



GROW
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Minutes

Grow Public Schools Board Meeting

Date and Time

Monday, April 24, 2023, at 4:00pm

Location**Physical Location:**

Grow Academy Arvin - Room 14
901 Nectarine Ct.
Arvin, CA 93203

Join Virtually:

<https://zoom.us/j/96864772521>

Meeting ID: 968 6477 2521

or call (669) 444-9171

INSTRUCTIONS FOR PRESENTATIONS TO THE BOARD BY PARENTS AND CITIZENS

Grow Public Schools welcomes your participation at the School's Board meetings. The purpose of a public meeting of the Board of Directors ("Board") is to conduct the affairs of the school in public. Your participation assures us of continuing community interest in our School. To assist you in the ease of speaking/participating in our meetings, the following guidelines provided:

1. Agendas and agenda materials produced by Grow Public Schools staff and Board members that are distributed at the meeting to members of the Board relating to open session items are available to all audience members. Email kheilman@growpublicschools.org for an electronic copy of the materials. Alternatively, a printed copy of the agenda packet will also be available at both the meeting and teleconference location(s) and items distributed for the first time at the meeting can be copied for members of the public upon request.
2. Individuals wishing to provide public comment at this Board meeting may provide comments on non-agenda items during the Oral Communications item on the agenda, or prior to the Board discussion of the Agenda items during the meeting. On your public comment card, please include whether you are commenting on non-agenda items or a specific agenda item (reference the agenda item number). Comments will be limited to three (3) minutes. If comments are in Spanish or another language, twice as much time will be allowed in order to provide for translation to English. Comments requiring translations will be limited to six (6) minutes. The Board of Directors may limit the total time for public comment to a reasonable time.

3. When addressing the Board, speakers are requested to state their name and adhere to the time limits set forth.

4. Any public records relating to an agenda item for an open session of the Board which are distributed to all, or a majority of all, of the Board members in advance of the meeting shall be available for public inspection of 5080 California Ave., Suite 100, Bakersfield, CA 93309.

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and upon request, Grow Public Schools may furnish reasonable auxiliary aids and services to qualified individuals with disabilities. Individuals who require appropriate alternative modification of the agenda in order to participate in Board meetings are invited to contact the main office.

Directors Present

Tom Mestmaker, Matt Look, Ernie Unruh

Directors Absent

Dr. Kristen Watson, Manuel Pantoja

Guests Present

Afaf Aldhulay, Alan Blandon, Alfonso Valenzuela, Amber Ranger, Beverly Foster (remote), Blanca Rodriguez, Briana Ritchie (remote), Bridgett Rubio (remote), Carol Chavolla (remote), Celeste Carcha (remote), Christian Ramirez, Cynthia Maner (remote), Doc Ervin (remote), Don Passion, Eliza Dryer (remote), Elysa Vargas, Eric Dryer, Eric Mendez, Erica Thomas (remote), Irene Montoya (remote), Jennifer Marcus (remote), Jenny Bard, Jessica Cardenas (remote), Jocelyn Scruggs, John Chavolla (remote), Jorge Ledesma (remote), Kari Heilman, Karmen Molina, Kelly Kulzer-Reyes, Kristian Mecham (remote), Lacie Harris, Lexus Block (remote), Lori Rivera, Maddison Contreras, Maira Portillo, Marcus Duarte-Smith, Maria Jaime (remote), Melody Castillo (remote), Melody Meyers (remote) Michael Goertzen (remote), Moses Reyes, RJ Valentino (remote), Raj Cheshire (remote), Dr. Ric Esquivel, Rick Phillips, Rubi Galvez, Steve McClain, Sydney Graves (remote), Valerie Covarrubias (remote), Victoria Curry, Wendy Elmore (remote) Yeseme Rodriguez

I. Opening Items

A. Call the Meeting to Order

Tom Mestmaker called a meeting of the Board of Directors of Grow Public Schools to order on Monday, April 24, 2023 at 4:01pm.

