



Minutes

Grow Public Schools Board Meeting

DATE and TIME:

Monday, October 21, 2024, at 4:00 pm

LOCATIONS:

Physical Location

Grow Public Schools, Home Office – Professional Development Center
4800 Corporate Court, Bakersfield, CA 93311

Locations to Attend Virtually

Grow Academy Arvin – Conference Room (Middle School Office)
901 Nectarine Court, Arvin, CA 93203

Grow Academy Shafter – Large Conference Room
471 W Los Angeles Ave., Shafter, CA 93263

1. Opening Items

1.1 Call the Meeting to Order

The meeting was called to order at 4:00 pm by Board Chair, Tom Mestmaker.

1.2 Record Attendance

Tom Mestmaker, Manuel Pantoja, Dr. Kristen Watson, Ernie Unruh, Matt Look, Doc Ervin, Dr. Ric Esquivel, Steve McClain, Jenny Bard, Lacie Harris, Tatiana Mirzaian, Eric Mendez, Alan Blandon, Katie Barton, Jocelyn Scruggs, Kari Heilman, Maddison Contreras, Crystal Ramos, Don Pasion, Ilene Jimenez, Shyanne Ledford, Maricela Gutierrez, Dylan Wilson, Jessica Raya (remote for GA Shafter), RJ Valentino (remote), Blanca Rodriguez (remote for GA Arvin), Valerie Campbell (remote)

1.3 Flag Salute

Tom Mestmaker, Board Chair, led the flag salute.

1.5 Public Comment

Kari Heilman, Senior Executive Assistant, shared that there were no public comments.

2. Announcements

Tom Mestmaker, Board Chair, shared that Matt Look has been reappointed by the Star Parents of Grow Academy (SPGA) for another one-year term, serving as the parent representative on the Grow Public Schools Board of Directors.

3. Closed Session

At 4:01 pm, Tom Mestmaker, Board Chair, announced that the Board was going to enter closed session and asked the audience members to please exit the room.

4. Open Session Information/Action

At 4:53pm, Tom Mestmaker, Board Chair, announced that the Board meeting was back in session. Mr. Mestmaker shared that regarding the performance evaluation for the Executive Liaison and the Superintendent there we no action items to report out.

Regarding the confidential student discipline matter, the Board has decided to uphold the recommendation to expel Student #2191. This Board’s finding of fact and expulsion order shall be provided to parents within ten (10) school days from today. The decision of the Board will be final.

Board Member Ernie Unruh expressed his appreciation to the administration for the thoroughness of the investigation and the timely delivery of reports to the Board, allowing sufficient time for review and decision-making.

5. Action Items

5.1 Ratification of Fully Executed Purchase and Sale Agreement (PSA) for Property

Tom Mestmaker, Board Chair, shared that the draft PSA was approved at the September 24, 2024, Board meeting and was fully executed on October 18, 2024. It is recommended that the Board ratify the agreement that was included in the Board packet.

Board Chair Tom Mestmaker asked if there were any comments from the Board. With no comments made, Mr. Mestmaker called for a motion to approve.

A motion was made by Ernie Unruh, seconded by Dr. Kristen Watson, and passed, via roll call to approve the ratification of fully executed purchase and sale agreement for property.

Board Member	Yay	Nay	Absent	Abstain
Tom Mestmaker	X			
Dr. Kristen Watson	X			
Matt Look	X			
Ernie Unruh	X			
Manuel Pantoja	X			

Carried 5-0

6. Grow Public Schools Executive Team Leadership Report

Doc Ervin, Executive Liaison to the Board of Directors

Mr. Ervin shared that the Board received drafts of the Executive Liaison and Superintendent goals for the 2024-2025 school year. He expressed his eagerness to discuss the draft goals with each Board member to gather their thoughts and feedback. A finalized version will be presented to the Board at the December meeting.

