



**STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY**

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**BRIEFING MEMORANDUM**

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**TO:** SPCSA Board

**FROM:** Patrick Gavin, Executive Director  
Mark Modrcin, Director of Authorizing

**SUBJECT:** Agenda Item #6: Recommendation Report regarding Nevada Connections Academy's Elementary School Improvement Plan

**DATE:** August 6, 2018

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Nevada Connections Academy (NCA) is an online school serving students in grades Kindergarten through 12. The school originally opened under a written charter from 2007 to 2013. In 2013 the charter school applied for renewal which was subsequently approved. Nevada Connections Academy and the Authority entered into a mutually agreed – upon settlement which expires at the end of the 2019 – 2020 school year. This was a result of Notices of Intent to Revoke the written charter issued on September 30, 2016 and February 10, 2017 pursuant to NRS 388A.330 based on the high school's graduation rate. The school currently serves over 3,000 students statewide.

NCA's elementary program (grades K-5) was recently rated as a 1-star school under the Department of Education's Nevada School Performance Framework (NSPF). Historically, the elementary school program has demonstrated average performance at best, earning a 3-star rating in both 2012 and 2013. However, during the current charter term, performance according to the NSPF has been below average. In fact, performance has declined as the elementary school program has earned 1 or 2-star rating in both 2014 and 2017.

Consequently, NCA received a Notice of Breach on March 12, 2018 due to its elementary school receiving a 1-star rating under the Department of Education's Nevada School Performance Framework. The elementary program earned an index score of 24.44. Absent an approved corrective action plan, including commitments to specific achievement targets, a third consecutive rating at the 1 or 2-star level would result in the school receiving a Notice of Intent to terminate based on persistent underperformance.

**Summary of the Process:**

As mentioned previously, NCA received a Notice of Breach due to the underperformance of the elementary school program due to being rated as a 1-star school under the NSPF for both the 2016 –

2017 school year and the 2013-14 school year. To provide the school with an opportunity to address these academic deficiencies, SPCSA staff required the school submit the following information by May 4, 2018:

- A thorough description of the most essential features of the proposed academic change(s) to the education program NCA plans to implement to correct the level of underperformance. This may include programs (e.g. curriculum, PD, afterschool programming, parent program), principles (e.g. no excuses, individualized learning, learn at your own pace) and structures (blended learning, small learning communities, small class sizes). The school was asked to also provide:
  - A thorough description why these approaches were chosen, and how NCA data supports these selections;
  - How these approaches are different from those previously implemented;
  - A thorough description of how these approaches will effectively serve all students across achievement levels, including those that are not proficient; and
  - Strong evidence from independent research that meets the strong evidence standard set forth in section 8101(21)(A) of the ESEA.
- Outline the clearly measurable interim and annual performance and growth goals that the school proposes in order to meet or exceed SPCSA performance expectations under the Nevada School Performance Framework. Be sure to include the following information for context:
  - Describe how the baseline performance was set;
  - Articulate how the organization will measure and evaluate academic progress throughout the school year, at the end of the academic year, and the entire school year. This includes the performance of individual students, student cohorts, subgroups and the entire school; and
  - In addition to mandatory state and Authority testing, identify the primary interim academic assessments the school will use for internal purposes to analyze student learning needs and ensure progress towards SPCSA and state proficiency targets. Please describe how these will be used and provide independent statistical evidence that the instrument is strongly correlated with and predictive of results on either the Smarter Balanced Assessment or the ACT.
- To support the academic goals and benchmarks outlined above, NCA should describe the following:
  - How teachers and school leadership will be supported in developing capacity around these benchmarks and assessments; and
  - Should the school fall short of the benchmarks highlighted above, explain what steps the school will take school-wide and/or at the classroom level. To address this level of underperformance, NCA should detail what would trigger such corrective actions and who would be responsible for implementation.
- Individual student attendance information for the 2015 – 2016 and 2016 – 2017 school years, pursuant to NAC 387.193.
- Minutes of each public NCA Board meeting since July 1, 2015 through March 12, 2018.

The school submitted an elementary school improvement plan to Authority staff in response to the requests above on May 4, 2018. The school also provided additional information in response to staff's clarifying questions on June 14, 2018. A copy of the Notice of Breach, and both the initial and clarifying responses are attached to this recommendation.

As discussed below, SPCSA staff recommends that the Authority Board accept this plan, with conditions, but leave the school under a continuing Notice of Breach until the 2018-2019 NSPF ratings are released in the Fall of 2019. At this time, sufficient information and data will be available to make an informed decision about continuing along the intervention ladder, or returning the school to Good Standing. As NCA's current charter contract expires on June 30, 2020, the question of whether the school has met the achievement targets set forth in the plan will also be a primary consideration for the Authority at the time of the renewal decision in the winter of 2019-2020.