B. Record Attendance

C. Flag Salute

Natalie James, third grade student at Grow Academy Arvin, led the flag salute.

D. Public Comment

Kari Heilman, Executive Assistant, shared that there were four public speakers, all commenting on the same, non-agenda topic - support of Grow Public School's full inclusion program and co-teaching strategies.

Marcus Duarte-Smith, Parent

Mr. Duarte-Smith said he supports and encourages the current full inclusion and co-teaching model. Research shows it is beneficial to all scholars, not just special needs students. One of the most beneficial aspects is the student to teacher ratio. All students get to interact with one another rather than separating special needs students. He compared his previous experiences with local schools and Grow Academy and described it as “night and day”. He shared that Wendy Elmore, Special Education Coordinator, is a great asset to Grow Academy Shafter and he would prefer the Board continue utilizing the co-teaching model.

Amber Ranger, Parent

Ms. Ranger said she has one child in second grade who attends Grow Academy Shafter as well as one child who will be attending kindergarten next year. She is concerned about the potential teacher staffing next year which abandons the co-teaching model and reduces the number of special education teachers. The LCAP goal is to personalize the inclusive learning experience which inspires both staff and students to achieve high levels. The LCAP data shows that math, ELA, and Common Core State Standards (CCSS) continue to be below average. Ms. Ranger requested they continue with the current co-teaching model.

Lori Rivera, Parent

Ms. Rivera said she is a mother of two students who attend Grow Academy Shafter. One of her children has special needs. When she enrolled her children in a local school, she says it was a constant fight with her children to want to go to school. When other parents described their experience at Grow Academy, she signed them up to attend. She no longer listens to cries on their way to school. Her daughter is no longer getting picked on and she is being treated as an individual instead of “the child with Down syndrome”. She feels passionately that the status quo should continue. She is concerned about the recent rumor that Grow Academy will begin phasing out special education teachers in each classroom next year.

Grow Shafter and Grow Arvin are two different schools and does not want them to function the same. While both schools are under the Grow name, they should not share the same new uniforms. Requiring a new uniform creates a financial hardship. She asked the Board to focus on education and not on the uniforms.

Kelly Kulzer-Reyes, Parent

Ms. Kulzer-Reyes said she has two children who attend Grow Academy Shafter and hopes her third child with Down syndrome is selected in the upcoming lottery. The co-teaching model is based on research, and she has been a teacher for 20 years. Co-teaching helps all students and the students who have more teachers in a classroom, not fewer, have more access to success and to higher test scores. The co-teaching model is not optional, it is in LCAP-LCFF funding source through 2024. The *Seeds for Success* document references item 3.1 which states, “two adults in math and literacy classrooms”.

II. Grow Public Schools Executive Team Leadership Report

A. Dr. Ric Esquivel, Chief of Schools

Mr. Ervin, CEO, was unable to attend the Board meeting, therefore, Dr. Esquivel will be giving both the CEO and the Chief of Schools update. He introduced Steve McClain, the

new Chief Business Officer. Mr. McClain joined GPS approximately one month ago and has over 25 years of experience. We are excited to welcome him to the team.

We are changing our Board governance software from BoardOnTrack to Diligent Community.

The annual oversight visit with Kern County Superintendent of Schools (KCSOS) at Grow Academy Arvin which took place last week was a positive visit. KCSOS reviewed educational services, business, human resources, governance, and student service. The oversight visit with Richland School District at Grow Academy Shafter is tomorrow.

B. Steve McClain, Chief Business Officer

Steve McClain shared his background. Mr. McClain has lived in Bakersfield since 1990. At that time, he was working for the Paramount Farming Company. After that, he began working for KCSOS, and was subsequently hired as the Assistant Superintendent/Chief Business Official for the Bakersfield City School District, where he worked with Mr. Ervin. From there, he started working in Fresno for the Central Unified School District as their Assistant Superintendent/Chief Business Officer. He is happy to be back in Bakersfield and excited to be a part of the Grow network.