We learned that the Mandatory Ethics Board Training can be completed online, with several options available. Kari Heilman, Senior Executive Assistant, will follow up via email to provide additional information. Board Member Ernie Unruh inquired about which entity is offering the workshops. Mrs. Heilman responded that California Charter School Association (CCSA) and a few other organizations are providing them.

Doc Ervin concluded his update sharing that we have begun our strategic planning process to update our multi-year plan. He noted that RJ Valentino, the President of the Grimm Family Education Foundation and the President of The Napa Group, is partnering with us on this project. Mr. Valentino is here, via online, to give us a high-level overview of the project's status.

Mr. Valentino expressed his excitement about partnering with Grow Public Schools (GPS) and its leadership to support the strategic planning process. He emphasized that the process is leadership-driven, with six phases, but also inclusive, engaging various groups throughout. The project began on July 1, 2024, with Phase #1 focused on reviewing the project plan and governance structure.

Currently in Phase #2, we are revisiting GPS's vision and mission, as well as identifying key areas of focus. Kevin McGowan, GPS's Coordinator of Program Analytics, has conducted a situational analysis, highlighting trends such as declining K-8 enrollment across California, but increasing Charter School enrollment. In Kern County, there remains a strong need for wellness initiatives and college and career readiness programs, reinforcing the importance of GPS's mission.

Looking ahead to Phase #3, the team will develop strategic directives and pathways, informed by stakeholder engagement throughout the process. The stakeholder feedback will guide the strategic planning cabinet in developing a comprehensive financial and business plan, along with an adaptive implementation strategy. The project is set to be completed by June 30, 2025.

This is a brief overview of the process so far. We've had our initial meetings with both the Strategic Planning Cabinet Committee and Key Stakeholders. Moving forward, we will schedule time at future Board meetings to gather your input. We also have our Strategic Planning Steering Committee kickoff scheduled for November 8th. This group will serve as our advisory committee and will provide feedback on items emerging from the Strategic Planning Cabinet throughout the next year. Additionally, task forces made up of individuals from within the school system will be formed to help develop the plan.

Board member Ernie Unruh mentioned that he was unfamiliar with some of the terminology and asked for clarification on the term "annual refreshing". RJ explained that while strategic plans are typically set for five years, the rapidly evolving landscape of education necessitates an annual review. This process involves evaluating what has been accomplished, considering new circumstances that may influence the plan, and making necessary adjustments as needed. Additionally, this process will include a focus on strategic talent management, where we will assess both the current talent and Board dynamics, envisioning them not only for this year but also projecting ahead for the next five years.

Dr. Ric Esquivel, Superintendent

Dr. Esquivel stated that, like Mr. Ervin, the Board received a copy of his draft goals and expressed his eagerness for their feedback. He shared that currently, GPS is in a season of network-wide goal setting, which is part of the performance management kickoff initiated this year. He emphasized that this is an important opportunity for the organization to reflect on what is most significant for its future.

He highlighted that everyone within the organization serves as a coach, whether leading others, systems, or structures, with the aim of building capacity across the board. The objective is to ensure ongoing conversations about development, starting with these initial goals. Dr. Esquivel expressed pride in the commitment shown by all leaders at the home office and schools to set up a unique opportunity: to establish an ambitious goal of becoming a blue-ribbon network of schools.

To achieve this, they have identified key performance indicators in various categories, including Math, English Language Arts (ELA), Science, Suspension Rates, Chronic Absenteeism, and English Learner Progress on the ELPAC, along with GPS's continued commitment to Family & Community Engagement and Health & Wellness. These metrics will form the dashboard for setting annual goals across the network, all in alignment with the Wildly Audacious Goal (WAG).

Dr. Esquivel noted that benchmarks have already been established, and the team has conducted research on similar schools with comparable demographics that have achieved blue-ribbon status. This research will serve as a blueprint as they strive for blue-ribbon recognition. Mr. Ervin added that reaching this goal will not be accomplished in a year; it will require time and sustained effort but believes that it can be done. Dr. Esquivel added that we will benchmark our way there and it will be an annual journey together.