### **Nevada Connections Academy Response to Notice of Breach and Staff Analysis:**

#### *School Improvement – Programs and Structures*

According to the response submitted by Nevada Connections Academy, the submitted Elementary School Improvement plan is not only a response to the Notice of Breach issued by the Authority, but is also an outline of efforts that have been ongoing for over a year as the school has been making efforts to improve the overall performance of students. The plan is divided into three main sections: proposed academic changes, interim and annual performance growth goals, and supporting goals and benchmarks.

Under the proposed academic changes for the 2018 – 2019 school year, the NCA plan contemplates seven programmatic changes and interventions that are, according to the proposal, supported by research and can lead to school improvement.

The first change in programming is the implementation of a new curriculum, enVisionMath. The school underwent some changes during the 2017 – 2018 school year, but more drastic changes will be implemented this upcoming year as the curriculum incorporates a blended approach of traditional and investigative learning techniques that emphasize problem-based interactive learning opportunities, visual learning strategies, embedded assessment, and data-driven remediation. This curriculum was chosen based upon considerable research containing base alignment specific to the Smarter Balance (SBAC) standardized testing protocol. Additionally, NCA notes in its submission that students receiving instruction through enVisionMath curriculum at other schools have shown significant improvement in their mastery of math concepts and problem-solving, math computation, and math vocabulary. There was also evidence of accelerated growth rates for students during the second year of this curriculum.

A second math program NCA will be implementing in 2018 – 2019 is Math, We Got This! (MWGT!). This initiative focuses on expanding student engagement, shifting how students, teachers and Learning Coaches think about math, and tying math to real-world examples. More specifically, the program will enhance the curriculum by developing students' oral and written communication skills around math, and providing additional math time to those students identified as Tier 2 or 3 students identified on formative assessment.

Within this initiative, each grade level and school curricular department will own a piece of math and propose to assess ways that their group could contribute to improving student outcomes. Elementary teachers will also receive specific MWGT! professional development, and this will be required of all returning teachers as the previous regimen was not successful and did not exclusively focus on math. Professional development under this initiative is to occur monthly during the 2018 -

2019 school year, and the school already has specific subjects to be covered in each month of the year, beginning in September. Teacher participation will be monitored by K-8 administrators, the managing teachers and the school leader. All staff members, both new and returning, are required to participate per their evaluation competencies. Learning Coaches also have the option of accessing the Learning Coach Central resource hub to assist their students. Participation is voluntary in these sessions, but Learning Coaches of “at-risk” students will be encouraged to attend appropriate sessions.

The third and final programmatic change for math to be implemented in 2018 – 2019 is Math Time to Talk (Math TtT), which are small group LiveLesson sessions moderated by Pearson Online and Blended Learning math subject experts that appear in student courses approximately every seven lessons. These 30-minute sessions are focused on increasing the ability of students to engage in math discourse in such a way that promotes an increase in conceptual understanding. Sessions are designed to reinforce key math skills, improve problem solving, and strengthen math vocabulary and communication skills. NCA teachers will receive training from Pearson in effective strategies for promoting math discourse.

According to the proposal, research indicates that talking about math is a key activity to support students’ active engagement in math thinking, reasoning, and problem solving. During the 2016 – 2017 school year, students in grades 3-5 at two Connections Academy schools participated in a pilot of the Math TtT program. The outcomes of this pilot were closely studied and verified in order to decide whether the program was successful, and it was determined that students participating in at least six sessions of the Math TtT had significantly higher final math course scores than the group that did not.

NCA also plans to implement two programmatic changes for the delivery of English Language Arts (ELA) content. The first is a shift to a new curriculum, Wonders, for students in Kindergarten through 5th grade. This curriculum was chosen based on considerable research containing base alignment specific to the SBAC standardized testing protocol and is aligned to four research-based design principles, including an engaging learning environment, the opportunity for students to practice, review, and revisit concepts, assessments that are varied, relevant and frequent, and consistent course and lesson structures. To find an optimal curriculum for NCA students, the school opted to utilize curriculum from a Pearson competitor, McGraw Hill, which is noteworthy. The change to the Wonders curriculum began in the 2017 – 2018 school year, but NCA is confident that the results and improvement under this curricular shift will be magnified after two years of implementation.

