school law.

**Renewal Question 4:  
If the School's Charter is Renewed,  
What are its Plans for the Next Five Years?**

1. The new Accountability Plan proposed by PVPA establishes clear and appropriate goals supported by specific measures. However, in several cases the proposed goals and measures are inconsistent.
2. PVPA's relocation to a single site in South Hadley is expected to enhance the opportunities available to PVPA students.
3. PVPA has set near-term goals through a consultative process and has addressed significant issues as they arose, but PVPA's Board of Trustees has not engaged in any comprehensive, systematic strategic planning for the next charter period.

## ABOUT THE RENEWAL PROCESS AND SITE VISIT REPORT

Beginning in the spring of the third year of its charter (and ending August 1<sup>st</sup> following its fourth year), a school may apply for renewal of its charter for another five-year term. Following guidelines set forth in the *Application for Renewal of a Public School Charter*, an application for renewal should be an articulate, affirmative response, based on clear, credible evidence, to the questions that guide charter school accountability. It must also offer compelling answers to questions about the school's plans for the future. The application should be a sound, well-supported explanation of why the Board of Education should renew a school's charter.

Once this application has met a minimal review of its clarity and coherence, the Department of Education works with an independent evaluation team, which conducts a site visit of the school to corroborate and augment the school's application for renewal. This report is the result of one such evaluation.

The renewal site visit process and report provide a detailed and current portrait of a public charter school at the time of its application for renewal. While the renewal site visit report itself is a vital source of information within the renewal process, it is most effective when used in conjunction with the longitudinal school performance data available to the Department of Education. The combination of more general long-term data with the detailed information gathered by the renewal visit constitutes an evidence base rigorous enough to inform decisions about the future of public charter schools responsible for the education of students in the Commonwealth. In keeping with Massachusetts Board of Education's commitment to a public charter school accountability system that is based in robust and diverse performance data, the renewal site visit report does not make recommendations about whether or not a school should be renewed. It presents a detailed picture of the present state of the school as one of several key sources of information to be considered by the Board of Education in its renewal decision.

### How to read this report

The first section of this report describes the school's setting. Included in this section are information on the origin and history of the charter, student demographics, staffing and the school's educational program. This is also an opportunity to include any organizational history, such as changes in the board and leadership or challenges the school has faced, and its response to those challenges.

The core of the report is the Renewal Inspection Team's findings. Findings are the Team's assessment of the school's strengths and areas for improvement that, in their judgment, have the greatest bearing on the school's achievement of its defined goals. Findings are organized under each of the renewal questions: *Is the academic program a success? Is the school a viable organization? Is the school faithful to the terms of its charter?* The Team's comments on the fourth question, *If the school is renewed, what are its plans for the next five years?*, reflect their judgment of the quality of the school's proposed new goals and their assessment of the school's capacity to fulfill those goals. Each finding is a bolded statement followed by explanatory paragraphs reporting the evidence supporting the Team's judgments. Finally, **Appendix A** illustrates the Team's schedule during the renewal visit.

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## RENEWAL INSPECTION TEAM

**F. Daniel Ahern, Jr.** is President of Clarus Group, a consulting firm dedicated to helping governments and nonprofit organizations meet high standards of performance and integrity. Prior to co-founding Clarus Group, he served for ten years as the First Assistant Inspector General for Management in the Massachusetts Office of the Inspector General. He has also been a performance auditor for the Virginia General Assembly, an independent consultant to state agencies in Massachusetts and Virginia, and an adjunct professor teaching graduate courses in public administration and nonprofit management at Northeastern University and Clark University.

**Pamela Bloomfield** is Vice President of Clarus Group. Prior to co-founding Clarus Group, she served for ten years as the Deputy Inspector General for Management in the Massachusetts Office of the Inspector General. She has also been the Assistant Director of Finance and Administration for an Oregon county; a management consultant assisting federal, state, and local government agencies; and a course assistant teaching written and oral communications at the Harvard Business School. She currently serves on the Board of Editors of *Public Administration Review*.

**Peter Davies**, *team supervisor and report editor*, is a former British School Inspector who has worked in school and district accountability for more than ten years in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe, and the Middle East. He was formerly an administrator with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in Paris and a visiting professor to the Oxford University Department of Educational Studies. He has worked within school and social services departments as a principal and administrator.

**Dr. Wayne LaGue**, *coordinator of on-site inspection*, has been an educator for 35 years and recently retired as Superintendent of Schools in Wareham. In addition to having served as a school superintendent in both urban and rural communities, he has taught in Massachusetts public schools at the elementary, middle, and high school levels and has served as director of curriculum and instruction. He holds a doctorate in educational leadership from Boston University and an advanced graduate degree in the philosophy of curriculum from Oxford University.

**Douglas Renick** is an independent consultant who works with nonprofit organizations and school districts to provide facilitation and strategic planning. He has recently been a whole-school change coach in the Boston Public Schools, working with principals and teachers to implement and sustain improvements that increased student performance. He has used Total Quality Education as an approach to improvement in schools, and for many years he managed Harvard University's Center for Training and Organization Development.

**W. C. Wolf, Jr.** has been an active educator for the past 50 years. He taught grades K-6 in three states, served in academic administration and professorial positions at four higher education institutions, administered a U.S. Office of Education research contracts program, and directed and evaluated various C. F. Kettering Foundation undertakings. He has published extensively.

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Research Methodology, Organizational Leadership, and Elementary School Curriculum/Instruction are his specialties.

Dan Ahern and Pamela Bloomfield are Clarus Group principals working under contract to Class Measures Ltd for the purpose of this contract.

Peter Davies, Wayne LaGue, and Douglas Renick are members of Class Measures Ltd.

W. C. Wolf, Jr., is an independent contractor working for the Massachusetts Office of Educational Quality and Accountability.

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## SETTING

The Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter Public School (PVPA) is a regional school located in the Pioneer Valley towns of Hadley and South Hadley. Its mission is “to offer its students intensive exposure to the performing arts, within the context of an excellent college preparatory curriculum.” The school reports that it offers the most extensive public high school performing arts program in Massachusetts, with over 50 course offerings each semester in drama, dance, music, and visual performing arts. Its educational philosophy is to “[provide] students with a supportive and challenging environment that is responsive to multiple learning styles, emphasizes learning through the arts, and integrates creative and critical thinking throughout the curriculum.”

Since receiving its charter in 1996, PVPA has steadily expanded. It began its operations by adding a high school grade level in each of its first four years. During the period of this review, the school expanded by adding seventh- and eighth-grade classes and increasing enrollment to 400. The high school (ninth through twelfth grades) currently operates in series of leased buildings, including several modular buildings, located in close proximity along Route 9 at the intersection of Route 47 in Hadley. The middle school (seventh and eighth grades) operates in a wing of a leased building in South Hadley, the remainder of which is being renovated to accommodate the high school students beginning in fall 2005. The middle school enrollment was small (eight students in 2002, twelve students in 2003, and seven students in 2004) prior to the opening of the new facility this school year.

PVPA serves students from more than 60 cities and towns and has operated at full capacity since its charter was renewed in 2001. According to Department of Education (DOE) enrollment data, PVPA currently serves 402 students: 82 in the middle school and 320 high school students. There are more than 180 students on PVPA’s waiting list. DOE’s enrollment data for the 2004-2005 school year show that 83.6 percent of PVPA’s students are White, 7.7 percent are African-American, 6.0 percent are Hispanic, 1.5 percent are Asian, and 1.2 percent are Native American. DOE data also show that 9.7 percent are Special Education students and 9.5 percent are categorized as low-income. There are no students categorized as First Language Not English or Limited English Proficient. Sixty-one percent of the students are female.

