



Minutes

Grow Public Schools Board Meeting

DATE and TIME:

Monday, December 9, 2024, at 4:00 pm

LOCATIONS:**Physical Location**

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

Locations to Attend Virtually

Grow Academy Shafter – 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 4:00 pm by Board Chair, Tom Mestmaker.

1.2 Record Attendance

Tom Mestmaker, Dr. Kristen Watson, Matt Look, Doc Ervin, Dr. Ric Esquivel, Steve McClain, Jenny Bard, Shyanne Ledford, Tatiana Mirzaian, Eric Mendez, Katie Barton, Jocelyn Scruggs, Kari Heilman, Yolanda Sanchez, Crystal Ramos, Don Pasion, Ilene Jimenez, Emma Pereida-Martinez, Jessica Raya (remote for GA Shafter), RJ Valentino (remote), Jennifer Marcus (remote), Victoria Potter (remote), Dylan Wilson (remote), Elia Sagasta (remote), Blanca Rodriguez (remote for GA Arvin), Valerie Campbell (remote), and Cindy Frantz (remote)

1.3 Flag Salute

Grow Academy Arvin's 8th grade Student Council President, Aubrey Gallardo, led the flag salute.

1.5 Public Comment

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

2. Closed Session

At 4:07 pm, Mr. 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 4:15 pm, Mr. Mestmaker, Board Chair, announced that the Board meeting was back in session.

4. Action Items

4.1 Consideration and Approval of Purchase and Sale Agreement (PSA) for Property Identified as APN No. 170-250-03.

Tom Mestmaker, Board Chair, shared that it is recommended that the Board approve the draft of the purchase and sale agreement (PSA) provided to the Board, and also authorize Doc Ervin, Steve McClain, and/or legal counsel to negotiate revisions to the terms of the PSA as necessary, consistent with direction as to price and terms of payment given by the Board in closed session, and submit a fully executed PSA back to the Board for ratification at the next Board meeting.

Board Chair Tom Mestmaker asked if there were any comments from the Board. With no comments made, Tom Mestmaker called for a motion to approve.

A motion was made by Dr. Kristen Watson, seconded by Matt Look, and passed, via roll call to approve the Purchase and Sale Agreement (PSA) for Property Identified as APN No. 170-250-03.

Board Member	Yay	Nay	Absent	Abstain
Tom Mestmaker	X			
Dr. Kristen Watson	X			
Matt Look	X			
Ernie Unruh			X	
Manuel Pantoja			X	

Carried 3-0

4.2 Approval of FY 2023-2024 Grow Public Schools Audit Report.

Tom Mestmaker, Board Chair, shared that it is recommended that the Board approve the FY 2023-2024 Grow Public Schools Audit Report, which had no findings related to financial statements, federal awards, or state compliance.

Board Chair Tom Mestmaker asked if there were any comments from the Board. With no comments made, Tom Mestmaker called for a motion to approve.

A motion was made by Matt Look, seconded by Dr. Kristen Watson, and passed, via roll call to approve the FY 2023-2024 Grow Public Schools Audit Report.

Board Member	Yay	Nay	Absent	Abstain
Tom Mestmaker	X			
Dr. Kristen Watson	X			
Matt Look	X			
Ernie Unruh			X	
Manuel Pantoja			X	

Carried 3-0

5. Grow Public Schools Executive Team Leadership Report

Doc Ervin, Executive Liaison to the Board of Directors

Mr. Ervin shared with the Board of Directors that the final approval of the Executive Liaison goals is included in the board packet. These goals, initially presented at the October Board meeting, focus on four major initiatives:

- Growth & Replication
- Strategic Plan
- Educational Advocacy & Networking
- College & Career Empowerment

The Strategic Plan, one of the Board Liaison's key initiatives, included in the Board packet was a one-page overview of the draft updated Vision and Mission statements, along with identified Areas of Focus. On January 6th, the entire GPS network will contribute thoughts and input to the strategic plan at Winter Summit.

College & Career Empowerment, Kevin McGowan, Coordinator of Data Analytics, has been working on this initiative, collaborating with stakeholders including Cal State University, Bakersfield (CSUB), Bakersfield College, Kern Community Foundation, Kern Community College District, and district Superintendents.

The framework, currently in draft form, aims to provide ongoing support for Grow alumni and students in grades 9-12 through a structured seven-year plan. Key components include:

- Middle School (Grades 6-8): College and career awareness, with potential partnership with the Kern County Superintendent of Schools and CSUB's pre-admissions program.
- High School (Grades 9-12): Case management, transcript reviews, course selections, tutoring, and additional academic support.
- Post-Graduation Support: Scholarships and continued assistance for Grow Alumni in college.

