



Minutes

Grow Public Schools Board Meeting

DATE and TIME:

Monday, June 23, 2025, at 4:00 pm

LOCATIONS:

Physical Location

Grow Public Schools Home Office – Professional Development Center
4800 Corporate Court, Bakersfield, CA 93311

Locations to Attend Virtually

Grow Academy Arvin – Middle School Conference Room
901 Nectarine Court, Arvin, CA 93203

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 4:00 pm by Board Chair, Tom Mestmaker.

1.2 Record Attendance

Tom Mestmaker, Manuel Pantoja, Ernie Unruh, Dr. Kristen Watson, Doc Ervin, Dr. Ric Esquivel, Lacie Harris, Steve McClain, Tatiana Mirzaian, Timeshia Mackey, Kevin McGowan, Yvonne Lopez, Kari Heilman, Yolanda Sanchez, Don Pasion, Blanca Rodriguez (remote for Grow Academy Arvin), Andrea Carreno (remote for Grow Academy Shafter), Jennifer Marcus (remote), and RJ Valentino (Remote).

1.3 Flag Salute

The flag salute was Tom Mestmaker, Board Chair.

1.4 Public Comment

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

2. Closed Session

At 4:01 pm, Tom 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 4:05 pm, Mr. Mestmaker announced that the Board meeting was back in session.

3.1 Required Oral Report Regarding Amendment to Superintendent Employment Agreement

Mr. Mestmaker read aloud the following:

As to the item regarding approval of an Amendment to the Employment Agreement for the Superintendent, I am required by law to indicate, prior to any vote on that Amendment, that the Amendment includes the following:

- 1. Effective July1, 2025, the Superintendent will receive an annual 5% salary increase (this constitutes a 2% salary increase plus a 3% COLA).*
- 2. A 225 workday work year*
- 3. Extension of the term of the current employment agreement to – July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2028.*

I would note that the contract amendment before the Board for consideration today is wholly in keeping with the compensation comparability study previously approved by the Board for this position.

Under this contract amendment, all other terms of employment remain the same.

3.2 Board Approval of Compensation Comparability Study for the Superintendent position.

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

A motion was made by Dr. Kristen Watson, seconded by Manuel Pantoja, and passed, via roll call to approve the Compensation Comparability Study for the Superintendent position.

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

Carried 4-0

3.3 Board Approval of Amendment to Superintendent Employment Agreement.

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

A motion was made by Manuel Pantoja, seconded by Dr. Kristen Watson, and passed, via roll call to approve the Amendment to the Superintendent Employment Agreement.

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

Carried 4-0

3.4 Required Oral Report for Amendment to Employment Agreement for President

Mr. Mestmaker read aloud the following:

As to the next item regarding approval of an Amendment to the Employment Agreement for the President, I am required by law to indicate, prior to any vote on that Amendment, that the amendment includes the following:

- 1. This Amendment extends the employment agreement of the Board Liaison to July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2028, with a change in the title to "President."*

Under this contract amendment, all other terms of employment including salary and benefits remain the same.

3.5 Board Approval of Amendment to Employment Agreement Between Doc "Harry" Ervin and Grow Public Schools for Position of President

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

A motion was made by Ernie Unruh, seconded by Manuel Pantoja, and passed, via roll call to approve the Amendment to Employment Agreement Between Doc "Harry" Ervin and Grow Public Schools for Position of President.

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

Carried 4-0

3.6 Board Approval of President of Grow Public Schools – Job Description

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

A motion was made by Dr. Kristen Watson, seconded by Manuel Pantoja, and passed, via roll call to approve the President of Grow Public Schools Job Description.

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

Carried 4-0

- Public Hearing on 2025-2026 Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) and Budget Overview for Parents for Grow Public Schools, Grow Academy Arvin, and Grow Academy Shafter.

Mr. Mestmaker read aloud the following:

The Board is required to hold a public hearing to solicit the recommendations and comments of members of the public regarding the specific actions and expenditures proposed to be included in the LCAP. Included in the Board packet is Grow Public Schools, Grow Academy Arvin, and Grow Academy Shafter’s 2025-2026 LCAPs, including the LCFF Budget Overview for Parents.