In the current school year, according to DOE data, PVPA’s student-teacher ratio is 11.5 to 1, somewhat lower than the statewide average of 13.3 to 1. Middle school classes at PVPA have about 20 students in each, which is a larger average class size than the average class size of PVPA’s high school classes. DOE data indicate that the school has 35 teachers, 30 of whom teach in core academic areas. Consistent with PVPA’s mission, more than 90 percent of PVPA’s academic teaching staff are accomplished performance artists, according to PVPA’s Application for Charter Renewal.

PVPA’s school day is longer than that of many other public schools: classes are held from 8:30 a.m. until 4:15 p.m., with many of the performing arts classes held in the afternoon. PVPA employs internal standards and benchmarks to evaluate student performance. Course credits are granted based on each student’s performance in meeting or exceeding the competency standards and benchmarks for each course. PVPA does not accept work below the competency level

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(equivalent to a B grade in traditional school grading systems) or promote students that have not demonstrated competency in all required courses. PVPA's students have performed well on all required Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests. PVPA's Application for Charter Renewal and annual reports emphasize, however, that PVPA does not believe that standardized tests are accurate in measuring student ability or competency.

In addition to requiring competency in a college course of study, PVPA graduation requirements include at least eight hours per week of performing arts programs, completion of two performing arts internships and two other internships: one within the PVPA community and one in the external community.

PVPA Board of Trustees operates with a membership consisting of two parents, two teachers, two administrators, five students, and six community members. Student members under age 18 participate in Board meetings but do not vote. Standing and ad hoc Board committees include Executive, Finance, Admissions, Assessment, and Diversity. The two PVPA founders continue to lead the school as Director of Administration and Director of Education. In addition, PVPA is organized into various departments for academic subjects and performing arts, each headed by a director. PVPA records show that the school employs 40 hourly specialists, many of whom instruct in performing arts, in addition to its teachers.

During this charter period, PVPA has initiated several innovative programs, including the Plane Tree Program and the "Arts in Every School" program. PVPA developed the Plane Tree Program as a transitional program to assist home-schooled students in enrolling in or returning to public education. Through the "Arts in Every School" program, PVPA teachers show other schools how to integrate the arts and multiple learning styles into an academic curriculum through a variety of on-site workshops. In 2002, PVPA was selected as one of five schools in the United States to participate in Project Zero, a research project undertaken by the Harvard University Graduate School of Education to study exemplary interdisciplinary teaching at the pre-collegiate level.

PVPA students have distinguished themselves academically and artistically. For example, PVPA's Mock Trial team is preparing to attend the national competition after winning the 2005 Massachusetts State Finals; PVPA's Catalyst Dance Company won a place in performance at the National High school Dance Festival in Philadelphia; and PVPA's student jazz a cappella group, 5 Alone, has been invited to perform at many national and international festivals and was named Best Jazz Vocal Group in *Downbeat Magazine's* 2003 and 2004 Annual Student Music Awards.

## **FINDINGS**

The Renewal Inspection Team (Team) spent two days on site at the Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter Public School (PVPA) on April 25 and 26, 2005. The Team conducted separate focus group interviews with PVPA's Board of Trustees (Board), teachers, department heads, students, and parents. The Team observed instruction in 11 high school classes and 4 middle school classes. In addition, the Team conducted interviews with school administrators, including the Director of Education, the Director of Administration, the Business Manager, and one of the Board's co-Treasurers.

The Team obtained and reviewed PVPA data and documents prior to the renewal site visit, on site, and after the site visit. The information reviewed included five years of Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) data; the school's internal assessment rubrics; the school's current Accountability Plan; the school's Application for Charter Renewal, including the proposed Accountability Plan; annual reports; the school's by-laws; minutes of Board meetings held between December 3, 2002 and March 17, 2005; annual budgets; audited financial statements and management letters for the three years ending June 30, 2002 through June 30, 2004; policies and procedures; handbooks and other information provided to staff, students, and parents; curriculum rubrics; staff evaluation and professional development plan documents; information on teacher qualifications and experience; student work; lease information; previous site visit reports; and the previous renewal inspection report prepared in 2000.

### **RENEWAL QUESTION 1: IS THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM A SUCCESS?**

#### **MCAS RESULTS**

The Team examined the scores attained by PVPA students on the MCAS exams for the period of 2000 to 2004. These scores were compared to the MCAS scores attained by Massachusetts school students statewide. Because PVPA draws its students from many school districts – 34 districts according to DOE's 2004-2005 pre-enrollment report, many of which are themselves regional school districts – no single district could be used to provide a meaningful comparison with PVPA's MCAS results.

There is limited MCAS data for PVPA eighth graders during the period under review. Data are available only for 2003 when 12 students took the Science and Technology/Engineering exam and the Mathematics exam. In 2004, only seven eighth graders took the exams, too few for DOE to report the data. (DOE does not publish school reports on MCAS results when fewer than 10 students in a grade take the exam.) Similarly, with two exceptions there are insufficient data to report on any subpopulation categories. The two exceptions are: in 2004, ten PVPA students who were eligible for free or reduced price lunch took the tenth-grade exams, and in 2003, 13 PVPA special education students took the tenth-grade exams.

According to PVPA's Application for Charter Renewal and Annual Reports, PVPA does not believe that standardized tests accurately measure student ability or competence, notwithstanding the strong performance of PVA students on the MCAS exams.

**1. PVPA has met its Adequate Yearly Progress requirements.**

The Department of Education (DOE) has determined that PVPA made Adequate Yearly Progress in 2003 and 2004. In English Language Arts, the school’s Cycle III performance rating is “very high” and its improvement rating is “above target.” In Mathematics, its Cycle III performance rating is “high” and its improvement rating is “above target.”

**2. Because PVPA’s eighth-grade classes have been small, only 2003 MCAS Mathematics and Science and Engineering/Technology exam results are available for analysis. In 2003, when 12 PVPA eighth grade students took the exams, PVPA students generally outperformed students statewide.**

In 2003, the only year in which PVPA has had a sufficient number of eighth-grade students take the MCAS exams for DOE to report the results, as shown in Table 1, the PVPA students generally outperformed students statewide. Eighty-four percent of PVPA students passed the exam by scoring Needs Improvement or better, compared to 67 percent of statewide students. Similarly, 42 percent of PVPA students compared to 37 percent statewide scored Proficient or better. The one area in which students statewide did better than the PVPA students was in the percentage that scored in the Advanced category: 12 percent of students statewide compared to no students at PVPA. The comparative performance overall is reflected in the PVPA Proficiency Index of 72.9 compared to 63.2 for the State.

**Table 1. Comparison of PVPA Charter Public School and State Grade 8 MCAS Mathematics Results 2003**

Year	N	Advanced	Proficient	Needs Improvement	Warning/Failing	Proficiency Index
PVPA	12	0	42	42	17	72.9
State	78,456	12	25	30	33	63.2
<i>Data Source: Department of Education MCAS Data</i>						

A similar pattern is found in the MCAS Science and Technology/Engineering exam results. As shown in Table 2, 91 percent of PVPA students passed the exam by scoring Needs Improvement or better, compared to 69 percent of students statewide. The results for PVPA and statewide students scoring Proficient or better are comparable (33 percent and 32 percent, respectively) although four percent of statewide students scored in the Advanced category, whereas no PVPA students achieved an Advanced score.

**Table 2. Comparison of PVPA Charter Public School and State Grade 8 MCAS Science and Technology/Engineering Results 2003**

Year	N	Advanced	Proficient	Needs Improvement	Warning/Failing	Proficiency Index
PVPA	12	0	33	58	0	70.8
State	78,422	4	28	37	30	61.7
<i>Data Source: Department of Education MCAS Data</i>						

3. PVPA’s tenth-grade MCAS results on the English Language Arts (ELA) exam have consistently improved from 2000 through 2003; the slight decline from 2003 to 2004 is reflected in a slight decline in the school’s Composite Performance Index (CPI) for the exam. For the past two years no PVPA student has scored in the Warning/Failing category of the exam. PVPA’s results compare favorably to the results obtained by students statewide.