The next steps include interviewing Grow students to gather insights, finalizing partnerships, identifying sustainable funding sources (including grants and external programs), and establishing the organizational structure.

Dr. Esquivel reminded the Board that College & Career Empowerment is one of the Areas of Focus within GPS's multi-year strategic plan. The Winter Summit on January 6th will provide an opportunity for GPS to receive network-wide feedback on the five Areas of Focus.

Dr. Kristen Watson, Board Member, highlighted the importance of a ten-year student plan as a foundational component of this work. She noted that while such plans are introduced in middle school, they often do not function as living documents. Instead, they are revisited annually without meaningful engagement. She suggested starting the plan in 6th grade and actively involving students in its development throughout 6th, 7th, and 8th grades. Additionally, she recommended seeking input from Kern High School on their current ten-year plan format to explore best practices.

Mr. Ervin added that Kevin McGowan and Alfonso Valenzuela, Data Systems Coordinator, are working on an alumni database that could potentially integrate the ten-year plan. This database would enable communication with parents and students via text messaging and email while ensuring that each student's plan remains permanent within the system.

Dr. Esquivel appreciated Dr. Watson's comments and emphasized the importance of building coherence early on. If high schools are using specific platforms, GPS should begin familiarizing students with them in middle school. This alignment would create a seamless transition and prevent the plan from becoming a short-term initiative. Dr. Watson further notes that the ten-year plan would serve as a tool not only for students but also for those providing support along their educational journey.

Mr. Ervin acknowledged the scale of this initiative, emphasizing that in addition to launching the system, GPS must also develop a long-term sustainability plan. While GPS can fund for the next three to five years, the question remains: what happens after that? He reminded the Board of potential grant opportunities, including the NewSchools Venture Fund, Charter School Growth Fund, and California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP), highlighting the need to explore sustainable funding options.

Matt Look, Board Member, asked whether the initiative includes pathways for trade schooling or if it is primarily focused on college. Dr. Esquivel clarified that the goal is to provide students with choices—ensuring they graduate with multiple options. The priority is for every student to graduate, and from there, to have a clear pathway forward, whether in college, trade school, or another career path. He emphasized that community-wide support will be essential for the initiative's success.

Dr. Ric Esquivel, Superintendent

Dr. Esquivel began by thanking the Board for their discussion and feedback on the Superintendent's goals. A revised version of these goals is included in the Board packet, focusing on three key areas: academic excellence, operational excellence, and people development. All three overarching goals are aligned with the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), ensuring annual progress toward GPS's wildly audacious goal of becoming a network of Blue Ribbon Schools. These KPIs will serve as the foundation for measuring progress year over year.

During his presentation, Human Resources Director Eric Mendez will focus on Performance Management. At the mid-year point, significant progress has already been made. The HR team has worked closely with team leaders and directors across the network to strengthen their ability to develop others, particularly in goal setting. By the end of January, all team members will have established their goals, and Mr. Mendez will provide further details on this process.

Looking ahead to Quarter 3, school leaders will provide an update on the mid-year NWEA assessment. Next week, the instructional team will review mid-year achievement data, identifying both successes and areas for improvement to ensure a strong start in 2025.

Finally, Dr. Esquivel expressed appreciation to CSUB for hosting the Winter Summit on Monday, January 6th. The event will include network-wide discussions on the Areas of Focus within the strategic plan, as well as dedicated time for goal setting and planning. Board Members are invited to attend, and additional details will be provided in the next Board update.

Steve McClain, Chief Business Officer

Mr. McClain provided an update on the Phase 2 facility projects at Grow Academy Shafter and Arvin.

For Shafter, weekly meetings have been ongoing with Colombo Construction, and the building permit was approved a few weeks ago. Colombo is currently bidding out the work, with bids expected back this week or next. The first phase of construction, which includes grading the back four acres to prepare for a soccer field, will begin next Monday. This phase also includes the addition of basketball courts and a parent drop-off area at the back of the campus. Construction is expected to take approximately three to four months. A more detailed schedule will be provided at the next Board meeting.

Board Chair Tom Mestmaker asked if the Board would receive updated construction renderings. Mr. McClain confirmed that a rendering had been shared previously but will be included in the next Board update.

For Arvin, the project plans are currently in back check, with most comments cleared. A call with the legal team last week helped address the city's requirements. The goal is to begin construction in early 2025. While the Shafter project is further along, efforts are underway to expedite progress in Arvin. Mr. Ervin noted that staffing changes within Arvin's city administration have contributed to delays. However, the City Manager and Police Chief are supportive of the project and pleased to see it moving forward.