Board Member Unruh complimented the GPS administration because he knows Mr. McClain is a qualified and quality person.

The CMO's lease ends July 31, 2023 and we are currently in the process of deciding whether to actively renew the lease or look at other locations.

GA Shafter has received the operating permit from the City of Shafter for the temporary buildings. Our security contractor is on location today finishing up with the security hardware. The furniture will be moved in, and we will utilize these classrooms for student testing.

C. Dr. Elysa Vargas, Interim Chief of Academics

The graphs displayed a calculated "behind the scenes" algorithm predictor of whether or not scholars are expected to be proficient in English Language Arts (ELA) by the end of the school year. The scholars took this assessment in December and again in March. The goal was an overall growth of 5% across the district. According to the graphs, almost every grade level surpassed the goal with a 10% increase or higher.

The ELA/Humanities teachers are some of the most experienced in the network, therefore, the fluency with the content has helped. We have also highlighted data analysis this year. In the next week, all students will go through a test taking strategies and tips workshop from their teachers or guest hosts, Dr. Esquivel and Mr. Ervin.

A graph with December and March test scores for math was shared. Math continues to be an area of growth. We've committed this year to working with KCSOS and CORE to enhance the math instruction. We are experiencing a lot of growth in several classes. However, unlike ELA, the trajectory hasn't been quite as strong. We are hoping to work towards that 5% growth in mathematics instruction on that end of year assessment this year. Our analysis of why math hasn't been as strong: half of the network math teachers are new

to the organization or new to the grade level; 22-23 emphasis on conceptual understanding of mathematics; misalignment of performance task with priority standards.

Because test taking involves everyone on campus, we are not just thinking about the instruction, we are also thinking about the environment and the culture. We are working with our tech provider to make sure everything is functioning. We are preparing our classroom spaces to ensure they are appropriate and ready for testing. We are also holding the proctors to a high standard, so they understand how to manage their classes.

III. Division Reports

A. Rick Phillips, Director of Operations

The Operations Team has been working closely with the attendance clerks to complete the enrollment lotteries. Grow Academy Arvin had no concerns when they conducted their enrollment lottery last Thursday. Second and fifth grade did not have a lottery. This Thursday, Grow Academy Shafter will be having their lottery and it will also be shared on Facebook live. Each grade will have a lottery. Once they are accepted, Aeries online enrollment will be offered. The Operations team is working on getting the online enrollment translated to Spanish.

B. Eric Mendez, Director of Human Resources

The finalized quotes for benefit open enrollment are being collected this week so an organizational decision can take place after review. This will help in the planning of open enrollment which begins in June. A final recommendation for the Board will be available by the end of May.

Additionally, there is a persistent focus on recruitment as there are still a handful of certificated vacant positions on each campus. This week, we will hold another round of Alder interviews for next year 23-24. Lastly, with all these new recruits, we are looking at an organization-wide new hire onboarding process that will also happen in June. This will be a half day where all new teachers and small group instructors will be brought in to obtain the new benefit information, learn about GPS, and receive one on one time with key members of the organization. This means that they will be prepared to hit the ground running by July.

C. Jocelyn Scruggs, Family and Community Engagement (FACE)

The spring open house took place at each site last month and we had over 600 combined families who attended. Families walked away with information on LCAP, testing tips, attendance, uniform updates, and promotion. A big thank you to RJ Valentino, Raj Cheshire, Dylan Wilson and Jennifer Marcus from the Grimm Family Education Foundation, who also came to support. We received lots of positive feedback from both staff and parents, and we look forward to more opportunities in the future.