A new ELA programmatic change that NCA plans to implement under this plan for 2018 – 2019 is to leverage the Lexia Reading Core5 system. This platform is data-driven by student outcomes, providing targeted instruction by a teacher or paraprofessional, empowering students to build their fundamental literacy skills through technology and direct instruction. The Lexia Reading Core5 platform aims to increase student proficiency in six areas: phonological awareness, phonics/phonemic awareness, structural analysis, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. According to the proposal, multiple studies published in peer-reviewed journals indicate that Lexia Reading Core5 has been found to accelerate the development of reading skills, improve standardized test scores for elementary school students as well as help close the reading gap for targeted populations such as students that have been identified as low performers as well as English learners.

NCA also contemplates two additional changes in student support structures to be implemented in the 2018 – 2019 school year. The first is provide a number of nationally-facilitated LiveLesson sessions to Learning Coaches throughout the school year to assist in supporting their students with language arts. According to the submission, data shows that only 34% of K-5 Learning Coaches

took advantage of this training for the 2017 – 2018 school year. These trainings have been available to all coaches in the past, but have not been promoted specifically to parents of K-5 students. According to the proposal, NCA plans to enhance not only the quality of provided trainings, but also disseminate more information on these opportunities through WebMail messages, home page announcements, the Learning Coach Link, and the monthly newsletter for Learning Coaches.

Finally, as part of its school improvement plan, the school is retraining all teachers on the multi-tiered instructional approach for the 2018 -2019 school year to ensure that teachers are aware of all strategies and available resources to help students, especially those that are at-risk. This includes retraining teachers in the Response to Intervention (RtI) program/protocol as well as how to interpret data to make instructional decisions, document their work with students, implement differentiation strategies, and support students who are not progressing or engaging in the instructional program. In its response to the clarifying questions from staff, NCA noted that this program was in place previously, but it was not being utilized effectively by all teachers due to annual turnover and changes to the program, thus necessitating a school-wide mandate to retrain. Teachers new to NCA are enrolled in the introduction and instructional-based series; second year teachers in the expanding beyond first-year resources series; third-year/veteran teachers in the refreshed information and retraining series.

Of the programmatic changes described above, staff is pleased that the school details a variety of research-based programs and strategies. NCA appears to have invested significant time and resources to investigate these programs and to determine the best fit for Nevada students. For example, SPCSA staff would agree that ensuring that both the enVisionMath and Wonders curriculums are aligned to the SBAC testing battery is a critical step, and a likely improvement from previous practices. SPCSA staff was also encouraged that the school plans to undertake significant steps to train staff on these changes. The detail provided for the MWGT! teacher training was thorough, and clearly defined the scope and frequency of the professional development to be provided. The submission also provides particulars on how all staff will be retrained on the RtI protocols, and the scope of resources and trainings available to Learning Coaches.

SPCSA staff did observe a few gaps within this section that are noteworthy. First, the school only provided training information for returning teachers under the MWGT! initiative, and did not detail how new teachers will be trained. This is a missing element that could be problematic if the school has high teacher turnover at the elementary school for the upcoming school year. Another issue identified in staff's review is that the Math TtT program also does not appear to be taught by teachers that are licensed or necessarily employees of NCA. The submission does note that the individuals leading this synchronous program will be trained math specialists who have a degree in mathematics. Additional details about their background and what type of training they receive is not provided, which is somewhat problematic given that the implementation and any success is in unknown hands. Lastly, SPCSA staff has concerns about the requirements outlined for Learning Coaches during their orientation. Learning Coaches are frequently the parent or guardian of a virtual school student, and can be construed as a volunteer under Nevada statute and regulation. Per [R131-16](#), it is not permissible for any public charter school to maintain a requirement to volunteer. Additionally, a charter school may not require a parent or guardian to attend informational meetings or discriminate against students whose parents are unable or unwilling to do so. These specific provisions were placed in regulations based on concerns raised by the U.S. Department of Education related to prohibited practices it identified in Nevada charter schools. Consequently, SPCSA staff cannot endorse NCA's plan to require Learning Coaches to complete orientation training, as outlined on page 7 of the school's clarifying responses, as a condition of initial or ongoing enrollment. The school must ensure that it notifies parents that while serving as a Learning

Coach and attending or participating in Learning Coach-specific or more general parent trainings is strongly encouraged and is demonstrated to improve student outcomes, the school cannot and will not consider such factors in any initial or ongoing enrollment decision or in any disciplinary or academic decision related to a student.

The elementary school improvement plan also includes some structural changes to how teachers will become stronger in data driven instruction. In the 2018 – 2019 school year, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) will be focused on two main areas: elementary math and elementary English language arts. In their PLCs, teachers will develop common grading practices, assignment expectations, and re-teaching and relearning policies. For the 2018 – 2019 school year, the entire NCA staff will meet on a bi-weekly basis. Another noteworthy change is a focus on SMART goals during PLCs so as to track the effectiveness of the multiple components of the school’s improvement plan. Previously, PLCs were spent as a way to identify and monitor the progress of at-risk students and place them into interventions. In the 2018 – 2019 school year, PLC participation and progress will be monitored by K-8 administrators, the managing teachers, the school leader managers and the school leadership team. This will be a significant investment of teacher time to plan and implement effectively, and will be a non-negotiable expectation for all staff members, per their annual evaluation competencies.

