



Minutes

Grow Public Schools Board Meeting

DATE and TIME:

Monday, April 22, 2024, at 4:00pm

LOCATIONS:

Physical Location

Grow Academy Arvin - Learning Lab
901 Nectarine Court, Arvin, CA 93203

Virtual Location

Grow Academy Shafter - Learning Lab
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 4:00pm by Board Chair, Tom Mestmaker.

1.2 Record Attendance

Tom Mestmaker, Manuel Pantoja, Dr. Kristen Watson, Ernie Unruh, Doc Ervin, Dr. Ric Esquivel, Steve McClain, Lacie Harris, Jenny Bard, Kari Heilman, Yolanda Sanchez, Maddison Contreras, Katie Barton, Eric Mendez, Alan Blandon, Katelyn Zenger, Dylan Wilson, Kelly Kulzer-Reyes, Don Pasion, Ilene Jimenez, Emma Pereida-Martinez, Gisella Guillen, Victoria Potter (remote), RJ Valentino (remote), and Maira Portillo (remote)

1.3 Flag Salute

GA-Arvin's ASB scholar, Jaylynn Williams, led the flag salute.

1.4 Public Comment

Kari Heilman, Executive Assistant, shared that there was one public speaker.

Kelly Kulzer-Reyes, Parent

Ms. Kulzer-Reyes proudly mentioned she's a parent of three remarkable GA-Shafter scholars, expressing deep appreciation for the ongoing support and commitment to the co-teaching model at GA-Shafter. She emphasized its importance, noting that Principal Harris has evidence of its success with the current TK classroom test scores. She urged the Board to continue the commitment to having two credentialed teachers in the classroom.

2. Grow Public Schools Executive Team Leadership Report

Doc Ervin, Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

Mr. Ervin provided a summary of the Countywide Benefit sharing that the State Board of Education is scheduled to vote on to officially grant us our new charter number on May 8th or 9th, which will likely be included on the consent agenda. This approval will allow us to implement the new Countywide charter on July 1, 2024. Additionally, Executive and Division Leaders will report on their current projects and note that our June 24th Board meeting location has changed to the CMO office at 1:00 pm.

Dr. Ric Esquivel, Chief of Schools (COS)

Dr. Esquivel shared that Leadership Professional Development has centered on RELAY, involving both Principals, the Assistant Principal in Shafter, Dr. Vargas, and himself in a year-long professional development focusing on instructional leadership and identifying best practices for classroom emulation in support of Teacher Professional Development. We've secured 12 seats for the 24-25 school year cohort, including coaches, coordinators, lead teachers, and lab teachers, aiming to strengthen the leadership pipeline and enhance structural professional development for the upcoming year.

As we approach the end of Q4, we're shifting our focus from end-of-year performance evaluations to bridging them with goal setting in the fall. Mr. Mendez, our Human Resources Director, will provide more details during his presentation. However, we aim to integrate the continuity discussion into our closing sessions with all team members - both certificated and classified - before the end of the school year.

Steve McClain, Chief Business Officer (CBO)

Steve McClain shared that both campuses are actively engaged in their facility projects. We have been holding weekly meetings with the architect, construction company, and the Principals to ensure everyone stays informed. The facility projects for GA-Shafter include new modular classrooms for TK, a new play structure, a new soccer field, and hard courts. GA-Arvin will have new kindergarten modular buildings and a new play structure. Construction is progressing well on both campuses. Work will continue through the summer and be completed before school starts on August 1st.

Mr. Ervin reminded the Board about the class size reduction in grades TK - 2 for the next school year. These grades will have smaller class sizes to close the achievement gap sooner. With this new model, the goal is to have all students reading at grade level by 3rd grade. Mr. Ervin also shared that with the TK pilot program this year, 90% of students are Kinder ready.

Mr. Unruh, Board Member, asked about the modular building contractor, JTS, and if we went to bid on it or if it was on a piggyback contract. Mr. McClain replied that it was on a piggyback contract.

Dr. Watson, Board Member, asked what assessment we use to determine Kinder readiness. Mrs. Harris, GA-Shafter's Principal, replied that Grow follows the Desired Results Development Profile (DRDP) in the TK classes. As they move into Kinder, NWEA and our basic phonics screener are used. These assessments have been very successful throughout the year.