As part of our *Seeds for Success*, we hired two Family and Community Event liaisons: Maira Portillo in Shafter and Blanca Rodriguez in Arvin. They started last Tuesday and met with POGA and SPGA to take feedback from parents. This included what they hope to see, what they would like to receive from the school, what works, and what we can improve. In order to facilitate communication, feedback is essential as we build

relationships and advocate for the families. This helps create a supportive and inclusive FACE program which benefits our scholars and their families.

D. Alan Blandon, Director of Business Services

The Business Team is continuing budget development for FY 2024 by meeting with principals, stakeholders, HR, and CMO leadership. The process entails allocating funds for specific categories to support school programs and operations.

E. Afaf Aldulay, Communication

Each of the websites (GA-Arvin, GA-Shafter, and CMO Office) are currently being redesigned. The goal for this project is to create network websites that are aligned visually and structurally, easy to navigate, and uphold our high standards. We began with sending out surveys to staff, family, and stakeholders and asking for feedback to help us understand the user channel. We are also working on content information. The goal is to launch the new websites in July.

Additionally, the Spring Promotion video was finalized and began running advertisements in February. These can be seen on several local news stations including KGET, Telemundo, FOX, and more. We are also running advertisements on Hulu, YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram. Our website traffic has increased approximately 50-70% since implementing TV ads and around 180% on social media ads. This is in comparison to last year's numbers at the same time. Next year, we will prioritize outward facing communications.

IV. Grow Public Schools Leadership Report

A. Lacie Harris, Grow Academy Shafter Principal

Spring intersession was recently concluded. The first week of spring break, we had our special education team provide extended school year services as well as a summer school-esc spring school component. There was a change this year by targeting scholars who needed an extra “push” instead of inviting our most struggling scholars. This academy was led by our instructional leadership team designed with the common core math standards in mind and backwards map strategically on reading informational text and comparing/contrasting multiple pieces of text in ELA. The upper grades mostly focused on concepts of fractions and the basics of multiplication and division. We had 140 students attend spring school morning session. We partnered with our extended learning opportunity program which offered choreography, life skills, and fingerprint mosaics.

Monday, May 1st, we will be having our kickoff rally which begins at 8:30am at Grow Academy Shafter. We are partnering with the Shafter High School marching band and asking parents and our younger scholars to make motivational signs or banners for a parade around the garden. We are implementing fun incentives such as making personal pizza or decorating a terra cotta pot to encourage testing.

B. Jenny Bard, Grow Academy Arvin Principal

The recent spring intersession had academics in the morning and fun activities in the afternoon. The kids are excited to earn “likes” in the ongoing Try Your Best Challenge

which they can go up levels on their personalized platform. Each participant is entered in a raffle.

We ended the third quarter with a carnival which had rock climbing walls and inflatables. According to STAR testing, 213 students grew at least half a year in grade level from January to March, which is about 25% of the school. Every scholar participates in small group interventions for thirty minutes each day.

Board Member Unruh asked Ms. Bard how many students she had enrolled in her spring intercession classes. She replied with 165.

V. Grow Public Schools Parent Report

A. Matt Look, SPGA Representative

Mr. Look thanked Blanca and Jocelyn for a great SPGA meeting last week. He added there were six new families who attended the meeting. Attendance continues to be a struggle in Arvin. We have Teacher Appreciation week coming up and Mother & Son Superhero themed Bingo Night on May 12th – hoping to end the school year strong.

B. Bridgett Rubio, POGA Representative

Ms. Rubio shared there is an upcoming Mother-Son Laser Tag event taking place May 19th. Hot dogs and sugar-free desserts will be served. Additionally, teacher appreciation week is wrapping up field day activities.

VI. Grimm Family Education Foundation Report

A. RJ Valentino, Grimm Family Education Foundation President

Mr. Valentino thanked Mr. Ervin and his team at the schools for the ongoing partnership. He added the Foundation has had some wonderful opportunities to work with the schools and the educators. Mr. Dylan Wilson is returning today from being invited to the Governor’s First Partner annual Earth Day celebration on Saturday. The theme was Food to School, so he spent time with the Governor and renowned chef, Alice Waters. Mr. Wilson will have some exciting updates to share at the next Board meeting. Congratulations to all of you on the reports regarding student achievement. We know everyone is gearing up for the upcoming testing, but the shared preliminary data is so encouraging.