PVPA students have performed well on the tenth-grade MCAS ELA exam over the past five years. As shown in Table 3, no PVPA student has scored in the Warning/Failing category of the exam in the last two years. The school’s CPI, which measures the progress of all students (those taking the standard MCAS exam and those taking the MCAS alternative assessment) toward proficiency, increased each year from 2000 through 2003 and then declined slightly in 2004, reflecting a slight increase (two percent) in the students who scored in the Needs Improvement category. However, the percentage of students who scored in the Advanced category increased substantially (by nine percent) in 2004: from 26 percent in the prior year to 35 percent.

**Table 3. PVPA Charter Public School  
Grade 10 MCAS English Language Arts Results  
2000-2004**

Year	N	Advanced	Proficient	Needs Improvement	Warning/Failing	Composite Performance Index
2000	65	5	26	33	36	58.6
2001	65	23	48	25	5	86.9
2002	60	22	58	15	5	91.5
2003	73	26	64	11	0	97.0
2004	75	35	52	13	0	95.7

*Data Source: Department of Education MCAS Data*

In each year of the five-year period with the exception of the 2000-2001 academic year, PVPA students have outperformed students statewide on the ELA exam by substantial margins, as shown in Table 4.

**Table 4. Comparison of PVPA Charter Public School and State  
Grade 10 MCAS English Language Arts Results  
2000-2004**

Year		N	Advanced	Proficient	Needs Improvement	Warning/ Failing	Composite Performance Index
2000	<b>PVPA</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>58.6</b>
	State	61,401	7	29	30	34	Not available
2001	<b>PVPA</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>86.9</b>
	State	64,177	15	35	31	18	79.6
2002	<b>PVPA</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>91.5</b>
	State	68,184	19	40	27	14	81.2
2003	<b>PVPA</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>97.0</b>
	State	69,301	20	41	28	12	83.2
2004	<b>PVPA</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>95.7</b>
	State	69,347	19	44	27	10	84.2

*Data Source: Department of Education MCAS Data*

This comparative sustained improvement by PVPA students is mirrored by the percentage of students passing the exam (by scoring Needs Improvement or better) or scoring Proficient or better. In 2000, only 64 percent of PVPA students passed the exam, compared to 66 percent of students statewide, and only 31 percent of PVPA students scored Proficient or better, compared to 36 percent of students statewide. Beginning the next year, however, PVPA students have outperformed students statewide by a substantial margin.

**Table 5. Comparison of PVPA Charter Public School and State  
Grade 10 MCAS English Language Arts Results  
Percent Needs Improvement or Better  
and Percent Proficient or Better  
2000-2004**

Year	Needs Improvement or Better		Proficient or Better	
	PVPA	State	PVPA	State
2000	<b>64</b>	66	<b>31</b>	36
2001	<b>96</b>	81	<b>71</b>	50
2002	<b>95</b>	86	<b>80</b>	59
2003	<b>100</b>	89	<b>90</b>	61
2004	<b>100</b>	90	<b>87</b>	63

*Data Source: Department of Education MCAS Data*

**4. PVPA’s tenth-grade MCAS results on the Mathematics exam have consistently improved from 2000 through 2004. PVPA’s results compare favorably to the results obtained by tenth-grade students statewide.**

As shown in Table 6, the performance of PVPA students on the MCAS Mathematics exam has improved each year from 2000 to 2004. The results are reflected in the school’s CPI scores, which show a large increase from 2000 to 2001 and similar increases in 2003 and 2004. In 2004 only two percent of PVPA students scored in the Warning/Failing category and 32 percent – double the next highest percentage in 2002 – scored in the Advanced category.

**Table 6. PVPA Charter Public School  
Grade 10 MCAS Mathematics Results  
2000-2004**

Year	N	Advanced	Proficient	Needs Improvement	Warning/Failing	Composite Performance Index
2000	61	6	15	20	58	43.8
2001	65	12	29	34	25	67.3
2002	60	18	28	37	17	70.5
2003	74	15	44	33	8	81.8
2004	75	32	45	20	2	89.2

*Data Source: Department of Education MCAS Data*

Table 7 presents comparative data on MCAS Mathematics exam performance for PVPA students and students statewide. In comparison to student results statewide, PVPA students’ performance on the Mathematics MCAS exam was weaker in the first two years – substantially so in 2000 – but has exceeded the statewide student performance in the last three years. Beginning in 2002, PVPA had a smaller percentage of students in the Warning/Failing category than the statewide results (17 percent versus 26 percent), and last year just two percent of PVPA students received a Warning/Failing score compared to 15 percent statewide. Notably, in 2004 a higher percentage of PVPA students scored in the Advanced category than the comparable percentage of students statewide who earned that score (32 percent versus 29 percent).

**Table 7. Comparison of PVPA Charter Public School and State  
Grade 10 MCAS Mathematics Results  
2000-2004**

Year		N	Advanced	Proficient	Needs Improvement	Warning/ Failing	Composite Performance Index
2000	<b>PVPA</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>43.8</b>
	State	62,398	15	18	22	47	Not available
2001	<b>PVPA</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>67.3</b>
	State	65,350	18	27	30	25	65.0
2002	<b>PVPA</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>70.5</b>
	State	67,343	20	24	31	26	65.4
2003	<b>PVPA</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>81.8</b>
	State	69,981	24	27	28	21	69.4
2004	<b>PVPA</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>89.2</b>
	State	69,839	29	28	28	15	71.4

*Data Source: Department of Education MCAS Data*

Table 8 aggregates the same data to show the percentages of PVA and statewide students who passed the exam (Needs Improvement or better) and the percentages who scored Proficient or better for each of the past five years. As can be seen, PVPA students have outperformed students statewide in each of the past three years. The percentage of PVPA students who passed the exam increased from 83 percent in 2002 to 97 percent in 2004, compared to an increase among students statewide from 75 percent to 85 percent. Similarly, the percentage that scored Proficient or better increased from 46 percent to 77 percent for PVPA students over that three-year period, compared to an increase from 44 to 57 percent for students statewide.

**Table 8. Comparison of PVPA Charter Public School and State  
Grade 10 MCAS Mathematics Results  
Percent Needs Improvement or Better  
and Percent Proficient or Better  
2000-2004**

Year	Needs Improvement or Better		Proficient or Better	
	PVPA	State	PVPA	State
2000	<b>41</b>	55	<b>21</b>	33
2001	<b>75</b>	75	<b>41</b>	45
2002	<b>83</b>	75	<b>46</b>	44
2003	<b>92</b>	79	<b>59</b>	51
2004	<b>97</b>	85	<b>77</b>	57

*Data Source: Department of Education MCAS Data*

- In 2004, all tenth-grade PVPA students eligible for the free or reduced price lunch program passed the MCAS English Language Arts and Mathematics exams. Collectively, their performance trailed that of all PVPA students who took the exam but compares favorably to the performance of all students statewide.**

In 2004, ten PVPA tenth graders taking the MCAS exams were eligible for the free or reduced price lunch program. All of these students passed the ELA and Mathematics exams. As shown

in Table 9, on the ELA exam these students generally scored somewhat lower than PVPA students taken as a whole: a higher percentage scored in the Needs Improvement category (20 percent compared to 13 percent) and fewer scored in the Advanced category (30 percent compared to 35 percent). The PVPA students eligible for the free or reduced price lunch program outperformed state students as a whole in every category.