Cindy Frantz, Senior Director of School Finance at EdTec, presented the Board with the December 2024 Financial Report, which included highlights from the FY25 1st Interim Report, an audit overview, and the budget forecast for the current fiscal year.

6. Division Reports

6.1 Learning & Innovation

Tatiana Mirzaian, Director of Learning & Innovation, provided an update on the second round of Common Formative Assessments. The ELA and Math assessments were administered just before Thanksgiving, allowing teachers to analyze the data upon returning from break. Educators engaged in a continuous improvement cycle, developing gap statements and reteaching plans based on their findings. Currently, the team is completing the Winter NWEA testing and preparing for the upcoming winter break.

6.2 Human Resources

Eric Mendez, Director of Human Resources, provided an update on the Leadership Exploration and Development (LEAD) Series. As Dr. Esquivel mentioned earlier, the series has been ongoing since July, with the fourth session being held recently. LEAD is designed for managers, supervisors, and directors to focus on key leadership skills, including open feedback, check-ins with team members, and goal setting.

In November, Home Office and site-wide teams came together to establish department-based goals that align with their respective team objectives. Since then, discussions have centered on defining performance goals and their connection to individual tasks, using the SMARTIE framework (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound, Inclusive, and Equitable). These performance and individual growth goals are set to be

completed by the end of January. Additionally, frameworks and rubrics for assessing various competencies will be introduced in the coming weeks as part of GPS's ongoing Performance Management initiatives.

During this time of year, HR is heavily focused on recruitment season. However, this year, we are placing greater emphasis on retention. We recognize the hard work and growth of our teachers and are committed to strengthening the strategies needed to keep them here. This includes enhancing engagement, teacher recognition, culture, and leadership across our campuses to retain the educators we value most—ultimately reducing the need for extensive recruiting. Our HR team is dedicated to developing a robust retention plan that prioritizes and supports our current teachers.

6.3 Marketing & Communications

Katie Barton, Director of Marketing & Communications, shared that open enrollment will be offered online for the first time. Traditionally, enrollment was handled through packets picked up in the office or at open campus events. This year, we are launching an online portal where families can register, which will also help streamline the lottery process.

We are actively working on communication to ensure families are informed about this new system. We're excited about the opportunities this platform provides and the barriers it removes, making it easier for families to explore and join our campuses.

Open enrollment will officially launch on January 7th, running for 60 days, followed by a lottery in late March.

6.4 Family & Community Engagement (FACE)

Jocelyn Scruggs, FACE Coordinator, updated the Board on key accomplishments. At the last Board meeting, we launched Parent Project, a program designed to support middle school parents. Since then, parents have completed the 10-week sessions, with 36 parents graduating across both campuses. Through the program, they gained practical tools to address challenging teen behaviors, substance abuse, and family conflict. It empowered parents to strengthen communication, implement effective discipline, and build stronger relationships at home and school, contributing to their students' success. We are proud to offer this program at Grow Academy Shafter and Arvin and celebrate the dedication of our graduating parents.

At the halfway point of the year, we also wanted to share a significant milestone: across both campuses, we have tracked 3,571 volunteer hours among 711 families—with 1,225 hours at Arvin and 2,346 hours at Shafter. These hours come from events such as Back to School Night, Parent-Teacher Conferences, Coffee & Conversation, Trunk-or-Treat, and various community partner workshops. We will continue tracking participation as we work toward our goal of having as many families as possible complete their volunteer hours by the end of the year.

Lastly, we remain committed to supporting our parent leadership groups—Parents of Grow Academy Shafter (POGA) and Star Parents of Grow Academy Arvin (SPGA)—through quarterly meetings. These gatherings focus on fundraising strategies, volunteer management, and collaborative initiatives to strengthen our school communities.

Parent Reports

Matt Look, Star Parents of Grow Academy (SPGA) Arvin Representative, shared that the Trunk-or-Treat event was a great success, with the Home Office hosting a couple of trunks. This was our second year holding the event, and it was a wonderful opportunity for our school community. Additionally, Grow Academy Arvin recently hosted a movie night, which was also a big success. A huge shout out to our parents and the Family & Community Engagement team for their ongoing support in making these events happen.

Valerie Campbell, Parents of Grow Academy (POGA) Shafter Representative, Valerie Campbell, Parents of Grow Academy (POGA) Shafter Representative, shared that Grow Academy Shafter hosted their movie night on November 14th, with 250 people in attendance. This event was free for all Grow families, and we were able to serve popcorn and lemonade at no cost. A big thank you to Matt Look for providing the screen and sound for the event.

