



Minutes

Grow Public Schools Board Meeting

DATE and TIME:

Monday, August 19, 2024, at 3:30 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 3:30pm 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, Dr. Elysa Vargas, Kari Heilman, Maddison Contreras, Don Pasion, Scott Underhill, Sarah Kollman (remote), RJ Valentino (remote), Shyanne Ledford, Lacie Harris, Maira Portillo (remote), Dylan Wilson, Tanya Kelley, Stephanie Sanchez, Crystal Ramos, Katie Barton, Eric Mendez, Alan Blandon, Melody Castillo, Dylan Wilson (remote), Victoria Potter (remote), Maira Portillo (remote), Elia Sagasta (remote), Jill Obrien (remote), Valerie Campbell (remote), and Berenice Parra (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. Closed Session

At 3:31pm, Tom Mestmaker, Board Chair, announced that the Board was going to enter closed session and asked the audience members to please exit the room.

3. Open Session Information/Action

At 4:19pm, Tom Mestmaker, Board Chair, announced that the Board meeting was back in session with no action items to report out.

4. Public Hearing

4.1 Public Hearing – Sufficiency of Instructional Materials

Open Public Hearing

At 4:20pm, Tom Mestmaker, Board Chair, announced that we will now move into the public hearing for the Sufficiency of Instructional Materials.

Public Comment

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

Close Public Hearing

Hearing that there were no public comments, Tom Mestmaker, Board Chair closed the public hearing for the Sufficiency of Instructional Materials at 4:21pm.

5. Action Items

5.1 Approval of Sufficiency of Instructional Materials

Tom Mestmaker, Board Chair, shared that following the public hearing, it is recommended that the resolution be adopted, finding that Grow Public Schools has provided each pupil with sufficient textbooks and instructional materials.

Dr. Kristen Watson made a motion to approve the Sufficiency of Instructional Materials.

Moved by: Dr. Kristen Watson

Seconded by: Manuel Pantoja

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

6. Grow Public Schools Executive Team Leadership Report

Doc Ervin, Executive Liaison to the Board of Directors

Mr. Ervin outlined the five key initiatives he will focus on this year: Key Stakeholder Liaison, Growth & Expansion, Seeds for Success 2.0, College Awareness & Readiness, and Educational Advocacy & Networking. Further details will be provided as we progress on these initiatives.

Kari Heilman, Senior Executive Assistant, informed the Board that beginning January 1, 2025, all charter board members are required to complete a two-hour ethics training within the year, per AB 2158. She suggested the Board could either schedule a special meeting in January or incorporate the training into a regularly scheduled meeting. Dr. Kristen Watson, a Board Member who serves on other local educational boards, mentioned that she has already completed ethics training and asked if it would fulfill this new requirement. Mrs. Heilman responded that she would confirm with Young Minney & Corr, LLC. Additionally, Ernie Unruh, another Board Member, inquired whether the training could be completed virtually. Mrs. Heilman agreed to check on this as well and provide an update at the next meeting.

Dr. Ric Esquivel, Superintendent

Dr. Esquivel shared that, thanks to the efforts of our school leaders, Home Office, and leadership teams, the school year is off to a successful start as we enter week three. This year, we have a network-wide theme aimed at “Digging Deeper and Blooming Brighter”. Our goal is to deepen our understanding of both students and teachers, to consistently build on what’s working, and to identify areas – through data and observations – that need to be improved upon.

Dr. Esquivel also highlighted our network annual event, GrowFest, which was held at Bakersfield College. The day featured team-building activities and launched our "Wildly Audacious Goal"—a North Star vision to guide our schools toward becoming national Blue Ribbon Schools. This goal will drive our priorities and strategies throughout the year. A key moment was when two Grow Academy Arvin alumni, one attending UCLA and the other Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, along with two current high school students from Grow Academy Shafter, shared their experiences. Dr. Elysa Vargas moderated this session, providing valuable insights for strengthening our programs based on alumni feedback.

Additionally, Dr. Esquivel emphasized the importance of supporting new teachers, whether they’re in their first year or seasoned professionals new to our network. In mid-July, prior to GrowFest, new teachers participated in a four-day intensive training program, “Grow 101,” held at our Home Office. The goal was to ensure they are well-prepared and familiar with our model. This continued support is critical for their success throughout the year.

Concluding his update, Dr. Esquivel turned it over to the rest of the team for departmental and school leader updates and Dr. Vargas will share our preliminary end-of-year data.