**Table 9. Comparison of PVPA Charter Public School and State Grade 10 MCAS English Language Arts Exam Results Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program Subgroup 2004**

	N	Advanced	Proficient	Needs Improvement	Warning/Failing
<b>PVPA F/RP Lunch Student Subgroup</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>0</b>
PVPA All Students	75	35	52	13	0
State All Students	69,347	19	44	27	10

*Data Source: Department of Education MCAS Data*

Table 10 shows the Mathematics exam results for PVPA students in the subgroup, for all PVPA students, and for students statewide. All PVPA students eligible for the free or reduced price lunch program passed the exam, whereas two percent of all PVPA students received Warning/Failing scores. Otherwise, PVPA students as a whole outperformed the subgroup. The PVPA students in the free or reduced price lunch program outperformed students statewide in terms of the percentage who passed the exam (100 percent compared to 85 percent) and those who scored Proficient or better (80 percent compared to 57 percent), although a higher percentage of students statewide scored in the Advanced category.

**Table 10. Comparison of PVPA Charter Public School and State Grade 10 MCAS Mathematics Exam Results Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program Subgroup 2004**

	N	Advanced	Proficient	Needs Improvement	Warning/Failing
<b>PVPA F/RP Lunch Student Subgroup</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>0</b>
PVPA All Students	75	32	45	20	2
State All Students	69,839	29	28	28	15

*Data Source: Department of Education MCAS Data*

- In 2003, all tenth-grade PVPA special education students passed the MCAS English Language Arts exam, and all but one passed the Mathematics exam. Collectively, their performance trailed that of all PVPA students who took the exams but compared favorably to the performance of all students statewide.**

In 2003, 13 special education students took the tenth-grade MCAS exams at PVPA. As shown in Table 11, these students as a group scored lower than all PVPA students in each category of the ELA exam. However, they outperformed both special education students statewide and all students statewide. Whereas all special education PVPA students passed the exam with a score

of Needs Improvement or better, 33 percent of special education students statewide and 12 percent of all students statewide did not pass the exam. Moreover, 70 percent of PVPA’s special education students scored Proficient or better, compared to just 25 percent of special education students statewide and 61 percent of all students statewide. The only category in which the special education PVPA students did not outscore students statewide was the Advanced category (8 percent compared to 20 percent).

**Table 11. Comparison of PVPA Charter Public School and State  
Grade 10 MCAS English Language Arts Exam Results  
Special Education Student Subgroup  
2003**

	N	Advanced	Proficient	Needs Improvement	Warning/ Failing
<b>PVPA Special Education Student Subgroup</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>0</b>
PVPA All Students	74	26	64	11	0
State Special Education Student Subgroup	10,006	3	22	42	33
State All Students	69,301	20	41	28	12

*Data Source: Department of Education MCAS Data*

Eight percent of PVPA special education students scored in the Warning/Failing category as did eight percent of all PVPA students, but otherwise the special education PVPA students’ scores trailed those of all PVPA students (Table 12). Special Education PVPA students outperformed all special education students statewide in each category; a higher percentage of special education PVPA students passed the exam than did all students statewide (92 percent versus 79 percent); and a slightly higher percentage of special education PVPA students scored Proficient or better than did all students statewide (54 percent compared to 51 percent). However, no special education student scored in the Advanced category, while 24 percent of students statewide scored in that category.

**Table 12. Comparison of PVPA Charter Public School and State  
Grade 10 MCAS Mathematics Exam Results  
Special Education Student Subgroup  
2003**

	N	Advanced	Proficient	Needs Improvement	Warning/ Failing
<b>PVPA Special Education Student Subgroup</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>8</b>
PVPA All Students	73	15	44	33	8
State Special Education Student Subgroup	10,141	5	15	30	50
State All Students	69,981	24	27	28	21

*Data Source: Department of Education MCAS Data*

**7. PVPA did not provide the Team with any individual student success plans for students who have failed MCAS exams. PVPA has offered individualized assistance to such students.**

DOE requires that schools develop individual student success plans (ISSPs) for students who fail the MCAS exams. In recent years, PVPA has had few students fail the MCAS exams. However, PVPA has not prepared ISSPs for those students as required. In a written response to the Team's request for copies of individual student success plans (ISSPs) prior to the site visit, the school stated: "We are not clear on the nature of this requirement. Please clarify with us and if possible we will have the material ready for you at the site visit." While on site, the Team again requested copies of ISSPs. In response, PVPA provided a copy of a planning document indicating that PVPA's Education Director would oversee the development of ISSPs. Upon reviewing a draft of this report, PVPA reported that at the time of the Team's review, no current student had an ISSP because all current students had passed the MCAS exams.

In the 2003-2004 school year, PVPA offered a course to assist students with writing for the MCAS ELA exam. PVPA also offers a remedial mathematics course, called "MCAS Math," that is open to all students in grades nine through twelve, by invitation. PVPA has in the past offered tutorials for students in the eleventh and twelfth grades who did not pass the MCAS ELA and/or Math exams. However, because all tenth-graders passed the ELA exam and all but a few passed the Mathematics exam on their first try over the past two years, these tutorials were discontinued. (As previously noted, in 2004 all PVPA students passed the ELA exam and only one PVPA student did not pass the Mathematics exam.) The Team observed that PVPA's relatively small class sizes and individualized instruction methods create an environment in which students are likely to receive the academic help that they need. As a result, the intended purpose of ISSPs has likely been achieved informally at PVPA.

**8. Although PVPA teachers make informal use of the MCAS results, PVPA does not conduct a systematic, school-wide analysis of MCAS results.**

The Team's interviews with PVPA teachers, administrators, and Board members indicate that PVPA makes limited use of the detailed performance data generated on the MCAS exam results. Individual teachers and several department directors told the Team that they conducted informal analyses of the MCAS data. However, PVPA does not conduct systematic, school-wide analyses of the data.

## **OTHER ASSESSMENTS**

**9. PVPA uses no standardized external tests other than the MCAS exams to assess student performance from a developmental perspective.**

PVPA's Application for Charter Renewal states: "PVPA students take standardized MCAS, PSAT, SAT, and AP exams as part of our regular program. Results of the tests go to students, parents, teachers, and our assessment team. We believe, however, that standardized tests do not exhibit our achievement as a school. PVPA seeks to educate students who, upon graduation, can

be successful at real world tasks, the scope of which far outreaches measurement by any standardized test.”

**10. PVPA relies primarily on internal standards and benchmarks to evaluate student performance. The standards and benchmarks are appropriately clear and challenging. They are aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, and there is a scope and sequence for each academic and performing arts curriculum. Rubrics assist students in demonstrating mastery of course materials. Members of the school community were familiar with and supportive of PVPA’s use of standards and benchmarks to assign course credit and promote students. PVPA’s records show that approximately 95 percent of students have met the course standards and benchmarks in each of the past three years, and the percentage of students who exceeded the standards and benchmarks has increased each year during that period.**

PVPA has developed standards and benchmarks and a scope and sequence for each academic and performing arts course offered by the school. The standards and benchmarks are based on the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and on *Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education* published by the Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory. Course credits are granted based on each student’s performance in meeting or exceeding the standards and benchmarks for each course. All PVPA students receive a list of standards and benchmarks at the beginning of each class in which they are enrolled. Students are required to achieve at least a “competency” level (the equivalent of a B grade in a traditional grading system) for each standard and benchmark in order to receive course credit. Rubrics have been prepared to assist students in demonstrating mastery of course materials. All students receiving “full credit” for a course have demonstrated competency in all course standards and benchmarks. Students whose performance exceeds the standards and benchmarks earn honors or advanced credit. Students who do not initially obtain “full credit” can keep working at the course until they earn “full credit.”