*Performance Goals—Annual and Interim*

The improvement plan detailed above aims to address the severe underperformance of the elementary school as evidenced by the recent 1-star rating under the NSPF and an index score of 24.44 out of a possible 100 points.

To move from a 1 to 3-star school, NCA has set forth an annual goal of increasing its overall NSPF index score by an average of 20% across the areas of Academic Achievement, Student Growth, Closing the Opportunity Gaps and Student Engagement in each of the next four years. Stated another way, the school aims to increase its NSPF index score by 20% so as to be a 3-star school at the end of the 2020 – 2021 school year. This is an ambitious goal and will require immediate evidence of improvement in the ratings for the 2017 – 2018 school year, which are scheduled to be released in September. The school does believe that it has made sufficient improvements to meet its 2017 – 2018 index score benchmark of 29.32, an approximate 5-point increase in the index score from 2016 – 2017.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Star Calculation</u>	<u>Point Increase from Prior Year</u>	<u>% Increase from Prior Year</u>	<u>Star Rating</u>
2016-17	24.44	Baseline	Baseline	One Star
2017-18	29.32	4.88	20.0%	Two Star
2018-19	35.18	5.86	20.0%	Two Star
2019-20	42.21	7.04	20.0%	Two Star
2020-21	50.7	8.77	20.0%	Three Star

The school will be leveraging two formative assessments to help monitor student progress. The first is the Measures of Progress (MAP) assessment, which was initially offered this past school year in grades 3-5. According to the submission, in 2018 – 2019, the school will be offering this exam at all elementary grades so as to inform all elementary grade level teachers of student

progress, with a particular focus on three student subgroups: lowest performing students, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading, and new NCA students. Subject-specific PLCs will structure SMART goals to assist in the monitoring of performance for these subgroups, which have a great impact on the overall NSPF score.

According to the proposal, the school also plans to continue to implement the Longitudinal Evaluation of Academic Progress (LEAP) formative assessment as the school's pre-, mid-, and post-assessment. All students in grades K-5 will take the LEAP Math and English/Language Arts assessments. According to the proposal, these assessments will help NCA teachers understand the current academic state of each student. Once pre-tests are completed in the fall, teachers and parents have access to an individualized report that provides academic information to assist in identifying skills, strengths, and weaknesses of each student. This same information will be used to inform goal setting for students, PLC discussions and analysis.

Overall, SPCSA staff finds that the interim assessment plan is strong, and is set up to inform teacher practices as well as to differentiate students among key subgroups. The MAP assessment is a well-respected exam, and was adopted by NDE as part of the Read by Grade 3 initiative. It has not been adopted by Nevada as an upper elementary and middle school assessment, however. At present, there is only limited, publisher-produced analysis to support the predictability of the MAP assessment in relation to performance on the Smarter Balanced examinations. The school may have to supplement the MAP with other data sources, such as the SBAC interims, to make a determination as to what levels of MAP growth and what MAP scoring levels correspond with SBAC growth and proficiency targets in the NSPF. In contrast, it is noteworthy that NCA provided an independent assessment analysis of the effectiveness of the LEAP assessment in and its predictive nature of student achievement on a state assessment. While not Nevada-specific, this study confirms that the LEAP assessment has the ability to distinguish which students are likely to be successful on the end-of-year SBAC examination, but also those that are not likely to be successful. Overall, the assessment plan is logical and can setup teachers and administrators to analyze timely student data.

SPCSA staff does have reservations about the school's ability to achieve an average of 20% growth in its index score according to the NSPF over the next four ratings. The current score of 24.44 indicates that the school is one of the lowest performers in the entire SPCSA portfolio, both in terms of student growth and proficiency. To increase proficiency, SPCSA staff would expect that the school would have very high growth goals under this plan so as to sustain a moderate increase in proficiency over the next four years. Stated another way, sustained proficiency improvement is impossible without an increase in student growth that is dramatic. SPCSA staff is not as confident that the school can make gains that average 20% annual growth over the next four years.