Steve McClain, Chief Business Officer

Mr. McClain updated the Board on Grow #3, thanking them for approving the Purchase and Sale Agreement, which allows the project to move into escrow. The next phase is the due diligence period, during which we will work with our civil engineer Bob Swanson to ensure the designated area is suitable for a school site. A pre-construction meeting is scheduled for November 5th, involving the construction team, Colombo, architects from Ordiz Melby, and Landscape Development, LDI, for landscaping. This month, the programmatic design phase with the architects will begin, addressing questions such as the number and size of classrooms. While the initial design is being replicated, this site will provide more space.

Board member Manny Pantoja asked if the new school will have a gym. Mr. McClain responded that various options are being considered, including a multi-use gathering space.

Cindy Frantz, Senior Director of School Finance from EdTec, presented the FY24 Unaudited Actuals. Highlights from her presentation include:

- The 23-24 Unaudited Actuals reports were submitted to our authorizers on September 4, 2024.
- FY 24 Unaudited Actuals: Restricted and one time revenue - 15% of Grow's FY24 revenue was one-time restricted funding.
- 23-24 Unaudited Actuals - \$4.4 million of fixed assets in construction in progress for ongoing facilities improvement projects.

- Audit process will be continuing over the next four months

Mr. McClain shared that we are planning to get reimbursed through SB 740 for our project construction costs. Last year the Board approved a reimbursement resolution so when the financing comes, the money will be returned to us.

7. Division Reports

7.1 Learning & Innovation

Tatiana Mirzaian, Director of Learning & Innovation, provided updates to the Board as we enter quarter two. The first focus is on building instructional leadership capacity, continuing the work with RELAY, a graduate school of education. Some of our coaches, the Assistant Principals, and Lab Leads have participated in RELAY's training, and brought the learnings back to the school sites. The goal is to ensure coaching is aligned with observable "look-fors," evidence, and data-based strategies, all RELAY components designed to strengthen instructional leadership.

The second focus is on enhancing data fluency and evidence-based systems, which are integrated into coaching huddles. During these sessions, observation data from across the system is reviewed, and next steps are planned using playbooks. Principals, who make daily decisions, are supported in managing data cycles. Teachers are also being assisted in analyzing system data and how students are performing on quick checks.

Our Fall Summit took place on Friday, October 11th, at the Grow Academy Shafter campus. The event focused on four key practices from our teaching and learning framework: lesson learning & preparation, classroom culture, delivery of instruction, and professional responsibilities. We organized sessions aligned with these components, engaging 146 instructional staff members from across our network in valuable professional learning opportunities.

Board Member Ernie Unruh asked if the teachers completed an evaluation of the Fall Summit and, if so, what the feedback was. Ms. Mirzaian confirmed that they did. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the worst and 5 the best, 93% of participants rated a 4 or 5 for the question, "We are aligned to network priorities." For the question, "Sessions were relevant in enhancing their practices as an educator," 83% gave a 4 or 5. However, the collaboration category received lower ratings, indicating a desire for more opportunities to collaborate. The team will explore ways to enhance collaboration for the next summit.

7.2 Human Resources

Dr. Esquivel informed the Board that Eric Mendez, Director of Human Resources, had a prior commitment, and he would be delivering the update on Mr. Mendez's behalf. He highlighted the leadership exploration and development series, which is aligned with performance management. This series involves all leaders, from academics to non-academic areas, in a development process focused on goal setting.

In line with the commitment to ensuring the best talent is in front of students, Dr. Esquivel shared a significant data point: in 2021-2022, only 70% of the teaching staff held a credential (preliminary or clear). By 2024-2025, that number has risen to 94%, reflecting substantial progress and the organization's dedication to excellence. Mr. Ervin

emphasized that as the network grows, the HR team remains committed not only to hiring credentialed teachers but also to recruiting the best talent available.

