



Minutes

Grow Public Schools Board Meeting

Date and Time

Monday, May 22, 2023, at 4:00pm

Locations:**Physical Location**

Grow Academy Shafter - Room 21
471 W. Los Angeles Ave.
Shafter, CA 93263

Attend Virtually

Grow Academy Arvin
901 Nectarine Ct.
Arvin, CA 93203

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

Ernie Unruh, Dr. Kristen Watson, Manuel Pantoja

Directors Absent

Matt Look, Tom Mestmaker

Guests Present

Afaf Aldhulay, Alan Blandon, Alfonso Valenzuela, Amber Ranger, Bridgett Rubio (remote), Doc Ervin, Don Passion, Eliza Dryer, Elysa Vargas, Jennifer Marcus (remote), Jocelyn Scruggs, Kari Heilman, Kelly Kulzer-Reyes, Lacie Harris, Maddison Contreras, Maira Portillo, Melody Castillo (remote), RJ Valentino (remote), Raj Cheshire (remote), Dr. Ric Esquivel, Rick Phillips, Steve McClain, Wendy Elmore.

I. Opening Items

A. Call the Meeting to Order

Ernie Unruh called a meeting of the Board of Directors of Grow Public Schools to order on Monday, May 22, 2023, at 4:05pm.

B. Record Attendance

C. Flag Salute

Harman Singh, seventh grade student at Grow Academy Shafter, led the flag salute.

D. Public Comment

Kari Heilman, Executive Assistant, shared that there were three public speakers.

Kelly Kulzer-Reyes, Parent

Ms. Kulzer-Reyes said when she attended the school-site council meeting, she learned there would be six special education instructors next year instead of the previous eight. She would like two additional special education teachers to be hired so the current co-teaching program can continue. Co-teaching programs are different than co-teaching strategies. Ms. Kulzer-Reyes thanked the Board.

Amber Ranger, Parent

Ms. Ranger said she has two second grade scholars and one soon-to-be in kindergarten. She is displeased in the way Grow will deliver instruction next school year. These changes do not align with the LCAP. The LCAP states there should be eight teachers, but we are being told there will only be six. They want to know why and what is the reason behind the change. It is unclear how having less special education teachers will benefit everyone next school year because that will be a heavier load on our current teachers and less help for the students. Also seeking clarity on how the six special education teachers will spend their time spread across grade levels. Less collaborating with teachers equals more work for all. She is concerned for the children who need extra help because while she has a child with an IEP and she feels confident her child will be taken care of, there are other students who need extra help who do not have an IEP. She has been told the power does not lie with the Board, so she is unsure who she is speaking to today. She doesn't know if there is any power in the Board because she has also been told the power is with Dr. Elysa Vargas, Doc Ervin, and Dr. Ric Esquivel. She is advocating for her kids and doesn't know what approach is the right one because she was told going to the Board was not the correct approach.

Acting Board President, Ernie Unruh said if parents want to know what the truth is, they ought to talk to the administration. The Board will not respond to inquiries with specifics. Parents have come twice now to board meetings and are asking what the process is, the recommendation is to meet with the school administrators.

Ms. Ranger thanked Mr. Unruh and said they have, but they would like a continuing conversation about it.

Mr. Unruh asked Ms. Ranger and Ms. Kelly Kulzer-Reyes if they had met with the two head administrators.

Both Ms. Ranger and Ms. Kelly Kulzer-Reyes answered no.

Mr. Unruh encouraged all of the attending parents to meet with administration.

Adeyinka Glover, Clients Rights Advocacy

Ms. Glover shared she is a clients' rights advocate who wanted to introduce herself. Her organization represents clients with developmental disabilities across the state and she will be available after the Board Meeting if anyone has any questions.

II. Grow Public Schools Executive Team Leadership Report

A. Doc Ervin, Chief Executive Officer

Mr. Ervin said the Board Meetings dates for next school year are in today's consent agenda. The frequency is being changed to bi-monthly. Special Board Meetings will be called as needed.