#### *Teacher and School Leadership Support*

In addition to the professional development described within the Programs and Structures section and the content to be prioritized during PLCs, NCA recognizes that teaching in a virtual school environment is a specific skill and requires both initial and ongoing professional development. According to the NCA submission, topics for professional learning sessions support core standards for facilitating student learning, align to the school year cycle, and are driven by the belief that all students can and must learn. Through trainings, teachers will be equipped with a working knowledge of the Pearson curriculum, strategies and effective practices for virtual instruction, the ability to effectively use tools to monitor student progress, and a strong understanding of the multiple forms of assessment to interpret performance data. According to the proposal, NCA leadership expects teachers to annually participate in ten professional development days and to complete assigned professional learning activities.

The professional development days requirement, in addition to other mechanisms such as PLCs, are positive improvements in the development structures for NCA staff. If executed successfully, SPCSA staff agrees that they could improve the effectiveness of the elementary school staff.

**Overall Recommendation: Approve with Conditions**

Staff, with some reservations, recommends that the Authority Board accept the Nevada Connections Academy Elementary School Improvement Plan, but with conditions so as to more fully understand the school's ability to execute on its assurances. These conditions are as follows:

- Elementary teachers will receive specific MWGT! professional development which is to occur monthly during the 2018 - 2019 school year. According to the NCA proposal, teacher participation will be monitored by K-8 administrators, the managing teachers and the school leader. ***SPCSA staff requests that NCA submit attendance logs, with corresponding teacher signatures verifying attendance, for all monthly MWGT! trainings. These logs and signatures should be submitted quarterly, beginning in October 2018. All such materials must be submitted into Epicenter.***
- NCA data shows that a small group of K-5 Learning Coaches have participated in offered trainings in the past. Beginning in 2018 - 2019, these trainings will be promoted specifically to parents of K-5 students. ***SPCSA staff requests a final schedule of LiveLesson trainings to be available to elementary Learning Coaches in the 2018 – 2019 school year so that an appropriate SPCSA staff member can also attend. Additionally, staff would like for the school to track Learning Coach participation in these sessions for the 2018 – 2019 school year. These forms should be submitted quarterly, beginning in October 2018. All such materials must be submitted into Epicenter.***
- NCA is retraining all teachers on the multi-tiered instructional approach and the RtI process for the 2018 -2019 school year to ensure that teachers are aware of all strategies and available resources to help students, especially those that are at-risk. ***SPCSA staff requests that NCA submit attendance logs, with corresponding teacher signatures verifying attendance and completion of this training, for all elementary school teachers by October 1, 2018, or another mutually agreed-upon date. All such materials must be submitted into Epicenter.***
- For the 2018 – 2019 school year, the entire NCA staff will meet in PLCs on a bi-weekly basis. PLC participation and progress will be monitored by K-8 administrators, the managing teachers, the school leader managers and the school leadership team. ***SPCSA staff requests that NCA submit all agendas and monitoring logs for PLCs, with corresponding teacher signatures verifying attendance, for all bi-weekly PLCs on a quarterly basis, beginning in October 2018. All such materials must be submitted into Epicenter.***
- According to the proposal, NCA leadership expects teachers to annually participate in ten professional development days and to complete assigned professional learning activities. ***SPCSA staff requests that NCA submit attendance logs, with corresponding teacher signatures verifying attendance, for all ten professional days required by the school for the 2018 -2019 school year. All such materials must be submitted into Epicenter.***

If this recommendation is approved, SPCSA staff will provide NCA with guidance on how this information should be reported so as to be easily understandable for all parties.



Finally, SPCSA staff remains concerned about the high student mobility rates that are present at Nevada Connections Academy. The school has provided a variety of information related to the level of student turnover schoolwide, including at the elementary school level and cites a range of research related to pupil mobility in brick and mortar schools. It is unlikely, however, that student mobility in virtual schools stems from similar issues. In brick and mortar schools, student mobility is highly correlated with poverty and housing issues. As students move from one neighborhood to another, they change school zones and most likely change schools.

As demonstrated by the scatter plot below, student transiency is strongly correlated with eligibility for free and reduced priced lunch, the primary proxy for poverty in school-based settings. The correlation between FRL and transiency rate can be seen below. As you can see, the red line, which represents the line of central tendency, shows a strong relationship between transiency and pupil income, with schools that have higher FRL populations experiencing substantially greater levels of transiency.