Ernie Unruh, Board Member, asked how many new teachers participated in Grow 101. Dr. Vargas replied that there were approximately 30. Some of them are our residents but it’s their first experience as a teacher.

Steve McClain, Chief Business Officer

Mr. McClain updated the Board on the school expansion projects that his team worked on over the summer. Eight new classrooms and four new restrooms were available on the first day of school. Fresh sod has been added to the fields and the new playground structures look great. Mr. McClain extended a big thank you to the Board for their support, to the facilities team for their hard work in meeting the tight timeline, and to all the subcontractors and contractors involved. Also, the City of Arvin and the City of Shafter for their collaborative efforts in making the project a success.

Dr. Elysa Vargas, Chief Academic Officer

Dr. Vargas provided the Board with an update on some of our 2023-2024 preliminary data, noting that much of it remains embargoed.

In her presentation, Dr. Vargas highlighted the network-wide SBAC ELA results for grades 3-8, showed an 8% proficiency gain and a 6% gap closure over the past four years. Similarly, for SBAC Math, there was a 5% proficiency gain and a 7% gap closure over the same period.

Board Member Dr. Watson asked about the embargoed results and whether county-wide data had been received. Dr. Vargas explained that the embargo includes county-wide data, which we

have not received yet. Dr. Watson also asked if we are working with the Kern County Superintendent of Schools (KCSOS) on math. Dr. Vargas confirmed that we have been partnering with both KCSOS and Core Learning for the last two years. Additionally, Grow Public Schools recently hired Core's Learning consultant as our new Director of Learning & Innovation. As California released its new mathematical framework, the partnership with KCSOS will help us deepen our practice. a new mathematical framework for which we will continue to partner with KCSOS to deepen our practice.

Dr. Esquivel added that the third component of this initiative involves RELAY. Last year, our school leaders and members of our academic team participated, and this year, our instructional coaches and leadership team are attending. This empowers them to enhance their content knowledge and teaching practices.

Moving on to K-2 data, we wanted to show the impact of our early learning program and how this is going to have ramifications in our system moving forward. We use NWEA which is a nationally norm test. It helps us think about how our students are performing compared to their peers. Researchers have established that the 55th percentile is what grade level proficiency looks like on this assessment. Both Arvin and Shafter show significant growth in ELA and math.

Board Member Matt Look inquired about the number of UPK students who went into 1st grade from our program. While Dr. Vargas did not have the exact number, she indicated that it was a high retention rate stating that we can find out the exact numbers and include them in the next Friday Board update. Board Member Ernie Unruh followed up by asking how many of the 1st and 2nd-graders in Grow Academy Arvin showing 43% at grade level are our students versus transfers. Dr. Vargas responded that we typically see very few transfers in 1st and 2nd grade, with most transfers occurring in kindergarten. We can also include this data in the Friday update.

Looking ahead to the 2024-2025 school year, the areas of focus include multi-tiered systems of teacher support and professional learning, data fluency to deepen content knowledge and personalized learning, and targeted efforts in early literacy and numeracy, particularly with TK-8 math.

7. Division Reports

7.1 Human Resources

Eric Mendez, Director of Human Resources, provided an update on new additions to the Home Office team. As Dr. Vargas previously mentioned, Tatiana Mirzaian has joined as the Director of Learning & Innovation. We also have three familiar faces stepping into new roles:

- Crystal Ramos: Crystal opened Grow Academy Shafter in 2017 as the Attendance Clerk, later serving as the Office Manager. She is now the Executive Assistant to the Superintendent.
- Sandra Mord: Sandra has been our Intervention Coordinator at Shafter and is now taking on the role of Intervention & Testing Coordinator for both campuses. Additionally, she is serving as the Interim Assistant Principal while Shyanne Ledford fills in for Principal Jenny Bard, who has been out on maternity leave.
- Jorge Jimenez: Jorge, who has been the Facilities Manager in Arvin since 2013, has transitioned to the Home Office as Facilities Coordinator working closely with facility leads on both campuses.

Dr. Esquivel added that these new positions reflect a consolidation of centralized support within the Home Office, preparing us for future growth. As we move toward opening Grow #3, this structure will help streamline operations, allowing for a more efficient use of time and resources without the need to create numerous new positions.