7.2 **Business Services**

Alan Blandon, Director of Business Services, provided an update on fall intersession activities. We recently upgraded the schools' internet access points to enhance network reliability and performance, allowing for faster internet connections across our campuses. This week, our IT Department will be replacing data switches on both campuses to improve data flow and network efficiency. Additionally, they will replace all equipment batteries, which will support data integrity and resilience during power outages.

Our facilities team is conducting fall and winter maintenance to ensure all equipment is up to date and functioning properly. In preparation for welcoming students back from Fall Break on Monday, October 28th, we are also power washing both campuses.

7.3 **Marketing & Communications**

Katie Barton, Director of Marketing & Communications, shared that we are collaborating with a contractor specializing in school websites, particularly in charter schools, to develop our new website. We look forward to reviewing and updating the site's content to meet the needs of our stakeholders—parents, prospective employees, and the community—as we aim to launch the new site by January 2025. This project will allow us to strengthen our brand and establish a valuable online resource for all.

For Quarter One, we also developed family engagement tools, which were distributed at this year's parent-teacher conferences. One of these tools is a *Family Guide to Improving Attendance*, created in collaboration with our schools to help parents understand attendance protocols. We also introduced a *Parent's Guide to Understanding Standards-Based Grading* to clarify how parents can interpret student progress and engage more meaningfully with their children's learning journey. We look forward to ongoing engagement and providing tools that empower families to support student success.

7.4 **Family & Community Engagement (FACE)**

Jocelyn Scruggs, FACE Coordinator, updated the Board on key accomplishments since the establishment of FACE, highlighting efforts to improve the parent contactability rate on ParentSquare. The goal has been to ensure families receive important communications, including attendance reminders, event notifications, and parent-teacher conference information. By the end of June last year, the district achieved a 96% contactability rate. This year, it started at 90% by the end of July, with Grow Academy Shafter reaching 100% and Arvin only one contact away from the same milestone. Jocelyn praised the FACE team for their hard work.

In September, FACE launched the Parent Project, a 10-week, evidence-based program aimed at helping parents manage challenging teen behaviors, such as substance abuse, truancy, and gang involvement. The program provides tools for improving communication, discipline, and relationships at home. With 20 parents enrolled at each school, the project has positively impacted families, empowering parents to create a

supportive home environment and reducing family conflict. The program will conclude in November with the parents graduating.

Matt Look, Star Parents of Grow Academy (SPGA) Arvin Representative, shared that we have had a fantastic kick-off this year, marking one of the best years for parent engagement, particularly with the SPGA meetings. He expressed gratitude to Jocelyn Scruggs and the FACE team for their dedication, noting that they have been a tremendous asset to the organization. Several events and fundraisers are on the horizon, including Trunk-or-Treat, which will take place on Tuesday, October 29.

Jill O'Brien, Parents of Grow Academy (POGA) Shafter Representative, shared that POGA has been busy over the last month and a half. We wrapped up our fundraiser for the college crew shirts, successfully selling 127 shirts to scholars and staff. Small Town Design Promotions plans to donate the proceeds from the shirt sales to POGA by the end of the month. Parents are already expressing interest in different shirt designs for next year.

Currently, we are in the process of funding Trunk-or-Treat. We have sold about 40 spots, doubling our sales from last year. Several vendors will be present, and we will be holding a raffle. Additionally, we will invite trick-or-treaters to vote on the movie they would like to watch during Family Movie Night, scheduled for November 14.

8. Grow Public Schools Leadership Report

Grow Academy Arvin

Jenny Bard, Principal, shared that Grow Academy Arvin recently held its annual STEM night, celebrating math and science with 168 families through hands-on activities. Participants enjoyed rocket building, using VR headsets, creating a solar system map with fruit, and exploring a wind tube sponsored by our partners at the KCSOS STEM department. We also wrapped up the quarter with academic awards and music concerts, bringing a joyful conclusion before fall break.