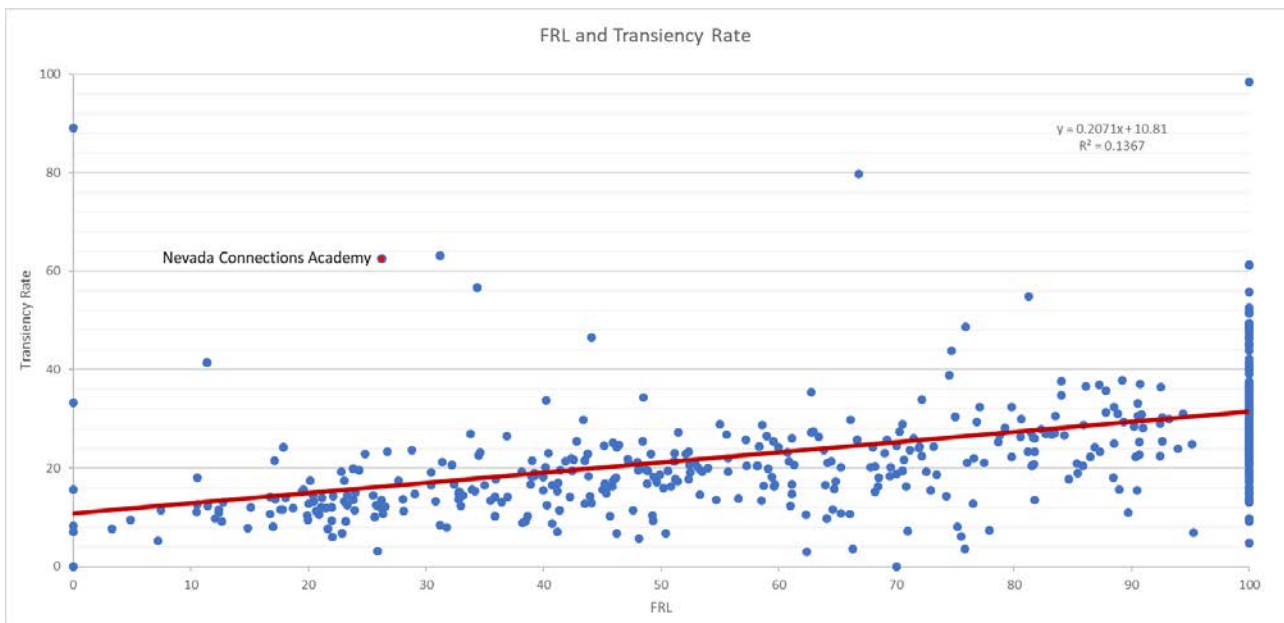


Figure 1: Correlation between FRL rate and transiency rate

It is important to note that NCA's transiency rate is far higher than one would predict based on its FRL rate. It is likely that this distinction is related to the differences in the virtual school context instead of being a result of an intrinsic student characteristic. In contrast to the circumstances of students in brick and mortar schools, a student in a virtual environment who moves from one community to another does not need to change schools due to geographic proximity. A virtual school like NCA serves students statewide and such schools commit to provide items such as computers and services such as internet access to students who would otherwise be unable to access the program. Consequently, it seems more likely that student mobility in virtual schools like NCA is based more on factors that are within the control of the school, such as customer service issues that disengage parents and students or the need for more intensive services and supports for students who are falling behind academically.

Moreover, even if one were to assume that student transiency or student poverty was the efficient cause of the school's low levels of performance, it is important to note that this is not borne out by

the evidence. In comparison to elementary and middle schools statewide, NCA's elementary school performs substantially lower than schools with similar FRL rates.

In order to determine the relationship between 2 predictor values (Transiency Rate & FRL) and the outcome of index score, Staff analyzed the relationship between NCA's elementary index score and its FRL rate, performing a linear regression analysis to assess the correlation between socio-economic status (as measured by FRL rate) and the school's elementary index score. First, a simple linear regression was calculated to predict the likely index score based upon a school's FRL rate. This predicted score for a given FRL rate is indicated with the red line in Figure 2.<sup>1</sup>