The standards and benchmarks reviewed by the Team were well prepared, clear, and challenging. Students interviewed by the Team indicated that they clearly understood the performance expectations for each course. Remarks by students, parents, and teachers interviewed by the Team indicated that they clearly understood PVPA’s use of the standards and benchmarks to evaluate student performance and expressed support for PVPA’s policy of requiring that each student demonstrate competency in all required courses before being promoted.

Table 9 shows distribution of course credit earned by students between the 2002 and 2004 school years as reported in PVPA’s 2004 Annual Report. In each year, approximately 95 percent of the students earned credit for courses. The percentage of students who earned advanced or honors credit has increased over the three years from 38 to 42 percent.

**Table 13. PVPA Course Credit Distribution  
2002-2004 School Years**

School Year	Advanced Or Honors	Full Credit	Full Credit Late	No Credit
2001-02	38 %	46 %	12 %	5 %
2002-03	41 %	43 %	10 %	6 %
2003-04	42 %	40 %	12 %	5 %

*Data Source: PVPA 2004 Annual Report*

## CURRICULUM AND CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

### **11. PVPA offers a college preparatory program combined with an extensive performing arts curriculum.**

PVPA's 2001 Accountability Plan lists the following student performance objective: "All PVPA students are, upon graduation, prepared for college." Although the Accountability Plan contains no measurable standards for assessing progress toward this objective, PVPA's Application for Charter Renewal reports that 80 percent of PVPA graduates apply to college and that 90 percent of those are accepted at their top choices.

PVPA's academic graduation requirements correspond to college admission requirements. The academic requirements include four years of Language Arts, three years of Social Studies/History, three years of Mathematics, three years of Science (all with laboratory), and three years of a World Language. Students have the option of taking a fourth year of Mathematics, Science, and World Language.

The performing arts are prominently featured throughout the PVPA curriculum. The graduation requirements include at least eight hours per week of performing arts programs and completion of two performing arts internships. PVPA lists 16 courses in the visual performing arts, 22 music courses, 17 drama courses, and 13 dance courses. PVPA offers this integrated curriculum by employing 35 full-time teachers and an additional 36 hourly specialists, many of whom are professional artists.

### **12. Although student portfolios are compiled in some classes, PVPA does not use the portfolios to evaluate student performance and award academic credit.**

Individual departments determine whether and how to use student portfolios. According to PVPA's Director of Education, PVPA has in past years attempted to require student portfolios to be maintained in every subject, but this effort proved unworkable. Portfolios are currently used in language arts, mathematics, world language, and visual arts courses. According to the Director, however, PVPA has "never used the portfolios for credit, only for reflection." She indicated, however, that World Language is currently updating its scope and sequence and are considering how to use the portfolio.

**13. In the classes observed by the Team, the instructional methods used by PVPA teachers were varied, individualized, appropriate to the subject matter, and effective. Students were engaged, respectful, and responsive to their teachers.**

The Team observed 15 classrooms at both the high school and the middle school. Class sizes ranged from four to 14 students, and the students in attendance ranged in age and in grade level. (In one classroom observed by the Team, the ages of the students spanned four years.) Classrooms were arranged to facilitate both large and small group instruction. The walls of many classrooms were covered with related instructional materials and examples of student work. Standards, benchmarks, and homework assignments were posted on classroom walls and chalkboards.

Teachers demonstrated varied methods of instruction in the classrooms observed, including whole group lecture-discussions, small group work, and individualized work. Teachers were prepared to teach the lessons. They explained the lesson purposes clearly, placed the lessons in the context of previous days' work, worked with students individually and in small groups during the lessons, encouraged the students to stay on task and work toward the earmarked benchmarks, and clarified homework assignments. Many of the teachers introduced problem scenarios as a part of their instruction and challenged students to solve them, either on their own or in conjunction with several other students.

Instruction was observed to be of high quality. Teachers were seen to use a diverse repertoire of instructional modalities while adhering to clear routines. The Academic Director indicated that she expects teachers to change their instructional methods every 20 minutes, or two or three times per instructional period. This technique maintained the interest of students in the classrooms observed by the Team.

Student discussions were on task and at a high level during problem-solving work. Teachers withdrew from the discussions from time to time and allowed students to take charge of the investigations. Students were respectful of each other and their teachers as they carried out the work. No classroom management problems arose during the observations.

Instruction is modified for special education students, all of whom are integrated into PVPA's regular classrooms. Support staff work with classroom teachers to provide support for special education students and to provide them with instructional assistance in resource rooms. Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) are maintained for special needs students. The IEPs examined by the Team were comprehensive. The school has a Special Needs Parent Advisory Council.

The Team's observations regarding the integration of academics and the performing arts varied: one member observed no integration, a second observed one example, and a third observed several examples.

**14. Classroom resources are adequate. Teachers use a variety of instructional materials; however, few textbooks were observed to be in use and computer technology does not appear to be integrated into the curriculum.**

Varied instructional materials and resources were observed being used by the teachers. These included graphing calculators, two-sided stones and pizza boxes, posters, counting tiles, wall charts, bar graphs, televisions, VCRs, hand-held and overhead projectors, and a variety of resource books. Few textbooks were in evidence.

The Team visited two computer labs at the school, one of which was not being used. Two to three computers were placed in most of the classrooms; however, none were used in the classes observed by the Team.

Consistent with the Team's observations, DOE data indicate that PVPA's use of technology in 2003-2004, the most recent year for which technology data are available, was lower than the statewide averages for several indicators. PVPA reported that 85 percent of its classrooms had Internet access, whereas the comparable percentage for classrooms statewide was 95.5 percent. PVPA also reported a ratio of 8.2 students per computer, whereas the comparable statewide ratio was 4.8 students per computer.

**15. PVPA has developed innovative programs to support student learning.**

PVPA has been innovative in developing programs to support student learning. Examples include the Plane Tree Program and Paideia. According to PVPA's Application for Charter Renewal, PVPA instituted the Plane Tree Program in response to an identified need for a transitional program to help home-schooled students adjust to a public school environment. The Plane Tree Program provides group meetings and activities to help participants develop social skills, an individualized curriculum, and a flexible schedule that allows each student to build up gradually to a full school day.

In the Paideia program, students work with teachers to develop a three-week intersession program of study. Students must complete one Paideia activity each year at PVPA as a graduation requirement. According to PVPA's website, Paideia "allows students to take part in important learning rarely incorporated in any high school. For three weeks, students may take part in an integrated Spanish and ecology program in the rainforests of Costa Rica; teach at an elementary school, build homes for Habitat for Humanity, examine math in a hands-on and exciting way, or work with an off-Broadway show. Paideia provides a way of re-energizing our community as well as providing unique opportunities for learning."

**RENEWAL QUESTION 2:  
IS THE SCHOOL A VIABLE ORGANIZATION?**

- 1. PVPA provides a supportive, informal, inclusive learning environment in which students and teachers respect and support one another. Members of the PVPA community reported that they feel safe and secure at the school. The Team observed that the location, configuration, and operation of the open-campus high school pose**

**safety challenges; however, these should be substantially reduced when the high school is relocated to South Hadley in July 2005. PVPA has assembled a staff of well-qualified and committed teachers.**

The Team observed that the school climate at PVPA is characterized by a strong sense of community and that teachers, students, and parents are enthusiastic about the learning environment. The school's two directors, the Director of Education and the Director of Administration, oversee PVPA's academic and performing arts departments, support, and business functions. Although the two school directors provide some direction and oversight, decision-making at the school is consultative and largely decentralized: teachers and department heads make many instructional decisions and students and parents participate in policy-making.