Additionally, we have concluded our STAR testing, and upon returning, we will continue our network-wide work on goal setting. This will involve setting end-of-year goals at both the teacher and student levels, as well as preparing for our NWEA assessment in December. We will also kick off our chronic absenteeism watchlist meetings to remind parents of the importance of regular attendance and to assist them in planning ahead for any circumstances that might prevent their students from being at school every day.

Grow Academy Shafter

Lacie Harris, Principal, shared two key action steps that they are implementing at Grow Academy Shafter to achieve our Wildly Audacious Goal of becoming a blue-ribbon school.

The first action step focuses on co-teaching strategies, which support differentiation and inclusion, ensuring that every scholar's unique needs are met. Six key co-teaching strategies—such as station teaching, parallel teaching, and team teaching—are deliberately planned during our weekly intellectual prep sessions. These strategies are utilized not only by education specialists but also embraced by our general education

teachers and small group instructors. This collaborative approach enables us to provide personalized instruction and enhance engagement, fostering an inclusive environment where all scholars, regardless of their learning needs, can succeed. These efforts reflect our commitment to equity and high-quality education for all students.

The second action step emphasizes improving student attendance. We have launched several initiatives this first quarter, resulting in a 1% increase compared to this time last year. Last year, our cumulative Average Daily Attendance (ADA) was 95%, and we are now at 96%. To recognize this achievement, we are awarding parents of students with perfect attendance a certificate that allows them to enjoy lunch with their scholar at the Grow Café.

9. Grimm Family Education Foundation

Dylan Wilson, Executive Director of the Edible School Yard, shared that the Grimm Family Education Foundation recently completed its busiest week of the year by hosting the Toast & Taste event at the Buena Vista Edible Schoolyard last Friday. The event was a resounding success, attracting 170 attendees, with proceeds supporting summer camp programs at all three edible schoolyards.

In September, we had the pleasure of hosting the Grimm Family Education Foundation's Advisory Council at Grow Academy Shafter. The campus looked wonderful, and we received positive feedback. Mr. Ervin and Dr. Esquivel provided an update on the current status of Grow Public Schools.

As for the Edible Schoolyard Programs, everything has been prepped and is ready for the fall and winter season.

10. Consent Agenda

CONSENT AGENDA ITEMS/OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC COMMENT:

The Consent Agenda consists of items that are considered routine and non-controversial by Grow Public Schools staff. Consent items will be considered first and may be approved by one motion. If a member of the public wishes to comment regarding an item or items on the Consent Agenda, they may do so prior to a vote being taken on the Consent Agenda. A member of the board may remove any item from the Consent Agenda, and it will be considered in listed sequence with an opportunity for any member of the public to address the board concerning the item before action is taken.

Aye Tom Mestmaker, Dr. Kristen Watson, Manuel Pantoja, Matt Look and Ernie Unruh
Carried 5-0

- 10.1 Approval of Minutes from September 24, 2024
- 10.2 Approval of Warrants and Credit Card Registers for August & September 2024
- 10.3 Approval of Conflict-of-Interest Code
- 10.4 Approval of Unaudited Actuals for Grow Academy Arvin and Grow Academy Shafter
- 10.5 Approval of Colombo Construction Company, Inc. Phase 2 Contract for Grow Academy Shafter
- 10.6 Approval of 2024-2025 Parent/Student Handbook Update for Grow Public Schools, Grow Academy Arvin, and Grow Academy Shafter
- 10.7 Approval of Updated Grow Public Schools Uniform Complaint Policy and Procedures

11. Closing Items

12.1 Adjourn Meeting

Matt Look made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 5:38pm.

Moved by: Matt Look

Seconded by: Dr. Kristen Watson

Aye Tom Mestmaker, Dr. Kristen Watson, Manuel Pantoja, Matt Look and Ernie Unruh
Carried 5-0

Certificate of Secretary

I certify that I am the duly elected Secretary of Grow Public Schools, a California non-profit public benefit corporation; that these minutes consisting of nine (9) pages, are the minutes of the regular Board Meeting of the Board of Directors held on October 21, 2024.



Secretary