In alignment with our Wildly Audacious Goal of becoming a National Blue Ribbon School, we are shifting how we think about performance management this year. Our focus is on setting clear goals and providing regular feedback to support each staff member. From individual goals to department – wide initiatives, we aim to create a level of predictability that will guide us toward Blue Ribbon status.

Recognizing that our supervisors need additional support to achieve this goal, we recently launched the LEAD series (Leadership Exploration and Development). This monthly professional development series equips our supervisors with the tools they need to effectively support their teams.

Board Member Matt Look asked how many supervisors are participating in the LEAD series. Mr. Mendez confirmed that there are 30 supervisors across both school sites and the Home Office.

7.2 **Business Services**

Alan Blandon, Director of Business Services, provided an update on the summer maintenance projects completed across our campuses. Key improvements include:

- Adding bark to the new play structures
- Installing new sod
- Upgrading the refrigerators in Shafter
- Power washing both campuses
- Installing new smart TVs in every classroom

Additionally, we also had the Williams Act visit last week in Arvin, which concluded with no findings. Shafter's visit is scheduled for tomorrow.

Mr. Blandon concluded his update by inviting Board Members to visit either campus to see the upgrades and additions firsthand.

7.3 **Marketing & Communications**

Katie Barton, Director of Marketing & Communications, presented the Seeds for Success Progress Report, which measures our progress over the last two years. To compile this report, we surveyed both staff and parents at the end of the previous school year. The report reflects on key quantitative metrics and academic data that guided our evaluation of each Seed. Each Seed – academic excellence, health and wellness, operational excellence, family and community engagement, and talent management – was rated based on three priorities, all of which were found to be on target.

Board Member Ernie Unruh asked what the percentage of parents was who participated in the survey. Mrs. Barton responded that 10% of families participated. Mr. Ervin added that we also gather feedback from our Parent Advisory Council and parent support groups (POGA and SPGA).

Board Chair Tom Mestmaker complimented Mrs. Barton on the professionalism evident in her work.

Mrs. Barton concluded by announcing that a Board Dashboard will be available starting in October. This dashboard will provide snapshots of key data, including attendance, chronic absenteeism, office disciplinary referrals, and any other relevant data. She also encouraged Board Members to suggest any additional key areas they would like to see highlighted. Dr. Esquivel added that this dashboard will align with our performance management initiatives and help us begin integrating the KiDS platform, allowing us to assess our progress compared to other schools.

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

Jocelyn Scruggs, FACE Coordinator, shared last year's program highlights. The FACE team established over 30 strategic partnerships with organizations like United Way and Kern County Public Health, significantly boosting community engagement.

We hosted 75+ family events, including Family Education Nights and Coffee & Conversation, with notable attendance increases – Coffee & Conversation now attracts 20-25 parents at GA-Arvin and 10-12 at GA-Shafter, compared to just 5 previously.

The 10-week Loving Solutions parenting program saw success, graduating 18 parents at GA-Arvin and 24 at GA-Shafter. We also piloted a QR code system to track volunteer hours, leading to a 30% increase in families completing their 30 volunteer hours.

This year, we're focusing on early engagement with families, particularly supporting students who are chronically absent, homeless/foster, English learners, or academically struggling. A new FACE dashboard, developed in coordination with our data coordinator, will help track our progress.

Mrs. Scruggs also introduced this year's parent representatives: Matt Look, a long-time SPGA member and leader at GA-Arvin, and Jill O'Brien, a dedicated parent involved in School Site Council and POGA at GA-Shafter. Both are committed to supporting the school community and fostering strong relationships.

Matt Look reported that SPGA's first meeting last week drew 30 parents. They are eagerly preparing for their first event, Trunk or Treat, in October.

Jill O'Brien shared POGA's first meeting had 25 parents, including new TK & K families. College crew t-shirts are now on sale, with proceeds supporting future family events.

8. **Grow Public Schools Leadership Report** **Grow Academy Arvin**

Shyanne Ledford, Interim Principal, shared that the school year is well underway, and she has been impressed by the sense of duty, urgency, and connection among the team. The transition has been smooth, with everyone being both welcoming and engaged, displaying great passion for our scholars and what lies ahead.

One area of focus this year is attendance. The culture team recently developed an attendance schematic, allowing scholars to be recognized individually, by grade level, and as part of their crew for strong attendance. Already, three crews have met the requirements and celebrated with special incentives that scholars selected themselves.

In addition, we are emphasizing intellectual preparation, with significant support and training from the Home Office team. This approach ensures that we deeply understand our content and where our scholars are headed, allowing us to plan lessons effectively.