The extent of student inclusion and involvement in PVPA is reflected in the participation of student representatives on the Board of Trustees and in the weekly meetings between the administration and the student council. PVPA's climate of community, inclusion, responsibility, and respect is reinforced at the beginning of each school year when students work in collaboration with teachers to review PVPA's code of conduct and recommend changes for consideration by the school community. The Team observed that students address teachers and administrators by their first names. Students interviewed by the Team expressed enthusiasm for the school and pride in its academic and performing arts curriculum. They reported that their teachers are talented, effective, and even passionate, and that they are very accessible and supportive of the students. The students' comments indicated that they accepted responsibility for their own learning and supported PVPA's grading system and graduation requirements.

Parents are very involved in PVPA committees, including the Board of Trustees' Assessment Committee which, according to the PVPA 2004 Annual Report, is charged with "auditing the school's progress each year and over time." Participants in the parent focus group interview conducted by the Team expressed satisfaction with their children's school experiences, with their access to teachers and other PVPA staff, and with their involvement in school decision-making.

All PVPA representatives interviewed by the Team regarded the school environment as safe and secure. The Team was told that there have been no fights in the entire 10-year history of the school, an accomplishment that was attributed to the strong school commitment to respect and proper conduct.

During its site visit, however, the Team did note that the current configuration of the high school and its open campus environment do present challenges to ensuring the safety of students and staff. The Team noted that the buildings have multiple entry points that are open and unmonitored. In addition, the high school's location in multiple buildings along Route 9 at the intersection of Route 47 in Hadley requires students to move among the buildings and to cross the busy intersection. PVPA has assigned a crossing guard to the intersection and has a policy that requires students to cross only at the crosswalk when the "Walk" signal is on. Nevertheless, student safety is a potential concern. These issues, with the possible exception of open building access, will be resolved when the high school relocates and joins the middle school in a single building in South Hadley for the next school year.

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Through classroom observations, discussions with administrators, and focus group interviews with teachers, students, and parents, the Team found that teachers are committed to the school and their students, effective in their teaching, and enthusiastic about their subjects. Information provided by PVPA to the Team shows that PVPA's teachers are well qualified. All 31 teachers have at least a Bachelor's degree; 17 have Master's degrees (one of which is listed as pending), and one has a PhD. Teachers have degrees in the subject matter they teach and most (93 percent) are certified or awaiting certification, according to the information provided by PVPA. PVPA's 40 hourly specialists, most of whom teach performing arts classes, are all expert in their fields, according to PVPA administrators. Eighteen of these specialists hold a Bachelor's degree, and eight of these also have Master's degrees.

The school strives to recruit and develop teachers who fit well with the PVPA culture and approach to education. Teachers are hired through an intensive process that includes student participation. Once hired, all full-time staff participate in a three-day orientation program that provides training in teaching techniques, incorporating multiple learning styles in a classroom setting, implementation of creative and critical thinking, and positive interpersonal and group dynamics. Staff meetings are held every two weeks.

According to current PVPA data analyzed by the Team, the average number of years the 31 academic teachers have taught at PVPA is 4.3. Slightly more than half of PVPA teachers (16) have taught at PVPA three or fewer years and slightly more than one-third (11) have taught at PVPA for just one year. These figures reflect in part the expansion of the middle school in the past year to include 40 students in the seventh grade and 42 students in the eighth grade. Teacher turnover is low: according to PVPA's Application for Charter Renewal, the school's staff turnover rate is under three percent.

**2. PVPA has operated at full capacity during this charter review period and currently has a large waiting list of students. The school has taken steps to recruit minority students and support diversity within PVPA. In 2003, the school had a relatively low dropout rate and high retention rate compared to schools statewide.**

As noted in the "Setting" section of this report, PVPA has operated at full capacity during this charter period and currently has a waiting list of more than 180 students from around the Pioneer Valley. School enrollment is predominantly white: DOE data show that the proportion of white students was 83.6 percent in 2004-2005, compared to 74.2 percent in schools statewide. According to PVPA's Director of Administration, PVPA has undertaken annual outreach efforts to minority students through the Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center in Springfield and a Hispanic community center in the area served by the school. He also reported that there is greater representation of minorities in the middle school grades and that the relocation to South Hadley is expected to make the school more accessible to more minority students. PVPA's Application for Charter Renewal notes that during the past year, a group of PVPA students initiated a discussion group, called Unity, to promote dialogue among students, staff, parents, and community members. In response to this initiative, the Board of Trustees approved an ad hoc Diversity Committee to meet and make recommendations to the Board.

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DOE indicators for the 2002-2003 academic year, the most recent year for which these data are available, show that PVPA had a high school dropout rate of 2.7 percent, which was below the statewide rate of 3.3 percent. PVPA's retention rate of 5.3 percent was more than double the statewide rate of 2.6 percent. According to PVPA administrators, common reasons for student withdrawals from PVPA include PVPA's high expectations, poor student grades, and PVPA's lack of some sports programs such as football and basketball. The higher retention rate was attributed to the school's strict adherence to its rigorous policy on achieving competency in all subject areas as a graduation requirement.

**3. PVPA's audited financial statements show that the school's financial condition is sound. The school plans to establish, and to transfer some of its assets to, a nonprofit entity that will assist the school with fundraising. The school has planned for the increased lease payments that its new facility lease requires.**

The Team reviewed PVPA's audited financial statements for the fiscal years ending June 30 2002, 2003, and 2004. In each instance, the auditors' reports accompanying all three audited financial statements were unqualified. The school received management letters from its auditor in 2003 and 2004 identifying opportunities to strengthen internal controls and realize operating efficiencies. The Team reviewed the comments in the letters with the school's financial officials and found that all current comments had been addressed or were receiving careful consideration.

The most recent audited financial statements show that PVPA has generated surpluses each year. As of June 30, 2004, the school had a net asset balance of \$1,027,569, which equaled approximately 38 percent of its operating expenses for that fiscal year. However, the Team learned in its interview with PVPA's Treasurer, Director of Administration, and Business Manager that almost \$364,000 (35 percent) of this net asset balance represents the value of land, a mortgage on the land, and building design documents for a building that the PVPA no longer plans to develop. The assets and mortgage had been held for PVPA by Arts in Education, Inc., another nonprofit entity; Arts in Education, Inc. transferred the assets and the liability to PVPA during the fiscal year that ended June 30, 2003. PVPA plans to transfer all assets and liabilities received from Arts in Education, Inc. to a new nonprofit entity that will be created to raise funds to support PVPA. The land will likely be sold and the value of the design documents (\$296,376) will likely be written off.

Nevertheless, PVPA has been able to generate operating surpluses in the past several years. In interviews with the Team, school officials attributed these surpluses to PVPA's control of expenses while lease payments were low. They told the Team that this cushion has enabled PVPA to develop an adequate net asset balance. PVPA has planned for its lease payments to increase by approximately \$400,000 beginning in July 2005, when PVPA will move the high school to its newly renovated facility in South Hadley. PVPA also anticipates that some operating efficiencies will result from the move.

**4. PVPA's Board of Trustees meets regularly and is actively engaged in school governance. Board minutes indicate that the Board regularly receives and discusses information pertaining to the school's finances and annual audits as well as other school**

**matters. However, the Board President sets goals for and monitors the performance of individual school directors without formal Board participation.**

The minutes of meetings of PVPA's Board of Trustees show that the Board meets approximately once a month, that Board members discuss and vote on substantive school matters, and that the Board is appropriately informed about and engaged in the school's financial affairs. The minutes show that the Director of Education, the Director of Administration, the Treasurer, and others regularly brief the Board. Board members and others interviewed by the Team reinforced these observations.