Additionally, Penguin Patch is up and running and will be open for the rest of the week. This shop allows students to buy small gifts for their families, and we're hopeful it will be a successful fundraiser, as it was last year. We're excited to host this event again.

7. Grow Public Schools Leadership Report

Grow Academy Arvin

Jenny Bard, Principal, shared that Grow Academy Arvin (GA-A) hosted a Friendsgiving event between Thanksgiving and Winter Break. It was a meaningful time to celebrate a season of high expectations, gratitude, and the success GA-A has achieved so far this year.

GA-A recently completed NWEA testing, and this week, students are reflecting on their results while enjoying small celebrations. These include dance parties, tastings in the Edible Schoolyard kitchen and garden, and a fun staff vs. students kickball game to wrap up the week.

In addition, students are engaging in reflections in class, and we will close the week with a special performance from Arvin High School's choir, who will sing for our students. We're also excited to host our first-ever K-2 Tricky Words Spelling Bee, where students will challenge themselves by spelling words that are not phonetically pronounced.

Grow Academy Shafter

Shyanne Ledford, Assistant Principal, filled in for Lacie Harris, Principal. Mrs. Ledford shared that GA-S has been celebrating growth from Common Formative Assessment (CFA) 1 to CFA 2. In Mrs. Harris's Principal report, she highlighted the notable progress of the 6th Grade SPED scholars, who showed more growth than their general education peers.

The school recently completed NWEA testing, which measures student growth based on a norm-referenced scale. While scores are still coming in, make-up testing is scheduled for today and tomorrow. Early data indicates high achievement and growth in kindergarten and 1st grade, as well as strong growth in 3rd, 7th, and 8th grade math. In reading, 5th grade has demonstrated high achievement, while 7th and 8th grade have shown significant growth.

This week is Parent-Teacher Conference Week, and older scholars are leading their own conferences, which has been an empowering experience. 7th and 8th graders use their own data binders to guide discussions. 5th and 6th graders are learning to take the lead but still receive

teacher guidance. It has been exciting to see older students take ownership of their education and confidently discuss their progress with their parents.

To close out the semester on a high note, this week also includes spirit week, the Penguin Patch student holiday shop, and other fun activities to encourage attendance and close out the semester with joy.

8. Grimm Family Education Foundation

RJ Valentino, President of the Foundation, filled in for Dylan Wilson and provided an update on the strategic plan process, which the Foundation has been developing in partnership with the GPS team. The project remains on schedule, with the following milestones completed: two meetings with the Planning Cabinet and one meeting each with the Steering Committee and the Key Stakeholders Group. The focus so far has been on refining the vision and mission and identifying five key areas of focus, which will evolve into the final strategic goals. In January, one-on-one conversations will begin with selected key stakeholders, and in February, a session will be held with the Board to share progress and engage in discussions on key generative topics and questions.

As the year winds down and we approach the holiday season, strategic talent management within the ESY network is becoming a priority to support expansion efforts.

Other updates include classes at ESY Buena Vista continue and a new round of data from the Seven-Year Longitudinal Study with CSUB is expected in late January and will be shared with the Board in February.

Lastly, congratulations to the Board and the school community on an exciting first half of the academic year. The Foundation extends its best wishes for a joyous and peaceful holiday season and looks forward to an exciting 2025 ahead.

9. 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 for a motion to approve consent agenda items 9.1-9.7.

Matt Look made a motion to approve consent agenda items 9.1-9.7.

Moved by: Matt Look

Seconded by: Dr. Kristen Watson

Aye Tom Mestmaker, Dr. Kristen Watson, Matt Look

Carried 3-0

- 9.1 Approval of Minutes from October 21, 2024
- 9.2 Approval of Warrants and Credit Card Registers for October 2024
- 9.3 Approval of FY 24-25 First Interim Financial Reports for Grow Public Schools, Grow Academy Arvin, and Grow Academy Shafter
- 9.4 Approval of Executive Board Liaison and Superintendent 2024-2025 Goals
- 9.5 Approval of the 2025-2026 School Calendar
- 9.6 Approval of Agreement for Pre-Construction Civil Engineering Services for Grow Academy #3
- 9.7 Approval of Amended Fiscal & Operational Policies and Procedures Handbook

10. Closing Items

10.1 Adjourn Meeting

Tom Mestmaker thanked everyone for attending the meeting and wished everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Matt Look made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 4:58pm.

Moved by: Matt Look

Seconded by: Dr. Kristen Watson

Aye Tom Mestmaker, Dr. Kristen Watson, Matt Look

Carried 3-0

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 December 9, 2024.



Secretary