VII. Consent Agenda

A. Approval of Minutes from March 27, 2023 Board Meeting.

Ernie Unruh made a motion to approve the minutes from Grow Public Schools Board Meeting on 03-27-23.

Matt Look seconded the motion.

The board VOTED to approve the motion.

Roll Call

Tom Mestmaker	Aye
Matt Look	Aye
Kristen Watson	Absent
Ernie Unruh	Aye
Manuel Pantoja	Absent

B. Approval of Purchase Orders, Warrants, and Credit Card Registers for March 2023.

Ernie Unruh made a motion to approve the purchase orders, Warrants, and Credit Card Registers for March 2023.

Matt Look seconded the motion.

The board VOTED to approve the motion.

Roll Call

Tom Mestmaker	Aye
Matt Look	Aye
Kristen Watson	Absent
Ernie Unruh	Aye
Manuel Pantoja	Absent

C. Approval of California State University, Bakersfield Renewed State and National Accreditation for the Revised Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) Credential.

Ernie Unruh made a motion to approve the California State University, Bakersfield Renewed State and National Accreditation for the Revised Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) Credential.

Matt Look seconded the motion.

The board VOTED to approve the motion.

Roll Call

Tom Mestmaker	Aye
Matt Look	Aye
Kristen Watson	Absent
Ernie Unruh	Aye
Manuel Pantoja	Absent

D. Approval of Auditor Engagement between CliftonLarsonAllen, LLP for the year ended June 30, 2023.

Ernie Unruh made a motion to approve the Auditor Engagement between CliftonLarsonAllen, LLP for the year ended June 30, 2023.

Matt Look seconded the motion.

The board VOTED to approve the motion.

Roll Call

Tom Mestmaker	Aye
Matt Look	Aye
Kristen Watson	Absent
Ernie Unruh	Aye
Manuel Pantoja	Absent

E. Approval of 2021 Form 990 and Form 199 Tax Return.

Ernie Unruh made a motion to approve the 2021 Form 990 and Form 199 Tax Return.

Matt Look seconded the motion.

The board VOTED to approve the motion.

Roll Call

Tom Mestmaker Aye
Matt Look Aye
Kristen Watson Absent
Ernie Unruh Aye
Manuel Pantoja Absent

F. Approval of Declaration of Need for Fully Qualified Educators for GA Shafter.

Ernie Unruh made a motion to approve the Declaration of Need for Fully Qualified Educators for GA Shafter.

Matt Look seconded the motion.

The board VOTED to approve the motion.

Roll Call

Tom Mestmaker Aye
Matt Look Aye
Kristen Watson Absent
Ernie Unruh Aye
Manuel Pantoja Absent

G. Approval of Declaration of Need for Fully Qualified Educators for GA Arvin.

Ernie Unruh made a motion to approve the Declaration of Need for Fully Qualified Educators for GA Arvin.

Matt Look seconded the motion.

The board VOTED to approve the motion.

Roll Call

Tom Mestmaker Aye
Matt Look Aye
Kristen Watson Absent
Ernie Unruh Aye
Manuel Pantoja Absent

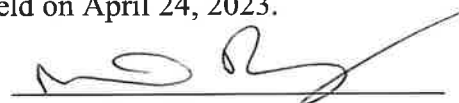
VIII. Closing Items

A. Adjourn Meeting

There being no further business to be transacted, and upon motion duly made, seconded and approved, the meeting was adjourned at 4:56pm.

CERTIFICATE OF SECRETARY

I certify that I am the duly elected Secretary of the Grow Public Schools, a California nonprofit 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 April 24, 2023.


Secretary