At 4:12 pm, Mr. Mestmaker announced that the Public Hearing was opened.

Tatiana Mirzaian, Learning & Innovation Director, presented the 2025 Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP), beginning with a reminder to the Board that this was a transitional year for Grow Public Schools (GPS). In the 2024-2025 school year, GPS operated under three separate LEAs: Grow Public Schools, Grow Academy Arvin, and Grow Academy Shafter. Starting next year, GPS will consolidate into a single LEA – Grow Public Schools - through the Countywide Benefit Charter.

Goal 1: Conditions of Learning

Ensure equitable access to facilities, qualified teachers, instructional materials, grade level content standards, programs, and services fostering the optimal conditions for effective and comprehensive learning.

- This goal remained unchanged, with the addition of adding McKinney Vento services.

Goal 2: Student Outcomes

Provide a personalized and inclusive learning experience that inspires all students to achieve at high levels.

- This goal also remained unchanged. GPS deepened its Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) by hiring a Director of Educational Programs and creating additional support positions.

Goal 3: Engagement

Provide an environment that fosters parent input and participation while supporting high levels of student engagement.

- No significant changes were made to this goal.

Ms. Mirzaian asked if there were any questions.

Board Member Ernie Unruh asked about the philosophy guiding LCAP expenditures. Dr. Esquivel responded that while the overarching goals have remained consistent, GPS has made substantial progress in implementation and is now “going deeper” with student support.

Ms. Mirzaian continued with a summary of the accountability components of the LCAP, which include local metrics, State priorities, and local indicators.

Dr. Esquivel emphasized that the LCAP is not a stand-alone document; it reflects an inclusive planning process that involves both parents and staff and is fully integrated into the overall educational program.

Mr. Mestmaker asked for any additional comments. With none made, he closed the Public Hearing at 4:19 pm.

5. Grow Public Schools Executive Team Leadership Report

Doc Ervin, President, began his presentation by noting that an action item on today’s agenda is the resolution to approve the transfer of the LLC and the restructuring of the RLG Land Foundation (RLGLF) as a Supporting Organization.

He acknowledged that this transition has been in discussion for some time and expressed appreciation for the partnership and collaboration throughout the process. To provide a brief overview of the proposed changes and their significance, he introduced RJ Valentino, President of the Grimm Family Education Foundation.

Mr. Valentino stated that this process has been in the works for 6 to 7 months. Both the RLG Land Foundation (RLGLF) Board and the Grimm Family Education Foundation (GFEF) Board have approved the transfer of ownership of Nectarine Court LLC (the entity that owns the current Grow Public Schools facilities) from RLGLF to Grow Public Schools. This will enable GPS to streamline governance and oversight related to school facilities, including land acquisition, school development, and financing—while ensuring continued eligibility for SB740 funding reimbursement.

In addition to the transfer, the plan includes repurposing RLGLF as a supporting organization for Grow Public Schools and transferring its borrower responsibilities under the existing bonds. The full transition is expected to take 6 to 8 months, and once complete, the current RLGLF will dissolve in its existing form and be reestablished as a supporting entity under a new name, pending IRS approval.

As part of the transition, ownership of Nectarine Court LLC will be transferred to the Grow Public Schools Foundation, and the LLC will be renamed. The borrower’s responsibilities associated with the current bonds will be transferred alongside the LLC. The legal team from YMC has outlined a comprehensive timeline and action plan to guide the process through completion.

Mr. Valentino asked if there were any questions. No questions were asked.

Mr. Ervin thanked Mr. Valentino for his remarks and transitioned into his update, beginning with highlights related to Grow Academy #3. He noted that the land acquisition was finalized in May, and that the architectural firm Ordiz Melby, Inc. has been collaborating closely with both the GPS team and Colombo Construction. The team anticipates submitting the site plan review to the city within the next couple of months. Work is still ongoing to identify viable financing options, which will be brought to the Board once ready for review.

He then provided an update on the development of the five-year strategic plan, sharing that the final Steering Committee and Cabinet meetings are approaching. The finalized version of the strategic plan will be presented at the August 25th Board meeting. The plan is organized around four key areas of focus: Academic Excellence, Health & Wellness, College & Career Empowerment, and Growth & Expansion.