Dr. Elysa Vargas, Chief Academic Officer (CAO)

Dr. Esquivel filled in for Dr. Vargas providing the academic updates. He reported that as we move into Q4 we have been very thoughtful on what worked last year, what are some areas we can refine from a testing perspective just to ensure every student is able to show their best in the

upcoming testing windows. This is true from TK all the way through 8th grade, knowing that there are some accommodations on individual plans that we need to make sure we acknowledge.

Our Q4 planning really considers our individualization for each student through a case management perspective and this is true for our instructional leaders as it is for our coaches and coordinators, and it's identifying who needs what support depending on their individual needs. What is it that Q4 needs to focus on given what they have shown growth in and what areas they might need additional help with? Ultimately, looking at how well teachers case manage according to this information. This is what took up much of our spring summit coming back from Spring Break. This is the plan that both of our schools and all classrooms are leading with.

Mr. Unruh, Board Member, asked if any special measures have been implemented for the dashboard, emphasizing that both proficiency and growth are important. He inquired whether we are focusing on groups of students since not everyone can achieve proficiency.

Dr. Esquivel, COS, replied that NWEA gives us a percentile range from 0 to 99, indicating where each student stands. Based on this, a plan has been identified for each group of students. We are focusing on two objectives: increasing proficiency for students who are on the cusp or already proficient and moving students out of the focus categories (0-20, 20-40), recognizing that for some it may take a year or two. This differentiation and support they receive are part of the plan.

Mr. Ervin, CEO, shared that there has been ongoing discussion about reducing the number of students who do not meet standards. This reinforces the focus on each student by name and need with specific support. Principals and the instructional leadership team have made this approach a norm. They know exactly where every student stands in terms of proficiency.

Mrs. Harris, Shafter Principal, mentioned that the instructional leadership teams met last week and listed every child by name and their respective group. Coaches have already entered classrooms where teachers maybe had lower achievement on recent ICAs and are conducting small groups with specific scholars in mind, addressing their missteps from the test. The approach is very hands-on and tactical, building classroom teachers' capacity through our coaches.

Mr. Ervin, CEO, noted that reviewing this year's data, which provides two years of baseline data, will enable us to set more accurate future goals. This includes reducing the number of students who do not meet standards and increasing proficiency levels. Last year involved establishing systems and structures and conducting needs assessments. This year has focused on implementation and monitoring. We are close to having all curricular and instructional systems in place, allowing for final adjustments next year.

Dr. Esquivel, COS, added that the next system we have been working on for the last year is the Teaching and Learning Framework, which is now about 90% complete. We have collaborated with our teacher leadership teams and plan to pilot the framework with this group of teachers within the next six weeks. Our goal is to launch the new year with the Teaching and Learning Framework fully in place.

This framework includes a rubric with four different categories: planning, classroom culture, delivery of instruction, and professional responsibility. It outlines expectations for both novice teachers and those demonstrating exemplary practices, setting a standard for teaching and learning across the Grow network. This framework also guides teachers in their professional

development as they transition through different levels. Reaching this milestone marks a significant achievement for our schools.

Mr. Ervin, CEO, added that we will ensure the Board receives a high-level overview before the next board meeting. While we are close to completion, the pilot will help us make the final adjustments.

3. Division Reports

3.1 Human Resources

Eric Mendez, Director of Human Resources, reported on the year-end evaluations currently in progress. The focus is not only on what went well this year but also on the strides made by staff and how they know they've achieved them. Goals are being set for tracking and monitoring throughout the next year.

As we are in the renewal offer season and recruitment, we will be sending out all offer letters to staff by the end of April. We are pleased with our current standing between renewals and recruitment efforts. Only one teaching position remains, with pending offers. This is a significant improvement compared to last year when we were still trying to fill positions in June.

Mr. Unruh, Board Member, asked if the teacher applicants we have been receiving are highly qualified. Mr. Mendez replied that they all have credentials. Mr. Ervin, CEO, added that finding qualified candidates and ensuring they are a good fit for the organization has been one of our primary goals.

Lastly, Mr. Mendez shared that we have hired an Assistant Principal for Arvin. We are excited to welcome Sarah Vasquez to our campus. She will start in June after completing her current assignment. We are setting up a robust onboarding plan to ensure she has all the support she needs over the summer and is ready to kick off the new school year. Mr. Unruh asked if she has a preliminary administrative credential. Dr. Esquivel noted that she currently holds an out-of-state administrative certificate, and we are working on reciprocity. Mr. Ervin requested this topic be added to the Friday update.

