

**STEVE SISOLAK**  
*Governor*

**STATE OF NEVADA**

**REBECCA FEIDEN**  
*Executive Director*



**STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY**

**1749 North Stewart Street Suite 40  
Carson City, Nevada 89706-2543  
(775) 687 - 9174 • Fax: (775) 687 - 9113**

Via Electronic Mail

January 17, 2020

Scott Harrington  
555 Double Eagle Court, Ste. 2000  
Reno, NV 89521

**Nevada Connections Academy Application for Renewal**

Chair Harrington,

As you know, Nevada Connection Academy's ("NCA") charter school contract renewal application is slated to be on the agenda for the January 31, 2020 State Public Charter School Authority ("SPCSA") Board meeting. NCA has requested that its middle and high school be renewed; however, NCA is not seeking renewal of its elementary school and as such, no matter the decision of the SPCSA Board regarding renewal. Therefore, it is my understanding that NCA's elementary school will close at the end of the 2020-2021 school year.

Over the last ten months, the staff and board chair of the SPCSA have been in regular communication with you and your team regarding this critical milestone. In addition, SPCSA staff have reviewed the renewal application, information from recent site visits, the recent and historical academic, financial and organizational performance of the school, the efforts from the school to improve academic performance, and various materials submitted by NCA to the SPCSA. Recently, SPCSA staff finalized our analysis and renewal recommendation. I am writing to let you know that I will not be recommending to the SPCSA Board at the SPCSA board meeting on January 31, 2020 that NCA's charter school contract be renewed. This correspondence constitutes the notice of my recommendation contemplated by Nevada Administrative Code 388A.285(7).

In summary, a number of considerations informed my decision and ultimately, my recommendation is to not renew NCA's charter school contract is based on NRS 388A.285 and NAC 388A.415(6). As you are aware, NCA's middle school received index scores under Nevada's Department of Education's Nevada School Performance Framework ("NSPF") of 26.1 (one star) for the 2017 – 18 school year, and 40 (two stars) for the 2018 – 19 school year. These scores are based largely on the academic performance, both proficiency and growth, of NCA middle school students. While ELA proficiency at NCA's middle school has been close to the state average over the last three years, it has declined steadily since the 2016 – 17 school year. Math proficiency at NCA's middle school has been noticeably below the state average for the last three years. With regard to growth, the median growth percentile for NCA middle school students has been below 50 in reading, most noticeably in math for the last three years indicating that students are, on average growing slower than their peers.

In addition, a third year of sub-three star performance (less than an index score of 50) for the 2019 – 20 school year would trigger permissive charter school contract termination proceedings under NRS 388A.330.

While NCA’s high school graduation rate has shown noticeable improvement in recent years, rising from 45% for the class of 2017 to 69.9% for the class of 2019, this graduation rate is still notably below the SPCSA average of 77.8% and the statewide average of 84.1%. In regard to NCA’s high school, most concerning is that it received an index score under the NSPF of 12.7 (one star) for the 2017 – 18 school year, and an index score of 13.8 (one star) for the 2018 – 19 school year. These star ratings are based on the graduation rate, along with student proficiency on the ACT assessment and college and career readiness indicators, among other factors. In the last two years, NCA student proficiency on the ACT assessment has been noticeably lower than both the SPCSA and statewide averages. In addition, student participation and completion of college and career indicators at NCA has been below 15% in each of the three measures. In the event that NCA’s high school receives a third year of a one star rating for the 2019 – 20 school year, NCA’s high school will face mandatory charter school contract termination under NRS 388A.300<sup>1</sup>. In order for NCA’s high school to achieve a two star rating and avoid mandatory charter school contract termination under NRS 388A.300, NCA’s high school must achieve an index score under the NSPF of at least 27<sup>2</sup>.

In addition to the recent poor performance at the elementary, middle and high school levels outlined above, this is not the first time that the performance of the school has been a concern. Over the 13-year history of the school, numerous notices have been issued by the SPCSA due to poor academic performance. In the last four years, Nevada Connections Academy has twice developed and submitted school improvement plans to the SPCSA (once in regard to NCA’s high school and most recently in regard to NCA’s elementary school). Unfortunately, NCA continues to perform below the adequate (three star) level as defined by the Nevada Department of Education’s Nevada School Performance Framework.

Over the past six months, NCA has provided the SPCSA with substantial information and data. This includes information provided in NCA’s Response to the Renewal Report, NCA’s Application for Renewal, NCA’s presentations to the SPCSA board on October 4, 2019 and December 13, 2019, and two letters dated January 10, 2019 providing additional information in response to questions that arose during the December 13, 2019 SPCSA board meeting. These documents and presentations outline a range of data and information related to Nevada Connections Academy, including but not limited to:

- Ongoing efforts to support NCA students with social emotional development and the comparatively higher results on the Nevada School Climate/Social Emotional Learning Survey
- The significantly higher transiency rate of NCA students compared to the statewide average
- Data indicating that students who are enrolled at NCA for multiple years have higher proficiency and growth than students enrolled for shorter periods of time.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It is my understanding that NCA’s elementary school triggering the mandatory charter school contract termination provisions for the 2018-2019 school year is the primary reason NCA elected not to seek renewal of its elementary school.

<sup>2</sup> An index score of 27 or greater but less than 50 would still mean that NCA’s high school would qualify for permissive charter school contract termination under NRS 388A.330.

<sup>3</sup> Based on data provided in the letter from Matthew Wicks on January 10, 2020, despite higher proficiency rates for students enrolled for multiple years, proficiency rates for these students still appear to be lower than state averages.

- Anecdotes regarding the unique circumstances of individual NCA students

While the data and information represent important considerations regarding Nevada Connections Academy, ultimately, they do not change or mitigate concerns regarding repeated poor performance and previous failures to make substantial school-wide improvements.

Please note that pursuant to NAC 388A.285(7), NCA is entitled to submit a response to my recommendation for consideration by the SPCSA Board. NAC 388A.285(7) contemplates that any response be submitted to the SPCSA within seven calendar days of this notice, or, in the event that this notice is not provided to NCA within seven calendar days prior to any consideration of the SPCSA Board, that NCA may request that the SPCSA Board postpone consideration of the SPCSA Board's consideration of NCA's renewal application. Since I am providing you with this notice on January 17, 2020, any response submitted by NCA must be received by January 27, 2020. You can simply submit any response to my email address, at [rebecca.feiden@spcsa.nv.gov](mailto:rebecca.feiden@spcsa.nv.gov). NCA's response, and any and all correspondence and documents that NCA has provided to the SPCSA as part of NCA's renewal application, will be provided to the SPCSA Board for its consideration

I am hopeful that you can understand that I am unable to recommend NCA's charter school contract application for renewal due to the reasons outlined above. Please know that I do not take this recommendation lightly. Any decision by the SPCSA to not renew a charter school contract impacts the SPCSA, local school districts, and, most importantly, Nevada students. The gravity of this decision, the impact on students, and the 13-year history that Nevada Connections Academy has serving Nevada students are why I engaged on multiple occasions with you and other representatives of NCA over the last ten months.

As always, please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Rebecca Feiden

Executive Director, State Public Charter School Authority

cc: Melissa Mackedon, Chair, State Public Charter School Authority  
Randy Kirner, Vice Chair, State Public Charter School Authority  
Sheila Moulton, Member, State Public Charter School Authority  
Sami Randolph, Member, State Public Charter School Authority  
Mallory Cyr, Member, State Public Charter School Authority  
Don Soifer, Member, State Public Charter School Authority  
Tonia Holmes-Sutton, Member, State Public Charter School Authority  
(via electronic mail)