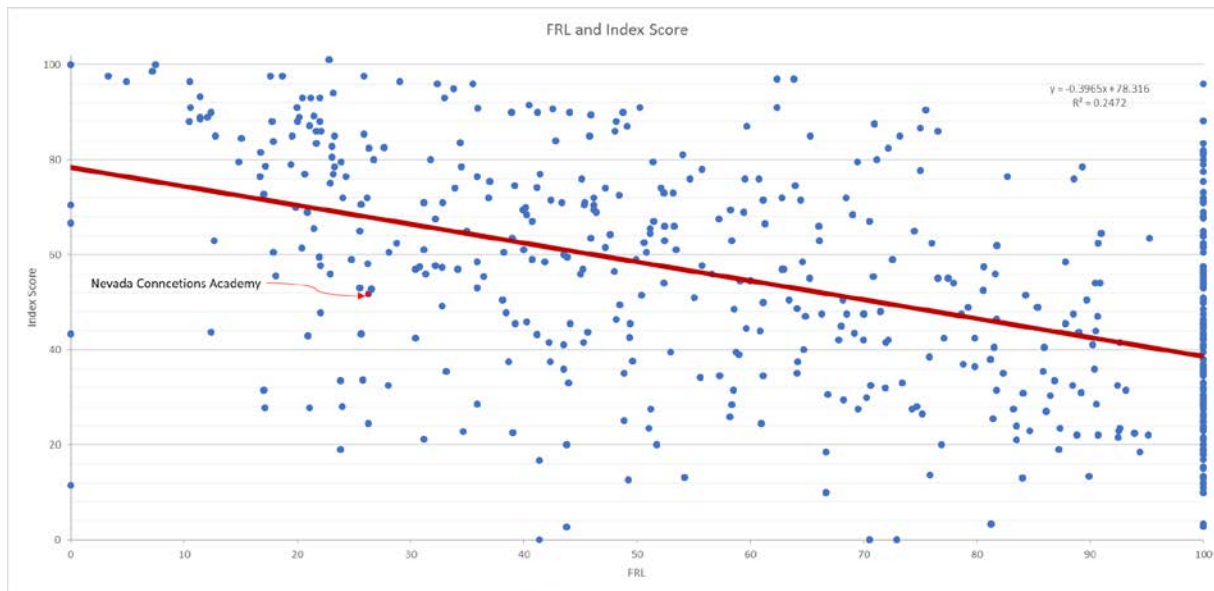


Figure 2: Correlation between FRL rate and NSPF index score

The results of the regression suggested that poverty explained 24% of the variance,  $R^2 = 0.2472$  which is a stronger degree of linear relationship than transiency rate when we compare with the outcome of index score.

Second, Authority staff reviewed the relationship between schools self-reported and un-validated student transiency rates and elementary and middle school index scores. As in the case of the FRL and index score analysis, staff calculated a linear regression to identify the predicted index score based upon a school's reported rate of student mobility. In contrast to the assertions made by NCA, there appears to be only a weak correlation between transiency and index score.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The results indicated a negative slope (slope -0.3965, intercept 78.316) with an  $R^2$  of 0.2472. The correlation coefficient between poverty and index score is -0.49722. This means that as FRL rates increase, index scores are likely to decrease for a typical school.

<sup>2</sup> The correlation coefficient between student mobility and index score is -0.38 which is considered a weak negative linear relationship. The results indicated a negative slope (slope -0.5409, intercept 65.958) with an  $R^2$  of 0.1496.