The Team noted, however, that the Board is not actively engaged in the process of setting goals for and evaluating the performance of the school administrators. Rather, the Board President handles these functions without formal Board participation. When asked about setting expectations and holding the directors responsible for school-wide matters such as improving student attendance (a recent Board concern), the members indicated to the Team that they did not think it would be appropriate to hold the directors responsible for such matters. However, when the Director of Education was asked about the Board's response, she indicated that she was responsible for performance on improving student attendance and that it would be appropriate for the Board to expect that of her.

Four Board members, including the current Board President, have served on the Board since the school's inception and, thus, provide continuity. Board members bring a variety of expertise and perspectives to the Board's work. For example, the Board includes parents, students, staff, artists, an attorney and two certified public accounts who serve as co-treasurers. The Board operates with the following committees: Executive, Finance, Admissions, Academic Affairs, Personnel, Assessment, Student Representatives, and Diversity.

**5. The Board's current practice of allowing Board members who are school staff and administrators to vote conflicts with the requirements of its current by-laws. Last fall the DOE provided PVPA with a detailed critique of its by-laws; recent revisions approved by the Board but not yet submitted to DOE do not completely address all of DOE's concerns. The Board's practice of allowing members to participate in the discussion of matters in which they have a financial interest is not consistent with the requirements of the state conflict of interest law. The Board has not fully complied with the state's open meeting law.**

According to PVPA's Application for Charter Renewal, PVPA's Board of Trustees currently consists of six outside community members with expertise in education, financial planning, and business; two parent representatives, two administrators; two staff representatives; and five student representatives. PVPA's current by-laws, which were last revised in 1999, provide that two student representatives, two teacher representatives, and two school directors serve as non-voting trustees and that any student representatives will be eligible to vote upon reaching age 18. However, Board members confirmed in the focus group interview that the Board's practice is to allow all Board members who are 18 years old or older to vote. Board minutes show that on June 11, 2003, the Board voted to extend voting privileges to all Board members with the exception of students under the age of 18, "with the understanding that Board members will

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recuse themselves in the event of a conflict of interest or to be determined by the President of the Board of Trustees.” Although the Board’s by-laws state that the Board can amend its by-laws by a majority vote of the Board, amended by-laws were not submitted to the Commissioner of Education as required by DOE.

The Board’s existing by-laws are out of date, contain provisions authorizing actions that would violation of the open meeting law (for example, Section 2.8 authorizes the Board to take action without a meeting, and Section 2.9 authorizes Board members to participate in Board meetings by telephone), and do not contribute to strong board governance. In September 2004 the DOE provided PVPA a detailed critique of its by-laws. On March 7, 2005, the Board voted to revise the by-laws, but the Board has not yet submitted the proposed revisions to DOE for review. The proposed revised by-laws did not completely address some of the concerns identified by DOE in September 2001.

M.G.L. c. 268A, the state conflict of interest law, prohibits public officials, including Board members, from participating in any particular matter in which the public official, an immediate family member, partner, or a business organization in which he or she has certain affiliations, has a financial interest. According to the State Ethics Commission, “[p]articipation [in a particular matter] includes not only voting or deciding on a matter but also formal and informal lobbying of colleagues, reviewing, discussing, giving advice and/or making recommendations on particular matters.” The Board’s policy of requiring its members to recuse themselves in the event of a conflict of interest is appropriate. However, Board members and administrators told the Team that Board members are permitted to participate in discussions of matters affecting their financial interests, as long as they recuse themselves from voting. This practice is not permitted by M.G.L. c. 268A.

The Team requested that PVPA provide all Board meeting minutes for the three-year period preceding the Team’s request. In response, PVPA provided the Team with regular Board meeting minutes for the period of December 3, 2002 to March 17, 2005. The minutes appeared complete and informative.

However, PVPA initially provided no minutes of executive sessions in response to the Team’s request. On site, the Team requested minutes for all executive sessions held in the same three-year period and was provided with two sets of minutes for executive sessions held in 2004. Both sets of minutes were handwritten, and neither recorded the meeting location or the present and absent Board members. The recorded purpose of the executive session held on January 28, 2004 did not comport with the requirements of the open meeting law, M.G.L. c. 30A, §11A½, which limits the use of executive sessions to the specific purposes set forth in the law. Moreover, the executive session date did not correspond with any regular Board meeting minutes. The regular Board minutes provided to the Team list at least two other executive sessions (convened on March 18, 2003 and February 10, 2004) for which PVPA did not provide minutes.

Minutes of the Board’s Executive Committee reviewed by the Team did not consistently meet the requirements for minutes under the open meeting law (date, time, place of meeting, identity of members present or absent). In addition, according to Board members and administrators interviewed, during the period under review the Board also acted in violation of the law when it

took telephone polls on matters that were later ratified in regular Board meetings. However, the Board reportedly discontinued that practice in the past year or two.

**RENEWAL QUESTION 3:  
IS THE SCHOOL FAITHFUL TO THE TERMS OF ITS CHARTER?**

**1. PVPA has adhered to the general principles contained in its 2001 Accountability Plan.**

PVPA's 2001 Accountability Plan contains 10 broad performance objectives: five student performance objectives and five school performance objectives. The plan lists multiple expectations for each performance objective. For the most part, the performance objectives and expectations contained in the plan do not contain specific, measurable standards for assessing PVPA's progress toward these performance objectives. In an interview with the Team, PVPA's Director of Education acknowledged that the 2001 Accountability Plan does not enable objective assessments of PVPA's adherence to the terms of its charter. As will be discussed under Renewal Question 4, PVPA has prepared a new Accountability Plan that is more specific and measurable.

Nevertheless, it is clear that PVPA has operated in accordance with the general principles expressed in the plan's performance objectives and expectations. The plan's student performance objectives are as follows:

- "All PVPA students demonstrate competency of the academic & performing arts curricula."
- "All PVPA students are, upon graduation, prepared for college."
- "All PVPA students are inspired and prepared to be lifelong learners."
- "All PVPA students create and support a nurturing and safe learning environment within the school community."
- "All PVPA students connect with the broader community through the internships and performances. All students participate in community service activities."

The first two student performance objectives were discussed under Renewal Question 1 in this report. As the previous discussion under Renewal Question 2 in this report shows, PVPA has adhered to the second and third above-cited objectives by creating a school environment in which students are engaged, motivated, and respectful of others within the school community. PVPA has also fulfilled the last above-cited objective by giving student performances and arts demonstrations in nearby local schools and by requiring, as a condition of graduation, that each student complete one internship of at least 16 hours in each of their four years at the school. These internships must include two off-site performing arts internships and two community service activities, one of which must entail service to PVPA and the other of which must be completed outside the school in the larger community.

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The five school performance objectives contained in PVPA's 2001 Accountability Plan are as follows:

- "PVPA teaching staff works as a team of professional, positive educators to support and enact the PVPA mission in all their work through teaching a curriculum that addresses all Student Performance Objectives and Standards & Benchmarks."
- "PVPA Administration & Board provide visionary leadership, focusing first & foremost on student learning, to carry out the mission of the charter. PVPA has a budget that is sufficient to support its charter, mission, & the achievement of all School & Student Performance Objectives & is allocated according to priorities set through reference to these."
- "Clear and open communication is the foundation for positive relations within the PVPA community."
- "PVPA has a positive relationship with the external community."
- "PVPA facilities, buildings, materials, equipment, & supplies enable the internal community to reach all school & student performance objectives; & meet local, state & federal regulations. Decisions about allocation of funds to meet this objective are based on priorities determined in reference to the student & school performance objectives, the mission & the charter."

