



## Minutes

### Grow Public Schools Board Meeting

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**DATE and TIME:**

Monday, February 26, 2024, at 4:00pm

**LOCATIONS:**

**Physical Location:**

Grow Academy Shafter - Learning Lab  
471 W Los Angeles Ave., Shafter, CA 93263

**Location to Attend Virtually:**

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

#### **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, Matt Look, Doc Ervin, Dr. Ric Esquivel, Steve McClain, Dr. Elysa Vargas, Barbara Grimm Marshall, RJ Valentino, Lacie Harris, Jenny Bard, Shyanne Ledford, Eric Mendez, Jocelyn Scruggs, Katie Barton, Kari Heilman, Maddison Contreras, Yolanda Sanchez, Elma Rodriguez, Arely Vasquez, Kelsey Garza, Tanya Kelley, Pedro Rodriguez, Katelyn Zenger, Cindy Frantz (remote), Victoria Potter (remote), Jennifer Marcus (remote), Prabhu Reddy (remote), Ana Shropshire (remote)

**1.3 Flag Salute**

The flag salute was led by Grow Academy Shafter students Ricardo Cardenas (5th grade) and Darian Noriega (8th grade), who both won their grade's Spelling Bee.

**1.4 Public Comment**

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

## **2. CMO Executive Leadership Reports**

### **Doc Ervin, Chief Executive Officer**

Mr. Ervin highlighted several agenda items slated for discussion during the board meeting. He shared that our countywide benefit petition was approved at the Kern County Board of Supervisors meeting on Tuesday, February 13th. He thanked everyone in our educational network, including key stakeholders, board members, staff, parents, teachers, and students for their invaluable support during this process. The next steps regarding countywide benefits will be discussed during Steve McClain's Chief Business Officer (CBO) update, along with updates on our facility projects. On the academic side, Dr. Vargas will share the 2023-2024 Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) mid-year update, and each school leader will present their highlights from the last couple of months. Cindy Frantz from EdTec will present the Fiscal Year 2025 budget assumptions, and our Human Resources (HR) and Family and Community Engagement (FACE) Directors will give high-level overviews of their department's activities since our last board meeting.

### **Dr. Ric Esquivel, Chief of Schools**

Dr. Esquivel shared that Dr. Vargas and the school leaders will provide a mid-year achievement update and also brief us on their continued focus of knowing every student by name, knowledge and need. Our third quarter started off with our Winter Summit, which was held on January 8th at Grow Academy Shafter. This provided a great opportunity for our teachers to collaborate and network. Additionally, school sites recently facilitated a Data Day where, after 6 weeks, our facilitators were able to review and analyze the data to assess our progress. In March, we will conduct our final interim assessment for the year, which will help identify areas needing improvement before May testing begins.

Lastly, I am pleased to introduce Katie Barton, our new Director of Marketing & Communications. Katie will be supporting communication initiatives not only for GPS but also, the Edible Schoolyard, and the Grimm Family Education Foundation. Katie brings invaluable expertise and a strategic approach to our organization. We are happy to have her as part of the team.

### **Steve McClain, Chief Business Officer**

Mr. McClain began his presentation by noting the approval process for annual school safety plans, highlighting this year's new requirement addressing opioid overdoses with Narcan. Recent training sessions equipped staff with the necessary skills to administer the antidote.

As mentioned previously by Mr. Ervin, we have received approval for countywide benefit. The next steps involve applying with the California Department of Education (CDE) to obtain a new charter number, which will be submitted in a couple of weeks. On May 8th, at the State Board of Education meeting, our new number will be assigned, allowing us to implement the new countywide charter on July 1, 2024.

Facility updates include slight modifications to the plans presented in December for the GA Shafter and GA Arvin campuses. GA Shafter will see new modular classrooms for TK and a revamped play yard, along with rearranged portables to accommodate growth, and plans for a soccer field and hard courts. GA Arvin will feature new kindergarten modular buildings and a redesigned play yard. A later phase, across the street, includes a P.E. classroom, a soccer field, and hard courts.

During the presentation, Dr. Kristen Watson, Board Member, inquired about the new TK space and its impact on our enrollment capacity. Mr. McClain explained that the classrooms are scheduled for a 20:1 ratio, allowing for an additional 20 students for the second TK class, effectively doubling our current enrollment for TK. Both campuses currently have waiting lists. Other classes will not increase enrollment but will rather reduce class sizes in kindergarten, first, and second grades, transitioning from 30 down to 20 or 22 students.

**Dr. Elysa Vargas, Chief Academic Officer**

Dr. Vargas started her presentation with high-level data from the most recent NWEA assessment, comparing our students' performance nationally. We observed progress in math, with a 3% growth across the network between fall and winter, and a decrease in students in the lowest tier, indicating positive movement towards closing achievement gaps.