Mr. Ervin also highlighted recent efforts to secure additional funding through grants. In the next month, GPS will have applied for three major grants, with Tanya Kelly, Director of Educational Programs, and Kevin McGowan, Coordinator of Data Analytics, playing pivotal roles in the application process:

1. CMO Replication Grant – Submitted on June 18th, requesting \$4 million (\$2 million per school) to support network expansion.
2. GEAR-UP Grant – Due for submittal on June 25th, requesting \$4.5 million over seven years to increase college enrollment and career readiness.
3. Model Development and Dissemination Grant – Due for submittal on July 14th, requesting up to \$2.5 million over five years to codify, support, and scale the Grow model.

Dr. Esquivel, Superintendent, began his update by highlighting the excitement surrounding the finalization of the Strategic Plan, particularly the launch of a new initiative: College & Career Empowerment. This initiative expands Grow's mission beyond TK-8 to support students in the post-secondary space. He welcomed Yvonne Armendariz, who joined GPS as the Director of Alumni & Family Supports on June 2nd. Dr. Esquivel noted that Ms. Armendariz has a strong background and deep experience in post-secondary support and we are happy to have her as a part of the team.

In other leadership updates, Dr. Esquivel announced the hiring of Heidi Waterstradt as GPS's new Chief Academic Officer, with a start date of July 1st. Her selection followed a rigorous five-month search process that attracted 84 applicants from a highly competitive pool. Mrs. Waterstradt brings extensive experience as a former KIPP School Leader and consultant with the Achievement Network, and the team is thrilled to welcome her aboard. She will be formally introduced at the August 25th Board Meeting.

Dr. Esquivel also shared a brief end-of-year testing reflection. While the results are still preliminary, early data shows that more students are exceeding grade-level expectations, indicating strong forward momentum. He expressed pride in the efforts of the school leadership and academic teams, reinforcing GPS's commitment to continuous improvement. Finalized data and a more comprehensive report will be shared at the next Board meeting.

Steve McClain, Chief Business Officer, started his update by noting that the adopted budget for the 2025–2026 school year is included as an action item on today’s agenda. He extended his appreciation to EdTec for their support throughout the budgeting process.

He reminded the Board that, as is standard practice, GPS adopts its budget prior to the release of the Governor’s final State budget, which is expected on June 30th. If necessary, revisions will be presented in August to align with any State-level updates.

Key highlights and assumptions included in the proposed budget:

- COLA (Cost of Living Adjustment) is projected at 2.3%, slightly reduced from 2.43% in January.
- New State funding includes student support and professional development discretionary block grant, currently estimated at \$305 per PY ADA, down from \$325 earlier this year.
- Transitional Kindergarten (TK) will be fully implemented for children turning 4 by September 1. The adult-to-student ratio will be 10:1, and the TK add-on funding rate will increase by approximately \$2,400 per student.
- A deferral is expected, shifting approximately one-third of June apportionment to July 2026. Mr. McClain noted that GPS does not anticipate any cash flow issues as a result.

For the proposed FY26 budget, GPS is projecting a consolidated net income of \$76,000. Mr. McClain emphasized that the team is being fiscally cautious and will continue to monitor and update financials in the First Interim Report.

Mr. McClain shared that several meetings are scheduled over the coming weeks regarding SB740 reimbursement updates. He noted that interest rates have stabilized, putting GPS in a favorable position for financing. Once reimbursement is received, the plan is to replenish cash reserves used for facility improvements in both Shafter and Arvin.

Facilities updates included:

- Shafter Phase 2, officially launched in Spring, beginning with the construction of a new parent drop-off area.
- Plans have been submitted to Arvin’s Planning Department, once approved we will be able to start the grading work across the street.

During the discussion, Board Member Ernie Unruh inquired about the location of GPS’s substantial reserves. Mr. McClain responded that in 2023, the funds were moved into a money market account, where they are monitored weekly. Once the SB740 funds are received, they will also be transferred into a conservative money market account to ensure both security and accessibility.

6. Action Items

- 6.1 Approval of Grow Public Schools, Grow Academy Arvin, and Grow Academy Shafter’s 2025-2026 Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) and Budget Overview for Parents.