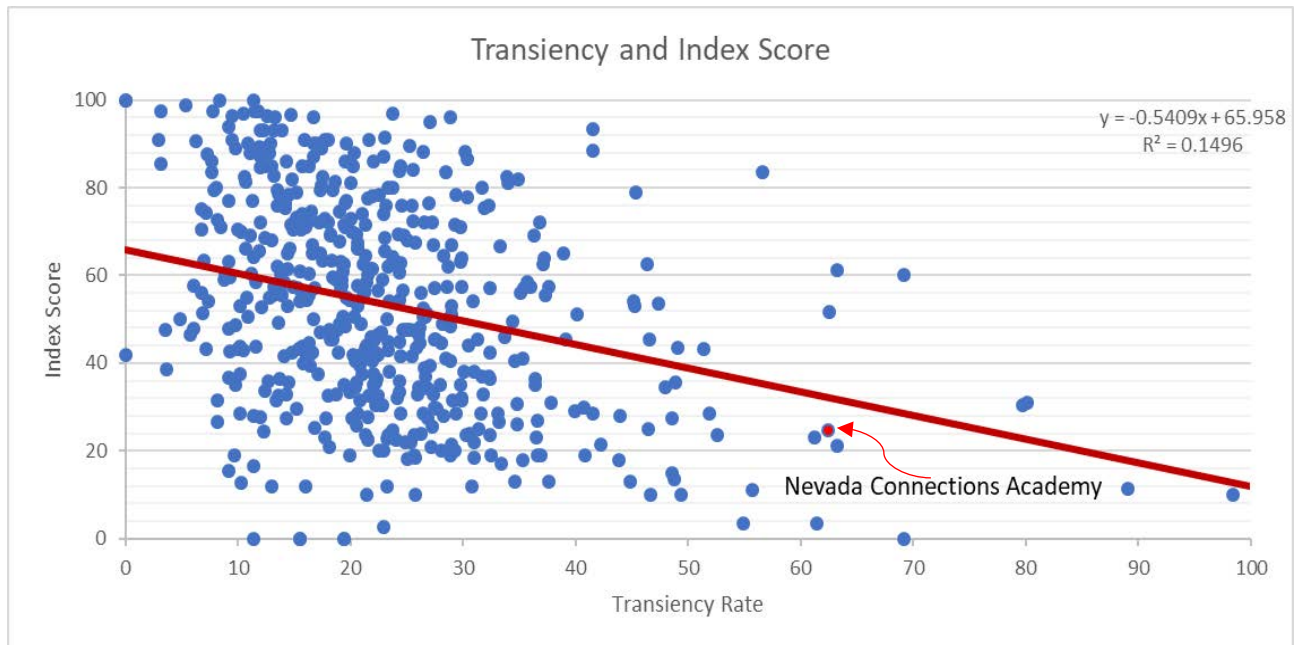


Figure 3: Correlation between transiency rate and index score

The results of the regression analysis suggest that student mobility explained 14% of the variance in index scores ( $R^2 = 0.1496$ ), which indicates that student mobility is not highly correlated with index scores by itself. Additionally, the school has previously provided compelling testimony citing the challenge of what staff anecdotally term “boomerang students,” pupils who may fail to attend for two consecutive weeks or voluntarily withdraw and then choose to re-enroll. Under the current, over-the-counter model of enrollment that occurs in virtual schools that are able to accept an unlimited number of students, there is no disincentive for families to withdraw their students for periods of time and then re-enroll them. No matter how many new students have backfilled the vacancies created by such withdrawals, the family can re-enroll their previously withdrawn pupil at any time. This model stands in stark contrast to the over-the-counter but zone-limited enrollment practices of traditional public schools and the lottery, enrollment cap, waitlist, and backfill practices that Nevada has mandated for charter schools.

To combat the high levels of student turnover at the elementary school, SPCSA staff recommends that the Board exercise its authority to mandate grade-by-grade student enrollment caps in the 2018 – 2019 school year to stabilize the student population. SPCSA staff recommends that enrollment be capped at the numbers in the chart on page 12 of this memo. Any students currently enrolled as of August 13<sup>th</sup> in a grade that has more students than the cap provides would be grandfathered into the school. New students wishing to enroll into grades that have enrollment above the established enrollment cap cannot do so until a time when the school has space available under the enrollment cap. Recognizing the importance of engaged and invested families, faculty, and governing body members, staff further recommends that this condition not apply to siblings of current NCA students, children of NCA staff, or children of the NCA Board.

*Proposed Enrollment Caps*

<b><u>Grade</u></b>	<b><u>Cap</u></b>
Kindergarten	250 students
1 <sup>st</sup> grade	250 students
2 <sup>nd</sup> grade	250 students
3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	250 students
4 <sup>th</sup> grade	250 students
5 <sup>th</sup> grade	250 students
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,500 students</b>

**Historical Performance, Enrollment and Demographic Information:**

*Nevada School Performance Ratings – NCA Elementary School*

<b><u>School Year</u></b>	<b><u>Rating</u></b>
2013	3 – star
2014	2 – star
2015	2 – star (continued)
2016	No star ratings released
2017	1-star
2018	<i>To be released in September</i>

*School Demographic Changes since 2015*

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total Enrollment<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>IEP</b>	<b>ELL</b>	<b>FRL</b>
15-16	2851	3.4%	10.1%	54.7%	21.2%	0.7%	8.3%	1.3%	8.3%	0.6%	43.1%
16-17	3091	3.2%	9.8%	53.8%	22.5%	0.4%	9.6%	0.0%	8.6%	1.0%	42.8%
17-18	3199	2.9%	11.0%	50.2%	23.5%	0.8%	10.2%	1.1%	8.4%	0.9%	8.4%

A – Asian

B – Black

C – Caucasian

H – Hispanic

I – American Indian/Alaskan Native

M – Mixed/Two or more races

P – Pacific Islander

IEP – Individualized Education Plan –A student with a disability/special education student

ELL – English Language Learner

FRL – A student who qualifies for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

**Legal Framework:**

As the SPCSA Board is well-aware, SPCSA-sponsored charter schools are generally governed by local, state, and federal education statutes and regulations; in addition to Nevada-specific charter school laws, regulations, SPCSA requirements and guidelines; as well as the charter school’s charter contract. Pursuant to [NRS 388A.276](#) and [NRS 388A.279](#), the Authority may, at a duly

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<sup>3</sup> Enrollment as of Validation Day each year (October 1).

noticed public meeting, approve, approve with conditions, or deny a request to amend a charter contract.

In this case, Nevada Connections Academy is currently operating under a charter contract entered into between the SPCSA and the governing body of NCA. If the SPCSA Board approves staff's recommendation to accept NCA's elementary school improvement plan proposal and leave the school in breach until the NSPF ratings are released in the fall of 2019, this would be a material amendment to the current charter contract due to the changes in the academic program and the proposed enrollment caps.