In Dr. Esquivel's update, he emphasized the importance of knowing each student by name, knowledge, and need. We have categorized students into three case management groups: Keep, Push, and Focus. Keep students maintain proficiency and receive enrichment, Push students are close to proficiency, and Focus students require additional attention to reach grade-level proficiency. Significant growth was noted in math for all case management groups and in Language Arts for Push and Keep students. However, Focus students in literacy still require further assessment to address their needs effectively.

For semester two, comprehensive plans were developed at the CMO level and cascaded down to the school sites, with support from instructional partners

such as KCSOS, CORE, and Relay for professional development. While no new initiatives were introduced, practices were refined based on data analysis.

Dr. Kristen Watson inquired about grade-level segregation, noting larger gaps in primary grades and smaller gaps as students progress through the program. Dr. Vargas highlighted that 8th graders tend to perform better with longer exposure to the program, but there are challenges with newer teachers. Priority grade levels have been identified for additional support.

Dr. Vargas concluded her academic data update by mentioning that there will be another round of this in March when they give their interim comprehensive assessment.

The mid-year update of the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) is mandated to be presented to the Board by February 28th annually. This report outlines the allocation of State funds to enhance services for priority student groups, including English Language Learners, foster and homeless youth, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students. The Board received a copy of the full LCAP mid-year report in the Board packet.

In general, the LCAP is organized into three main goals. The first goal focuses on academic achievement and intervention services, detailing actions and strategies aimed at improving academic outcomes for students. Examples include our learning lab, residency program, and additional staffing in classrooms. The second goal centers on family engagement, ensuring parents are active partners in our initiatives. This includes family and community engagement liaisons, parent appreciation night, and procedures for addressing chronic absenteeism and re-engaging at-risk families. The third goal emphasizes health and wellness, encompassing programs such as physical education and the edible schoolyard, which are integral parts of our everyday offerings.

Continuous areas for improvement are highlighted in the report, along with financial details indicating that we are on track and not exceeding budgeted amounts. Action 1, however, entails front-loaded costs, particularly for curricular materials purchased at the start of the year. As we conclude our current three-year cycle with this LCAP, we will be rewriting it for the next three years. Currently, we are engaging with various educational partners, presenting them with this year's data and discussing their priorities in meeting the needs of their students. All feedback will be incorporated into the new LCAP, which will feature three new goals similar to the current ones.

Dr. Esquivel noted the existence of two LCAPs, one for GA Shafter and one for GA Arvin. Moving forward as one LEA, we will consolidate to have one unified LCAP.

### **3. CMO Division Reports**

#### **3.1 Human Resources**

Eric Mendez, Director of Human Resources, reported that the HR team is currently in the midst of the recruitment season, which began with the KCSOS teacher fair earlier this month. Collaborating with our new Marketing & Communications Director, Katie Barton, we have implemented a targeted recruitment approach that has proven beneficial this year. In recent weeks, we conducted multiple interviews and have received a few acceptances.

Last Tuesday, we hosted our own recruitment event and invited teachers onto our Shafter campus for a tour, highlighting the unique aspects of our schools. A similar event is scheduled for this Wednesday in Arvin.

Additionally, we have several teachers on Provisional Internship Permits (PIPs) and Substitute Teacher Incentive Plan (STIPs) contracts. Partnering with Jill Hamilton Bunch, we are offering training sessions to assist them in obtaining their preliminary credentials.

Dr. Kristen Watson inquired about the turnout for the tour. Mr. Mendez noted that nine teachers attended, all of whom were credential eligible. Though slightly lower than anticipated, they were highly qualified candidates.

Tom Mestmaker, Board Chair, asked about the current number of residents. Dr. Vargas replied that there are fourteen residents within the network, contributing to our substantial pipeline for any vacancies or expansions.

#### **3.2 Business Services & Operations**

Steve McClain introduced Cindy Frantz from EdTec, who provided an update on attendance for the current year and an overview of the Governor's January 24-25 budget proposal.

Mr. McClain further informed the Board about ongoing internal meetings with schools to discuss budget adjustments for the upcoming year. He expressed confidence in our ability to strategically manage these adjustments and maintain our commitment to serving our students. He also noted the significance of our reserves in supporting this process and assured the Board of continued updates as we progress.

Responding to Dr. Kristen Watson's query about the possibility of a negative COLA, Mr. McClain explained that while COLA is influenced by inflation, there have been

years with zero COLA. Currently projected at less than 1%, the COLA will be updated in May at the State May Revised Budget. Cindy Frantz added that while the State is more inclined towards deferred payments rather than a negative COLA, a zero COLA remains a possibility.