3.2 Business Services

Alan Blandon, Director of Business Services, provided two updates. First, the enrollment lottery: GA-Arvin's student enrollment lottery was successfully conducted on April 10th, meeting the target enrollment. GA-Shafter's lottery is scheduled for Thursday, April 25th, at 4:30 pm.

Second, budget planning: Ongoing collaboration with school principals and leadership aims to establish a robust budget development process. The final budget will be presented for approval at the June 24th board meeting.

Board Member Mr. Unruh inquired about state funding and the deficit. Mr. McClain stated they are monitoring revenue and expect updates around May 10th with the May revise. Recent legislative agreements have addressed part of the issue, but more information is forthcoming.

Mr. Unruh expressed concern about funding uncertainty and asked about contingency plans. Mr. McClain confirmed they are planning for various levels of budget reductions and will share these plans at the next Board Meeting.

Mr. Ervin emphasized the strength of the Business Services team and their ongoing budget discussions. Dr. Esquivel highlighted the importance of multi-year planning to address long-term financial impacts. Mr. Unruh thanked them for their contingency planning efforts and noted the gap between the Governor's proposed budget and the legislative analysis, expressing appreciation for the team's proactive approach.

3.3 Marketing & Communications

Katie Barton, Director of Marketing & Communications, shared that she created a GPS one-pager, included in the Board packet, that outlines what Grow represents and the community it serves.

Promotion preparation is progressing well. GA-Shafter's presentation is scheduled for June 6th at Shafter High School, and GA-Arvin's ceremony is on June 7th at Arvin High School. We are coordinating with vendors to ensure smooth ceremonies. We will be promoting 89 scholars in Arvin and 80 in Shafter.

4. Grow Public Schools Leadership Report

4.1 Grow Academy Arvin

Jenny Bard, Principal, reported that it is both testing season and the end-of-year learning showcase season. Upcoming events include the countywide oral language festival on April 27th, the STEM Olympiad on May 4th, and Battle of the Books on May 6th. On campus, our new music teacher will present spring music showcases, and on May 31st, we will host our annual Collegiate Career Expo featuring projects from our 6th, 7th, and 8th graders.

Ms. Bard also provided an update on testing. Similar to GA-Shafter, every teacher has identified power standards and is addressing areas needing improvement based on Improving Classroom Acoustics (ICA) performance. Coaches are supporting grades needing extra help, with our most experienced teachers providing intervention.

Scholar celebration charts are displayed in the staff lounge. We have goals for both students who are at grade level proficiency and those pushing up a level. We aim to decrease the number of students who did not meet standards and increase the number meeting standards. Sticker charts track how grade levels are progressing as we approach the end of the year.

4.2 Grow Academy Shafter

Lacie Harris, Principal, continued discussing testing and shared how they are leveraging the expertise of coaches, admin coordinators, and experienced teachers to mentor classrooms needing extra support. Year-over-year ICA data shows about a 3% improvement in ELA and a 4% improvement in math compared to last year's ICA results. Our performance on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) state tests has been even better than the ICA results. This trend is promising, and we hope it continues.

Part of our strategy last year was a countdown to CAASPP. On our most recent data day, teachers analyzed data to identify the most crucial standards based on ICA results, creating a four-week countdown. These posters are displayed in classrooms and shared with scholars, guiding their work. We have also extended this strategy to K-2, using recent CFA data network-wide. They are doing the same countdown but at a K-2 level to ensure they are included.

Regarding the culture of achievement and high expectations, we had a fun activity for the solar eclipse. We safely participated by purchasing solar glasses for everyone, and our kindergarten scholars made models of the sun, moon, and Earth on popsicle sticks. Our scholars also participated in the student SOAR for the third quarter, earning activities like a petting zoo, arts and crafts, games, sports, and a glow party. These fun activities reward scholars for meeting and exceeding behavioral expectations across campus.

On Saturday, we had our health and wellness fair, organized by our Family and Community Engagement Liaison, Maira Portillo. She turned this into a community fair, incorporating our plant sale. The ESY program sold dried herbs and salts, raising over \$1,600.

Mr. Mestmaker, Board Chair, asked about the 8th-grade Washington D.C. trips. The students had a great time with jam-packed itineraries. Arvin had 68 students attend, and Shafter had 70.

5. Grow Public Schools Parent Report

5.1 POGA

Kaitlyn Zenger gave an update on POGA's activities since the last board meeting. We have a Mother/Son event coming up in May, featuring a Bingo night.