Finally, Mrs. Ledford shared that she and her team have been planning for several upcoming events, including the October concert, Trunk-or-Treat and other exciting activities.

Grow Academy Shafter

Lacie Harris, Principal, shared that she is in her fourth year with the organization and took a moment to express her gratitude for the ongoing support and leadership from the team. She noted the pride in the progress made, particularly in reducing the number of students not meeting standards. This success is largely due to the organization's focus on differentiated professional development, intellectual preparation, and the importance of instructional leadership teams attending the RELAY program, which began this summer.

Both campuses now have playbooks and success criteria, with instructional coaches collaborating to identify trends and share insights across the team. These trends are then communicated to staff to drive continuous improvement.

Additionally, the team is preparing to launch practice clinics, which will offer a deep dive into best practices to further strengthen instructional methods. Principal Harris expressed her excitement for the year ahead.

9. Grimm Family Education Foundation

Katie Barton, Communications & Marketing Director, presented on behalf of Dylan Wilson, Executive Director of the Edible Schoolyard (ESY). She shared the ESY hosted a network-wide professional development session at the end of July, with a special thank you to Shafter for hosting on day two. Participants enjoyed learning about the various programs from each site.

Starting Monday, programming will commence at Buena Vista, Arvin, and Shafter. We are excited for another successful year of Edible Schoolyard activities, with all gardens prepped and ready for students, and we look forward to the fall planting season.

Please save the date for the Toast & Taste event on Friday, October 18th at the Buena Vista Edible Schoolyard. This event helps sponsor the Edible Network scholarships, which support students attending summer camps. If you are interested in attending, please reach out to Mr. Wilson.

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.

Tom Mestmaker, Board Chair, asked that item 10.5 - Approval of Amendments to Lease Agreements Between Grow Public Schools and Nectarine Court LLC for the Arvin and Shafter Schools be removed from the Consent Agenda and be voted on separately.

Ernie Unruh, Board Member, made a motion to approve consent agenda items 10.1 – 10.4 and 10.6 – 10.18.

Moved by: Ernie Unruh

Seconded by: Manuel Pantoja

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

- 10.1 Approval of Minutes from June 24, 2024
- 10.2 Approval of Warrants and Credit Card Registers for June and July 2024
- 10.3 Approval of Priority 1 Local Indicator Teaching Outcomes
- 10.4 Approval of 2024-25 Bell Schedule and Instructional Minutes

- 10.6 Approval of Instruction Partners Early Literacy Proposal
- 10.7 Approve Renewal of Agreements with Point Loma Nazarene University
- 10.8 Ratify 8th Grade Field Trip Agreements
- 10.9 Ratify MOU with Relay Graduate School of Education
- 10.10 Agreement for ELOP Services with Teach Me Technology
- 10.11 Approval of Resolution Authorizing Amendment of Intercept Notices
- 10.12 Approval of Amended Fiscal & Operational Policies and Procedures Handbook
- 10.13 Approval of Updated Parent/Student Handbook 2024-2025
- 10.14 Approval of Amended Independent Study Policy
- 10.15 Approval of Title I Parent Involvement Policies
- 10.16 Approval of Time and Effort Policy - Grow Academy Shafter and Grow Academy Arvin
- 10.17 Approval of Grow Public Schools Uniform Complaint Policy and Procedures - Grow Academy Shafter and Grow Academy Arvin
- 10.18 Approval of Updated Grow Public Schools Cell Phone Policy

Consent Agenda item 10.5 - Approval of Amendments to Lease Agreements Between Grow Public Schools and Nectarine Court LLC for the Arvin and Shafter Schools. Manuel Pantoja, Board Member, wanted to know why the Board was voting to approve the leases again and why there was not an amount listed in the lease agreement. Steve McClain, Chief Business Officer, shared that these leases needed to be amended because of the transition to the Countywide Charter. The lease amounts have not changed.

Dr. Kristen Watson, Board Member, made a motion to approve consent agenda item 10.5 - Approval of Amendments to Lease Agreements Between Grow Public Schools and Nectarine Court LLC for the Arvin and Shafter Schools

Moved by: Dr. Kristen Watson

Seconded by: Matt Look

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

11. Closing Items

12.1 Adjourn Meeting

Matt Look made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 2:23pm.

Moved by: Matt Look

Seconded by: Manuel Pantoja

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 August 19, 2024.



Secretary