### 3.3 **Marketing & Communications**

Katie Barton, Director of Communications & Marketing, thanked Dr. Esquivel for the introduction and shared that she has been on the team now for two months. Alongside her work with Grow, she is collaborating with the Grimm Family Education Foundation and the Edible Schoolyard. The network, with the assistance of Mackenzie, our communications consultant, has developed a marketing and communications roadmap outlining projects and upcoming marketing needs for the school year. This roadmap serves as a guiding document for strategic initiatives, key milestones, and plans to enhance our brand presence, engage with our target audience, and establish meaningful connections with stakeholders. Emphasizing creativity, innovation, and strategic alignment, we aim for cohesive messaging, impactful campaigns, and measurable outcomes to propel our network forward.

As Mr. Mendez mentioned we are working on a digital recruitment campaign targeted at attracting teachers we aim to onboard, which is generating promising engagement.

Lastly, the weekly board update has undergone a makeover with a fresh look and will now only be sent as needed based on content relevance. It will focus on critical updates and key reminders, with immediate or urgent matters communicated directly or through memos.

### 3.4 **Family & Community Engagement (FACE)**

Jocelyn Scruggs, Family and Community Engagement Coordinator, reported on recent initiatives. GPS collaborated with the Kern Community Foundation to host a workshop for Grow's 2019-2020 alumni, with approximately 50 attendees. Furthermore, we are partnering with the Grimm Family Education Foundation to inform alumni about scholarship opportunities, with a session scheduled at GA Arvin next week.

Additionally, GPS has joined forces with Kern County Public Health, bringing mobile health clinics to each campus monthly to offer essential services such as immunizations and wellness checks for families and staff.

Our partnership with United Way has been invaluable, providing free tax preparation services on each campus monthly until April, along with the "Healthy Minds, Healthy Bodies" program. This initiative offers pantry food boxes, dental hygiene kits, books, and resources through a drive-thru event. Moreover, one of our Loving Solutions program graduates, Mary Lopez, shared her positive experience. As a grandparent to two GA Shafter students, she expressed gratitude for the course, which covered various topics including dealing with strong-willed children, improving grades, and managing sibling rivalry. Mary advocated for the program's return next year, preferably offered in both English and Spanish.

#### **4. Grow Public Schools Leadership Report**

##### **4.1 Grow Academy Arvin**

Jenny Bard, Principal, reported on several key areas. Firstly, GA Arvin has maintained steady enrollment by ensuring scholars are placed on independent study if they miss significant school days. The attendance clerk also works on supporting students with chronic absenteeism, ensuring parents understand the importance of regular school attendance.

Regarding academics, Ms. Bard discussed the updated lab structure. The executive academic team has focused on providing specific support for students at different proficiency levels. Students below grade level in reading receive additional intervention focusing on phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension. For those at or near grade level, power standards are identified, and teachers utilize literacy lessons curated by Dr. Vargas. In math, a gamified approach is taken, combining intervention curriculum with online platforms. Recent use of MANGO Math has been particularly engaging, with students enjoying various math games and participating in teacher-led reflections.

Lastly, intent to return numbers for next year are positive, and there are no concerns regarding filling vacancies.

##### **4.2 Grow Academy Shafter**

Lacie Harris, Principal, began her update by highlighting collaborative efforts with Ms. Bard, guided by the leadership of Dr. Esquivel and Dr. Vargas. We continue our participation in Relay for graduate school education, a professional development opportunity that we have been engaged in since June. This ongoing program offers both online and in-person seminars, providing us with a roadmap of best practices including collaborative planning meetings, weekly data discussions, and coaching and feedback expectations.

We have been disseminating these teachings to our instructional leadership teams to ensure consistent implementation across the board.

In fostering a culture of achievement and high expectations, we organize regular field trips to celebrate the successes of our scholars through experiential learning. Scholars who meet or exceed expectations on the mid-year NWEA test are invited to attend Celebration Saturdays at the California Science Center in Los Angeles. Additionally, we are recognizing our 7th and 8th grade scholars who meet expectations based on our promotion requirements, which include attendance, behavior, and academics. Those who qualify in all three areas will attend a spring fling dance this Friday with the theme, "The City That Never Sleeps".

## **5. Grow Public Schools Parent Report**

### **5.1 POGA**

Katelyn Zenger reported on recent POGA activities and upcoming events. At the last Board meeting, POGA kicked off the Penguin Patch holiday shop on campus, generating \$1,647 in proceeds, which will be donated to the yearbook program.

The Father-Daughter Dance, held off-site on February 16th to accommodate more attendees, saw nearly 300 participants and received positive feedback.

A small family night fundraiser is scheduled for April 4th at Rollerama, with proceeds earmarked for the end-of-year water play day. In May, a Mother-Son event is planned, and initial planning stages for the Dinner Garden event, one of POGA's major fundraisers, are underway. Further details will be provided at the next Board meeting.