Grow has successfully set up accounts with J.P. Morgan and Chase, both national banks. The investment policy is being created and should be finalized by June.

B. Dr. Ric Esquivel, Chief of Schools

Dr. Esquivel said the network-wide performance reviews have been launched. The structure for this year will be reflective in nature and open ended. The goal is for all team members to end the year with their supervisors having talked about celebrations and strengths. Staff members will be taking the Clifton Strengths Assessment in order to determine how those strengths can play into professional development (PD). The network-wide goal is to have everything completed by June 30th.

We are gearing up for the end of the year and maintaining our commitment that we will finish the year as strong and as focused as day one.

Early planning is taking place for summer intersession for the students to come in late July. Additionally, new teacher and all teacher PD is being planned for July.

C. Steve McClain, Chief Business Officer

Mr. McClain said the home office lease is up for renewal in July. We have been actively looking at options in the community. There are specific criteria requirements regarding space and long-term capabilities.

Tomorrow there is a meeting scheduled for facility staff, cabinet staff, principals, HMC, and Columbo Construction to discuss facility improvements for both campuses.

Mr. Unruh asked for a brief update on what was learned regarding investing of funds.

Mr. McClain said the investment policy is being drafted and will be available sometime in June. Legal counsel and the financial support team, EdTec, were both contacted and it was determined we were within the bounds of the law.

D. Dr. Elysa Vargas, Interim Chief of Academics

Dr. Vargas said in the last month, the Academics Team has been focusing on testing. Almost all testing has been completed with the exception of a few make ups. The 95% participation goal has been achieved and exceeded across all grade levels and subjects. This will ensure a good overview of what scholars learned this year and how much growth they have achieved. Mr. Alfonso Valenzuela is responsible for monitoring and compiling the data. Results will be available for sharing around the same time as the start of the new school year because of the amount of time it takes to complete the grading. The results of the NWEA testing should be ready to review by the next Board Meeting. This assessment has been administered three times this school year and will be an excellent predictor of how the students performed.

A survey will be administered to staff and teachers for the operations and logistical side of testing to ensure we have created the best environment for students to demonstrate what they have learned. The feedback will help improve the testing culture on campuses.

III. Division Reports

A. Rick Phillips, Director of Operations

Mr. Phillips said Aeries is very close to being fully implemented. The final go live date is in June. Teacher accounts for Sandbox subscriptions have been created. Admin trainees are accepting students.

The Uniform Committee is working on a voucher template to hand out for uniform ordering. Multiple sessions are being scheduled in June, both morning and night, for parents to come with questions and see samples of sizing.

B. Eric Mendez, Director of Human Resources

Dr. Esquivel reported on behalf of Mr. Mendez. Open enrollment will begin next week for the upcoming school year. All faculty network-wide will have the ability to select options.

Mr. Alan Blandon said the new broker is scheduled to do a presentations to CMO staff, staff at each campus, and newly hired staff.

Mr. Ervin said after the benefit study, it was decided to make the benefit packages more competitive and similar to other charter schools and school districts.

Mr. Unruh asked what the increase or decrease was in the package.

Mr. Blandon said the maximum employee contribution for Cigna PPO Plus was decreased from \$533 to \$375. We are also saving 42% with our new vision and dental packages.

Mr. Ervin said the plan is to reduce the out-of-pocket costs for employees.

Mr. Unruh said he appreciates that savings are going to help employees instead of going into a reserve. It would be helpful for the Board to see a breakdown of how that affects teachers with 0-2 years of experience.

Mr. Blandon added that they are still in the process of data analysis, but a long-term goal is to determine if Grow can cover the cost of vision and dental insurance.

Dr. Kristen Watson asked how recruitment is going in terms of staffing. Have we seen a positive result of this effort?

Dr. Esquivel responded yes; GA-Arvin currently has two teacher vacancies and there are five in GA-Shafter with multiple pending offers on the table. Our goal was to be completely staffed by July 1st and the classrooms continue to be our first priority.