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

A motion was made by Ernie Unruh, seconded by Dr. Kristen Watson, and passed, via roll call to approve the Grow Public Schools, Grow Academy Arvin, and Grow Academy Shafter’s 2025-2026 Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) and Budget Overview for Parents.

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

Carried 4-0

6.2 Approval of 2025-2026 LCAP ESSA Federal Addendum for Grow Public Schools

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

A motion was made by Dr. Kristen Watson, seconded by Manuel Pantoja, and passed, via roll call to approve the 2025-2026 LCAP ESSA Federal Addendum for Grow Public Schools.

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

Carried 4-0

6.3 Approval of 2025-2026 Local Indicator Report for Grow Public Schools, Grow Academy Arvin, and Grow Academy Shafter

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

A motion was made by Ernie Unruh, seconded by Dr. Kristen Watson, and passed, via roll call to approve the 2025-2026 Local Indicator Report for Grow Public Schools, Grow Academy Arvin, and Grow Academy Shafter.

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

6.4 Approval of Resolution Authorizing the Transfer of LLC and Restructuring of RLG Land Foundation as Supporting Organization

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

A motion was made by Dr. Kristen Watson, seconded by Ernie Unruh, and passed, via roll call to approve the Resolution Authorizing the Transfer of LLC and Restructuring of RLG Land Foundation as Supporting Organization.

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

Carried 4-0

6.5 Approval of 2025-2026 Budget for Grow Public Schools

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

A motion was made by Manuel Pantoja, seconded by Ernie Unruh, and passed, via roll call to approve the 2025-2026 Budget for Grow Public Schools.

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

Carried 4-0

6.6 Approval of Ordiz Melby, Inc. Proposal for Architectural Services for Grow Academy #3

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

A motion was made by Dr. Kristen Watson, seconded by Manuel Pantoja, and passed, via roll call to approve Ordiz Melby, Inc. Proposal for Architectural Services for Grow Academy #3.

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

Carried 4-0

7. Consent Agenda

Mr. Mestmaker read aloud the following:

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.

Mr. Mestmaker asked if there were any comments from the Board.

Board Member Ernie Unruh asked what screening instrument GPS is using for item number 7.7 - to assess students for risk of reading difficulties. Ms. Mirzaian replied, Amira.

Mr. Mestmaker asked for any additional comments. With none made, he called for a motion to approve Consent Items 7.1 – 7.14.

Ernie Unruh made a motion to approve consent agenda items 7.1 – 7.14.

Moved by: Ernie Unruh

Seconded by: Dr. Kristen Watson

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

Carried 4-0

- 7.1 Approval of Minutes from April 28, 2025
- 7.2 Approval of Warrants and Credit Card Registers for April and May 2025
- 7.3 Approval of Resolution Regarding the 2025-2026 Education Protection Account (EPA) Spending Plan for Grow Public Schools
- 7.4 Approval of Updated Local School Wellness Policy
- 7.5 Approval of Triennial Assessment of the Local School Wellness Policy
- 7.6 Approval of Participation Agreement with Bear Mountain Youth Sports League for Grow Academy Arvin
- 7.7 Approval of Adoption of Screening Instrument to Assess Students for Risk of Reading Difficulties

- 7.8 Approval of 2025-2026 Bolton Insurance Services Renewal Proposal for Property and Liability Insurance
- 7.9 Approval of Expanded Learning Opportunities Program Plan
- 7.10 Approval of Consolidated Applications for 2025-2026 Categorical Funding for Grow Public Schools
- 7.11 Approval of the Adoption of the Instructional Continuity Plan (ICP)
- 7.12 Approval of IT Support Services Agreement
- 7.13 Approval of Grow Public Schools Schoolwide Program
- 7.14 Approval of 2025-2026 Employee Handbook for Grow Public Schools

8. Closing Items

8.1 Adjourn Meeting

Mr. Mestmaker thanked everyone for attending the meeting and asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Manuel Pantoja made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 4:49 pm.

Moved by: Mauel Pantoja

Seconded by: Dr. Kristen Watson

Aye Tom Mestmaker, Dr. Kristen Watson, Manuel Pantoja, and Ernie 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 eleven (11) pages, are the minutes of the regular Board Meeting of the Board of Directors held on June 23, 2025.



Secretary