### **5.2 SPGA**

Matt Look provided updates from GA Arvin, mentioning their successful Father-Daughter Dance held last week. The location was shifted from the cafeteria to the quad area, accommodating 260 attendees. Chef Lisa and her team catered the event and assisted with cleanup, earning praise for their efforts.

A family day is scheduled for April, and plans for end-of-year events are underway. Additionally, there has been a notable increase in parent attendance at their events.

Ms. Bard added that SPGA funded a book vending machine, which has been well-received by students. Each staff member received five tokens to reward students



for special achievements. The tokens can be used at the vending machine, allowing students to choose a book to take home.

## **6. Grimm Family Education Foundation Report**

RJ Valentino, President of the Grimm Family Education Foundation, congratulated everyone on the successful countywide charter application process and approval. He commended the support from the Board, home office, and campuses, particularly highlighting the star students who spoke in front of the Kern County Superintendent of Schools Board. This achievement reflects the dedication of our leaders, administrators, principals, and faculty, all working together. We look forward to the future of our scholars and continued partnership.

ESY educators have been busy planning summer camps for both campuses and the garden. Dylan Wilson, ESY Executive Director, will provide more details on the curriculum at the next Board meeting. Additionally, upcoming plant sale events include GA Arvin on Monday, April 1st, GA Shafter on Saturday, April 20th, and Buena Vista Edible Schoolyard on Saturday, April 6th. Furthermore, a Dinner in the Garden event is planned, for April 18<sup>th</sup>, with proceeds supporting student scholarships for high school students entering college.

Doc Ervin, CEO, emphasized the increase in parent engagement, a goal established during the Seeds for Success initiative. He highlighted the correlation between parent involvement and student academic achievement. Plans include conducting an analytical data review with Dr. Vargas and Dr. Esquivel to assess the impact of parent attendance and involvement on student testing scores. Jocelyn Scruggs and her team have been instrumental in increasing parent participation in events this year.

## **7. Action Items**

### **7.1 Approval of 23-24 Comprehensive School Safety Plan - GA Arvin**

Matt Look made a motion to approve the 23-24 Comprehensive School Safety Plan for GA Arvin.

*Moved by:* Matt Look

*Seconded by:* Manny Pantoja

### **7.2 Approval of 23-24 Comprehensive School Safety Plan - GA Shafter**

Matt Look made a motion to approve the 23-24 Comprehensive School Safety Plan for GA Shafter.

*Moved by:* Matt Look

*Seconded by:* Manuel Pantoja

**Aye** Tom Mestmaker, Dr. Kristen Watson, Manuel Pantoja, and Matt Look

**Carried 4-0**

## **8. 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.

Matt Look made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda Items 8.1 - 8.11.

*Moved by:* Matt Look

*Seconded by:* Manuel Pantoja

**Aye** Tom Mestmaker, Dr. Kristen Watson, Manuel Pantoja, and Matt Look

**Carried 4-0**

- 8.1 Approval of Minutes from December 11, 2023
- 8.2 Approval of Warrants and Credit Card Registers for November 2023, December 2023, and January 2024
- 8.3 Ratify 8th Grade Field Trip Contracts for GA-Arvin and GA- Shafter
- 8.4 Approval of Conflict-of-Interest Code
- 8.5 Approval of National University Unpaid Student Teaching and Practicum Agreement
- 8.6 Approval of Reimbursement Resolution
- 8.7 Approval of Proposal from HMC Group for Additional Architectural, Mechanical, and Engineering Design Services - GA-Arvin and GA-Shafter
- 8.8 Approval of Agreements with JTS Modular, Inc. for the Construction of Modular Buildings at GA-Arvin and GA-Shafter

- 8.9 Approval of Agreements with Colombo Construction Company for the Construction Projects at GA-Arvin and GA- Shafter
- 8.10 Approval of Auditor Engagement between Clifton Larson Allen, LLP for the Grow Public Schools audit for the year ended 6/30/24
- 8.11 Approval of Auditor Engagement with Clifton Larson Allen, LLP for the 403b Audit for the year ended 6/30/23

**9. Closing Items**

- 9.1 Adjourn Meeting

Manuel Pantoja made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 5:02pm.

*Moved by:* Manuel Pantoja

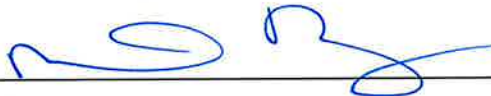
*Seconded by:* Matt Look

**Aye** Tom Mestmaker, Dr. Kristen Watson, Manuel Pantoja, and Matt Look

**Carried 4-0**

**Certificate of Secretary**

I certify that I am the duly elected Secretary of Grow Public Schools, a California nonprofit public benefit corporation; that these minutes consisting of eleven (11) pages, are the minutes of the Regular Board Meeting of the Board of Directors held on February 26, 2024.

  
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Secretary