We recently donated funds for costumes for the elective drama class. This successful initiative gave us an idea for next year: we plan to inform all teachers that a certain amount of funds will be available for classroom projects. Teachers will send their requests to the POGA board for review and approval, allowing us to help fulfill needs they might not otherwise be able to meet.

For Teacher Appreciation Week, we are also coordinating a coffee truck, which was well received last year. POGA will fund the coffee truck so all staff can enjoy a free drink of their choice.

We will have a POGA table at the new family orientation day to attract new parents. Currently, we have only 8 POGA participants serving 800 students.

POGA is committed to not only bringing fun events to school but also sharing opportunities for our scholars. Tomorrow, we are hosting a CalKIDS presentation, a scholarship program where the State provides a \$500 seed deposit into an investment account for college. It appears that all GA-S scholars qualify.

Looking ahead to next year's POGA board, we aim to create guidelines, a calendar of events, and a vendor list to ensure they have all the tools they need to be successful.

5.2 SPGA

Jenny Bard, Principal of Grow Academy Arvin, summarized SPGA's activities in Matt Look's absence. This Friday, we have a Mother/Son event with a sports theme, funded by SPGA, with about tickets still remaining. For Teacher Appreciation Week, SPGA is providing lunch for our staff. SPGA is also focusing on elections for next year to ensure their board is up and running.

Since our Family & Community Engagement Liaison, Blanca Rodriguez, has joined us, our parent group has become much more active, which is exciting to see. Additionally, SPGA continues to stock our popular book vending machine, which has been a hit with our scholars.

6. Grimm Family Education Foundation

Dylan Wilson, Executive Director of the Edible Schoolyard, shared a couple of key highlights. The Foundation has been busy this past month with numerous plant sales across the network. One significant update is the Leadership Bakersfield opportunity from a couple of weeks ago. The Foundation is involved with Leadership Bakersfield through the Bakersfield Chamber of Commerce. The Education Day focuses on showcasing education throughout Bakersfield, from early childhood to college.

We brought a group of 32 adults to Grow Academy Arvin, where they received a presentation from Dr. Esquivel and RJ Valentino, enjoyed student-led campus tours, and had lunch in the café, experiencing the daily meals of the students. This experience was the highest-rated one of the programs so far and a great example of collaboration across the network.

Additionally, we will be launching summer camps that will run throughout June at all three Edible Schoolyard locations: Buena Vista, GA-Shafter, and GA-Arvin.

7. 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.

Dr. Kristen Watson made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda Items 7.1 – 7.13.

Moved by: Dr. Kristen Watson

Seconded by: Ernie Unruh

Aye Tom Mestmaker, Dr. Kristen Watson, Manuel Pantoja, and Ernest Unruh

Carried 4-0

- 7.1 Approval of the Board Minutes from March 18, 2024
- 7.2 Approval of Warrants and Credit Card Register for March 2024
- 7.3 Grow 23-24 Financial Update - March 2024
- 7.4 Approval of 403(b) Audit for the Year Ended 6/30/23
- 7.5 Approval of 2022 Form 990 and 199 Tax Return
- 7.6 Approve Award of E-Rate Network Equipment Contracts
- 7.7 Approve Proposals for Landscape Design - GA-Arvin and GA-Shafter Phase 1 & Phase 2
- 7.8 Approve Proposal – Relocation of Existing Portable Buildings next to New Portable Buildings
- 7.9 Approval of Declaration of Need for Fully Qualified Educators for GA-Arvin and GA-Shafter

- 7.10 Approve Landscape & Irrigation Construction Proposal – GA-Arvin and GA-Shafter Phase 1
- 7.11 Kern County Consortium Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) Application for Grow Public Schools
- 7.12 Approve Agreement with JTS Modular, Inc. for the Construction of P.E. Modular Building at GA-Arvin
- 7.13 Approval of Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Kern County Office of Education and Grow Public Schools

Mr. Unruh, Board Member, requested that Administration give an update at the next board meeting regarding Grow Academy #3. Doc Ervin replied that an update will be given.

8. Closing Items

8.1 Adjourn Meeting

Manuel Pantoja made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 4:50pm.

Moved by: Manuel Pantoja


Seconded by: Ernest Unruh

Aye Tom Mestmaker, Dr. Kristen Watson, Manuel Pantoja, and Ernest Unruh

Carried 4-0

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 eight (8) pages, are the minutes of the regular Board Meeting of the Board of Directors held on April 22, 2024.



Secretary