PVPA has operated in accordance with these broad objectives. As previously discussed under Renewal Question 2, PVPA's teachers, administrators, and Board of Trustees express full committed to PVPA's mission. PVPA's financial management is sound and effective. The Team observed that communications among members of the PVPA community are open and positive. PVPA's Application for Charter Renewal lists numerous activities undertaken by PVPA with individuals and institutions from the Pioneer Valley area. For example, in 2003, according to PVPA's Application for Charter Renewal, PVPA initiated the Circle of Artists program to encourage area artists to support the arts in public education. PVPA has also collaborated with many performing arts programs in the Pioneer Valley, worked with the University of Massachusetts and the New World Theater on a play, and served as a training site for Smith College's education program. Finally, PVPA has addressed the shortcomings of its current facilities, which consist of six buildings in two towns, by identifying and leasing a single facility that will enable the school to function in a safer and more efficient manner.

**2. PVPA's Board of Trustees has not engaged in formal strategic planning during the current charter period. However, in recent years the Board has set five goals, which were intended to be more specific and measurable than the broad objectives contained in the 2001 Accountability Plan, and assessed PVPA's progress toward these goals.**

PVPA's Board of Trustees has not developed a strategic plan for the school. However, in 2003, the Board set the following five goals for the school, according to PVPA's 2004 Annual Report:

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- Goal 1 – To incorporate into the Board of Trustees’ responsibilities a system to monitor, revise, and communicate policies so as to facilitate their practical application and the efficient operation of the school.
- Goal 2 – To achieve and maintain consistency between and within departments.
- Goal 3 – To increase opportunities for curriculum integration between and within departments.
- Goal 4 – To increase parent/family participation and involvement in the school as well as to improve communication between PVPA and parents/families.
- Goal 5 – To improve student attendance.

In 2004, the Board’s Assessment Committee gathered information concerning PVPA’s progress toward the above-listed goals. According to PVPA’s 2004 Annual Report, the Assessment Committee found that progress had been made toward the first two goals but that PVPA needed to take additional steps to reach the last three goals.

**3. PVPA has undertaken and documented activities to disseminate models for replication and best practices to other public schools, as required by the charter school law.**

The charter school law, M.G.L. c. 71, §89(II), states that the charter of a Commonwealth charter schools “shall not be renewed unless the board of trustees of the charter school has documented in a manner approved by the board of education that said commonwealth charter school has provided models for replication and best practices to the commissioner and to other public schools in the district where the charter school is located.” According to PVPA’s Application for Charter Renewal, PVPA has initiated an Arts in Every School program involving public schools in the area during the current charter period. Through this program, PVPA reportedly has offered free teacher training workshops on topics such as Multiple Learning Styles, Arts Integration, Arts and Social Change. In addition, PVPA students have participated in arts performances at area public schools. According to PVPA, these performances have included a children’s theater program, choral and instrumental programs, dance programs, and historical character presentations. After the entire school served as a test site for an examination of arts integration in education by Harvard University’s Project Zero, two PVPA teachers were selected by Project Zero to serve on a team investigating the nature of interdisciplinary education. PVPA has also been active in the Massachusetts Charter School Association, which has posted on its website PVPA’s whole school paper, “Creating Excellence in Education,” and six other “best practices” papers authored by PVPA faculty.

**RENEWAL QUESTION 4:  
IF THE SCHOOL'S CHARTER IS RENEWED,  
WHAT ARE ITS PLANS FOR THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?**

- 1. The new Accountability Plan proposed by PVPA establishes clear and appropriate goals supported by specific measures. However, in several cases the proposed goals and measures are inconsistent.**

PVPA's Application for Charter Renewal contains a proposed Accountability Plan accompanied by the following explanation: "The assessment committee reviewed our current accountability plan and determined that it needed revision. They wanted to make the Goals more specific and measurable. They felt it would add clarity to our assessment. The following plan is their proposal for the next charter period."

PVPA's proposed Accountability Plan lists eight goals pertaining to PVPA's faithfulness to charter, academic performance, and organizational viability. The goals are clear and appropriate, and each goal is supported by specific, quantifiable measures. For example, Goal 1 relating to faithfulness to charter is as follows: "All PVPA students receive intensive exposure to the performing arts." Two quantifiable measures supporting this goal are listed:

- All students will participate in at least 4 hours a week of performing arts classes each semester.
- All four-year high school students are required to complete at least 16 credit hours of courses in the arts concentration of their choice as a graduation requirement.

In contrast to PVPA's 2001 Accountability Plan, PVPA's proposed Accountability Plan would enable objective assessment of PVPA's adherence to the terms of its charter.

In several cases, however, the listed measures appear inconsistent with the goals they are intended to achieve. Goal 3 relating to faithfulness to charter states: "All PVPA students will take part in service projects." Yet, the measures listed for this goal require that only 80 percent of PVPA students participate in service projects:

- During their high school career, 80% of high school students will complete 16 hours on a school service project.
- During their high school career, 80% of all students will complete a community service project.

According to PVPA's Application for Charter Renewal, each PVPA student is currently required to complete one 16-hour internship/service project each year as a requirement for graduation. This requirement is reflected in the above-listed goal but not in the two measures.

Similarly, Goal 1 relating to academic process states: “All PVPA students will demonstrate competency in the areas of language arts, math, science, history and world languages.” The measures listed for this goal are as follows:

- 80% of the students in each academic discipline will earn full, advanced, or honors credit in all academic courses.
- All students will pass the MCAS exams by their senior year.

Under PVPA’s system of assigning course credit, all students who have received full, advanced, or honors credit for a course have demonstrated competency in all the course standards and benchmarks. Thus, the first bullet listed above appears inconsistent with PVPA’s stated goal of having all PVPA students demonstrate competency in their academic coursework.

The Team asked PVPA’s Director of Education to explain these apparent discrepancies in the proposed Accountability Plan. She responded in writing as follows: “The accountability plan was designed by the assessment committee, and I believe they set many of the percentages based on our minimum of a B rating. Yes, every student needs to complete 100% of internships in order to graduate, so we are always accomplishing the goal at 100%.”

**2. PVPA’s relocation to a single site in South Hadley is expected to enhance the opportunities available to PVPA students.**

As previously discussed, PVPA will move the high school to join the existing middle school at the new South Hadley facility in July 2005. This report has noted a safety issue regarding the current configuration of the high school buildings on both sides of Route 9 in Hadley; the move to South Hadley will eliminate this safety issue. PVPA’s Application for Charter Renewal cites a number of benefits that the new site will provide to PVPA students, including opportunities for better communication, collaboration, professional science labs, performing arts spaces, an outdoor theater, parking, and safety from traffic.

**3. PVPA has set near-term goals through a consultative process and has addressed significant issues as they arose, but PVPA’s Board of Trustees has not engaged in any comprehensive, systematic strategic planning for the next charter period.**

According to PVPA’s Application for Charter Renewal, PVPA has conducted two surveys of the school community to help PVPA create goals for the next five-year charter period. The goals that have emerged from these surveys are as follows:

- Review and refinement of grading system,
- Review and refinement of daily schedule,
- Reexamination of graduation requirements,
- Planning and creation of a new school library,

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- Development of a comprehensive diversity plan,
- Implementation of a three-day orientation program for part-time employees, and
- Consideration of a school-to-work program.

These goals are supplemental to the goals in the proposed Accountability Plan and, while they are intended to set goals and objectives for the next five-year charter period, most are short-term goals planned to be accomplished in the upcoming school year. PVPA has successfully met challenges as they have arisen: for example, PVPA has secured a leased campus, addressed diversity issues, planned for longer-term space needs, increased its student enrollment, and expanded its educational offerings to accommodate a middle school population. PVPA has also taken steps to reexamine the school's mission and values, most recently through the work of the Assessment Committee. However, PVPA has not yet undertaken any comprehensive and systematic strategic planning to help the PVPA community map its future direction and course.

