

Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About PVPA

Updated 7/23/14

What does it mean that PVPA is a charter school?

PVPA has a charter granted by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, which is based on the priorities of college preparatory academics and strong performing arts. PVPA is a public school and does not charge tuition. PVPA follows most of the same regulations as any other public school.

How big is PVPA?

There is a top enrollment number of 400 students in grades 7-12. Specific grade sizes vary year to year.

What do PVPA's academic programs look like?

PVPA is a college preparatory school with rigorous academic expectations. The school's graduation requirements exceed the Massachusetts state standards. In grades 9-12, PVPA students are required to earn credit in four years of language arts, three years of laboratory science, four years of mathematics, three years of history, two years of one world language, and a minimum of eight hours weekly per semester of performing arts classes. In grades 7 and 8, students study core academics each year. Humanities study occurs within the context of an interdisciplinary language arts and history curriculum. Mathematics and science classes are separated by grade. In addition, they have twelve periods per week of electives (arts, world languages, physical education, etc.).

What do most PVPA students do after graduation?

Over 90% PVPA graduates go on to college in the first or second year after graduation. They repeatedly report feeling very well prepared for college due to the school's focus on self-advocacy, rigor and high expectations. They also tend to choose college programs that fit their learning styles and academic needs because they know themselves as learners. PVPA currently has graduates attending four-year liberal arts programs at schools such as Boston University, Bennington, Brown, Emerson, Mount Holyoke, Harvard, Smith, Tufts, UMASS, Wesleyan, Westfield State University, and Yale. Other students go to performing arts-focused programs such as the University of the Arts in Philadelphia, SUNY Purchase, and Berklee College of Music. Students also start at two-year community colleges such as Holyoke and Greenfield Community Colleges, and Springfield Technical Community College.

What kind of world language instruction does PVPA offer?

PVPA offers sequential instruction in French, Spanish, and American Sign Language in grades 9-12. Grade 8 students may choose to begin world language instruction in French and Spanish as a fifth academic class; however, students in higher grades receive priority enrollment. Students may also elect to take courses in any language outside of school to meet the three-year requirement. Past examples include Latin, Japanese, German, Arabic, and Mandarin.

Do students take the MCAS?

Yes. PVPA is a public charter school and follows all state testing requirements.

What should students expect for homework?

In general, teachers assign an average of 30 minutes of homework per night. Many students opt to have a Homework Support (study) block built into their schedules.

Are students separated by grade and/or ability level?

Academic courses, with some exceptions, are heterogeneously grouped. Teachers individualize instruction for students at all levels within each class. Arts classes are generally separated by grade into 7-8 groups and 9-12 groups. All students may elect to do independent work outside of class to

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earn "Honors" credit in any class. In grades 11-12, some classes are designated "Honors" level, and require extra work and responsibility.

What types of services does PVPA provide for students with disabilities?

Just like traditional public schools, charter public schools must ensure that students with disabilities receive all special education and related services identified in the student's individualized education program (IEP) in the least restrictive environment (LRE). PVPA complies with all relevant federal and state laws and regulations protecting students with disabilities including section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

The range of special education supports at PVPA include instruction in general education classes (full inclusion program); instruction in general and special education classes (partial inclusion program); and instruction in a special education classroom (substantially separate classroom). Special education services, including specially designed instruction, are provided by Academic Support Teachers and Apprentice Teachers on staff while related services, such as occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech and language services are provided by professionals contracted by PVPA.

What kind of arts programs does PVPA have?

PVPA offers a wide variety of offerings in music (vocal and instrumental), theater, dance, visual arts, and technical theater (sets, lights, sound, costumes, etc.) taught by experienced teaching artists. Class levels range from beginner to advanced and may require an audition process or demonstration of skill. It is not a conservatory program. Because classes tend to be small (under 20 students), teachers are usually able to tailor instruction to different ability levels within a class to meet student needs. In general, individual or small group musical instrument instruction is not offered.

What kind of performance opportunities do PVPA students have?

Students may perform publicly (or not) as they wish, although all are expected to participate in the performing arts each day through their classes. Most weeks there are informal Open Mics for the school community. Classes and groups prepare for public performances on various venues: the Mainstage, the Studio Theater, the Dance Studio Theater, or other off-site venues such as the Academy of Music in Northampton. PVPA has a production department that works cooperatively with performing arts directors to produce over 20 major community productions per year. In addition, there are touring groups such as the *Catalyst* dance company, and the *Children's Theater*, which perform around western Massachusetts and beyond.

Are there many evening rehearsals and performances at PVPA?

Rehearsal demands depend entirely on each student's schedule. In grades 7 and 8, there are few out-of-school rehearsals. In grades 9-12, students may be required to be in after-school and/or weekend rehearsals related to performances, which are particularly time-consuming in the week prior to a show. All rehearsals end no later than 8:30 pm.

When does school begin and end?

Currently, school begins at 8:30 Monday-Friday. It ends at 3:55pm Monday-Thursday and 2:50pm on Fridays.

What if a child is shy and/or does not like to perform for large groups?

There are many opportunities for students to be engaged behind the scenes. It is important that the child be interested in the creative process and one or more art form. Students should also be willing

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to take a risk occasionally and present things in front of classmates, as there are often performance aspects to class assignments.

How diverse is the student body at PVPA?

PVPA enrolls students from over 60 different cities and towns in Western Massachusetts. In the 2013-14 school year, approximately 75% of the student body self-identified as White, 9% as Multi-Racial, 6.80% as Black/African American, and 2.30% as Asian. Roughly 5.5% of the students identify themselves as Latino/a. About 19% of students were eligible for federal free/reduced lunch plans.

What does the daily schedule look like?

Each class meets three times a week for seventy-five minutes. On Fridays, all students have grade specific meetings and/or Open Mic. Per school day, five classes meet, with a daily break and lunch built into the schedule.

What does the yearly schedule look like?

First semester occurs from the end of August through mid-January, followed by Paideia (see below), and then second semester from early-February through mid-June. PVPA is a public school and follows the 180-day school year regulation.

What is Paideia?

Paideia is a Greek word that means "from all sources" and is the name of PVPA's January intersession. All students spend three weeks engaged in an intensive study or activity of their choice. Offerings vary year to year and include academics, arts, service learning, performance tours, and issues-based projects. The school day ends at 2:50pm during Paideia.

How do students get to school?

Many students carpool with other families. PVPA offers a paid bus service for which families pay a fee. PVPA buses arrive at school at 8:25 am daily and leave after school dismisses at 4:10 pm Mondays-Thursdays and 3:05 pm Fridays. You may call the PVPA Business Office at (413) 552-1591 for more information.

Is there a hot lunch program?

PVPA gets hot lunch through the South Hadley school system. Monthly menus are available in the main office and on the Web site. In addition, there are vending machines with items such sandwiches, soup, and snacks, and beverages. Pizza is available Tuesday through Friday. There are microwaves available to the students, as well as utensils and plates.

How much contact is there between students in grades 7 and 8 and upper grades?

Academic classes in grades 7-9 take place along the same hallway on the second floor, which acts as "home base" for these students. Specialized spaces (ex: dance studios, theater, etc.) are shared by all, as are common areas such as outdoor space. Most classes and productions are designated 7-8 or 9-12 unless otherwise indicated. All grades ride PVPA transportation together.

Does PVPA offer sports?

Yes. PVPA currently offers co-ed competitive soccer in the fall, and boys and girls competitive Ultimate Frisbee teams in the spring. Students in grades 7 and 8 may be included in the tryout process for competitive teams with coach approval.