Mr. Ervin added we have high expectations so it's important to note we are getting a lot of candidates, but we do not want to lower our expectations. 100% of staff submitted their Intent to Return Letters.

Dr. Esquivel said we have restored the TK-8 model of our charter, which has opened three additional teaching positions. The teacher residency program also allows us to backfill.

Dr. Vargas said we have created our own teacher pipeline which allows us to “grow our own”. Previously when we were in a pinch, we would ask SGIs (Small Group Instructors) to take more of a lead role in the classroom but now we have a much more intentional process. We want to encourage our SGIs to apply for the residency program. Currently we have 15 participants enrolled for the upcoming school year. One benefit to this process is the candidates will understand the culture of Grow.

Mr. Ervin said a solid teacher pipeline is imperative before we consider any expansion or growth in the organization. Last year we hired the majority of the residents.

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

Ms. Scruggs said she has been working closely with the new FACE liaisons. They play a crucial role in fostering positive relationships with our families and the wider community, and their efforts have already begun to yield positive results. Some highlights include increased parent participation in meetings and committees, more outreach in the communities, and connecting with multiple nearby collaboratives like the Kern County Network for Children, the Arvin Family Resource Center, and the Shafter Healthy Start Community Resource Center.

All are invited to attend the Coffee and Conversations meeting today after the Board Meeting at 5:30pm.

D. Alan Blandon, Director of Business Services

Mr. Blandon said we have successfully opened new accounts with J.P. Morgan. There is a meeting scheduled tomorrow to decide how each account will be utilized. Mr. Blandon introduced Ms. Cindy Frantz via Zoom to discuss the March Statement and the May Revise.

Ms. Frantz said that according to the March Statement, GA-Arvin has a strong positive operating net income projected for the end of the year. GA-Shafter is slightly negative but immaterial at this point. The home office is also negative because they are preparing for growth.

The May Revise was released and there have been no changes in the immediate for Grow. There are no changes in the equity multiplier either but neither of the schools are eligible for this grant. The Extended Learning Opportunities Program (ELOP) timeline for using the planning funds will be extended. The 8.22% COLA impacts all State programs with Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) being the biggest one.

There are major differences in the May Revise when comparing the Assembly and State Senate versions, but it will be resolved by the June 15th deadline. We will plan conservatively because of the amount of State level negotiating. There is also uncertainty regarding how the State is going to address the budget shortfall; this could mean deferrals or changes to next year’s budget.

E. Afaf Aldhulay, Communication

Ms. Aldhulay said we are revising the approach for promotion ceremonies for 8th grade scholars this year. Previously promotions have been combined with awards dinners which made a long night for everyone. We are separating these events. GA-Shafter will host their awards night at the Ford Theater on May 30th and their promotion ceremony at Shafter High School on June 8th. GA-Arvin will host their awards night in their ESY Garden on May 31st and their promotion ceremony at Arvin High School will be on June 9th. Both promotion events will feature a special video message from our founder, Barbara Grimm Marshall.

Four GA-Arvin Alumni have been recognized with renewable scholarships for college thanks to the Grimm Family Education Foundation's collaboration with the Kern Community Foundation.

IV. Grow Public Schools Leadership Report

A. Lacie Harris, Grow Academy Shafter Principal

Ms. Harris said the State testing window has been finished. Once testing results are available, they will be shared. We are partnering with Congressman David Valadao's office for some congressional recognitions for 8th grade scholars who earned Principal's List which is 3.57 GPA or higher as well as the 10 nominees for Scholar of the Year. These will be distributed May 30th at the awards ceremony. Other recognitions include athletics, citizenship, academics, arts, and physical education (PE).

K-2nd grade completed their NWEA testing last week and to celebrate, we hosted a bubble party for them.

B. Jenny Bard, Grow Academy Arvin Principal

Dr. Elysa Vargas presented on Ms. Jenny Bard's behalf. GA-Arvin has been celebrating the end of the year with various activities and family celebrations. These included but are not limited to 1st grade Mother's Day Tea, 2nd grade Garden with a Grown Up, Cinco de Mayo Dancing, and a Mother Son Bingo Night. There was also a "most improved attendance" award given to 15 students and families which included a special cooking class.

The 6th - 8th grade scholars are working on their Capstone Projects by researching a college of their choice and making a display. A College and Career Expo will be available for staff and parents to attend on June 2nd.

V. Grow Public Schools Parent Report

A. Matt Look, SPGA Representative

Matt Look was absent. No update.

B. Bridgett Rubio, POGA Representative

Ms. Rubio said the Mother Son Laser Tag event was a success with more than 200 attendees. The goal is to recruit more POGA members. There is a noticeably improved difference with having the FACE Liaison.

VI. Grimm Family Education Foundation Report

A. Dylan Wilson, Grimm Family Education Foundation ESY Director

Mr. Wilson said that weeds become a bigger concern in the summer due to the heat. Summer work plans have been created and will soon be implemented. Mr. Wilson and Mr. Steve McClain have been collaborating on both minor and major improvements to the campuses. Mr. Wilson will also attend the facilities improvement meeting tomorrow. The goal is to ensure the larger ESY projects fit into the overall project plan.

A new summer program, “Summer Camp Series” is being launched in Arvin, Shafter, and at the Buena Vista School Yard for two consecutive weeks. The students will be on site from 8AM to 2PM and experience a condensed format for the entire week.

The Foundation is looking into continuing its professional development plans. There is an upcoming meeting to discuss how the school year went and what strategies were most successful. Data will be collected soon via surveys network-wide and the CSUB seven-year multi-longitudinal study.

Mr. Unruh asked how long the summer camps were. Mr. Wilson responded the camp is four days long and they are offering it twice; it is an intensive format because the students will be in the garden in the morning and then the kitchen in the afternoon. The students will prepare their own lunch and experience things they wouldn’t typically experience in a normal school day.

Mr. Unruh said he is going with others to visit the new Edison Farm at the Edison School District on Friday. People see these things happening and see the positive and he is proud we are on the ground floor.

Mr. Wilson said our program has grown and influenced eight other programs.

VII. Consent Agenda

A. Approval of Minutes from April 24, 2023, Board Meeting

Dr. Kristen Watson made a motion to approve the minutes from Grow Public Schools Board Meeting on 04-24-23.

Manuel Pantoja seconded the motion.

The board VOTED to approve the motion.

Roll Call

Tom Mestmaker Absent

Matt Look Absent

Kristen Watson Aye

Ernie Unruh Aye

Manuel Pantoja Aye

B. Approval of Minutes from May 4, 2023, Special Board Meeting

Dr. Kristen Watson made a motion to approve the minutes from Grow Public Schools Special Board Meeting on 05-4-23.

Manuel Pantoja seconded the motion.

The board VOTED to approve the motion.

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

C. Approval of Warrants and Credit Card Registers for April 2023

Dr. Kristen Watson made a motion to approve the Warrants and Credit Card Registers for April 2023.

Manuel Pantoja seconded the motion.

The board VOTED to approve the motion.

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

D. Approval of Grow Public Schools Wellness Policy

Dr. Kristen Watson made a motion to approve the Wellness Policy.

Manuel Pantoja seconded the motion.

The board VOTED to approve the motion.

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

E. Approval of Grow Public Schools 2023-2024 Board Meeting Dates

Dr. Kristen Watson made a motion to approve the Grow Public Schools 2023-2024 Board Meeting Dates.

Manuel Pantoja seconded the motion.

The board VOTED to approve the motion.

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

F. Approval of Grow Public Schools 403b Plan Audit

Dr. Kristen Watson made a motion to approve the Grow Public Schools 403b Plan Audit.

Manuel Pantoja seconded the motion.

The board VOTED to approve the motion.

Roll Call

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

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 5:00pm.

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 ten (10) pages are the minutes of the Regular Board Meeting of the Board of Directors held on May 22, 2023.



Secretary