

1
2 **BEFORE THE STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY**
3 **STATE OF NEVADA**

4 In Re:

5 Nevada Connections Academy Notice of
6 Closure or Possible Board Reconstitution
7

8 **DECLARATION OF GINA HAMES**

9 I, Gina Hames, hereby declare under penalty of perjury as follows:

10 1. I am a Nevada Connections Academy (“NCA”) employee. I make this
11 declaration in support of NCA relative to closure proceedings before the State Public Charter
12 School Authority held on May 25, 26, and 27, 2017, and continued to an unspecified date in
13 2017.
14

15 2. The matters set forth in this declaration are based on my own personal knowledge.
16 If called upon to testify, I am competent to testify to the matters set forth herein.
17

18 3. I have been employed with NCA for the past five years, and I currently serve as
19 NCA’s high school success coach and intervention manager, and I run the Grad Point credit
20 recovery program. My teaching credential is in English Literature and I have focused on at-risk
21 students throughout my career.

22 4. Grad Point is an award-winning national program that was conceptualized and
23 created by Pearson Education. The program allows students to quickly recover credits in core
24 required courses. To be eligible, the student must have completed the full standard course, but
25 not achieved a passing grade. The program is prescriptive, which means courses are set up in a
26 sequential flow of study plans/modules in a set order. Each objective is addressed and must be
27
28

1 passed for the student to earn the credit. NCA launched the program during the 2015/2016
2 school year, and implemented it fully this school year.

3 5. As part of the Grad Point program, I have a case-load of about 100 students, each
4 of whom I speak with every other week in a mandatory biweekly call. I help them resolve
5 challenges, both with school work and with time management and organization, and keep them
6 engaged in school. To achieve a successful contact, I must speak with the student on the phone,
7 or in my LL room. I also text and email students often. While I sometimes meet the students
8 face-to-face at state testing and/or field trips, (typically later in the year) the relationship that
9 grows with each phone call is one without any judgement about appearances since it is over the
10 phone. I get to know a student without any preconceived ideas that might arise from clothing,
11 hair, tattoos, etc., which unique and beneficial about the platform NCA provides.

12
13 6. Through my experience running the program, I am aware that NCA serves a
14 severely credit-deficient population that other schools choose not to serve. Almost every student
15 I work with arrived at NCA in their 2nd, 3rd or 4th year severely lacking the typical number of
16 credits they should have. We place them in grades based on credits, not years in school, to help
17 them understand the length of their path to graduation. In the majority of cases, the students in
18 our Grad Point program were told or urged by their brick and mortar schools to enroll in NCA
19 because they were credit-deficient and would not graduate on time. These students were not
20 making progress and were not getting adequate help from their teachers, or were being bullied,
21 or were facing mental health issues, or were simply unable to attend school during the day due to
22 having a job, or other family obligation. Other students had missed too much school due to
23 severe illness, and still others faced becoming a parent while still in school to the detriment of
24 their ability to accumulate credits at the typical rate. I have students with brain tumors, students
25 facing repeated surgeries, students who moved and could not complete semesters, and students
26
27
28

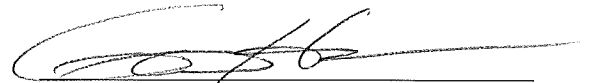
1 who are caring for ill parents. One student this year had a premature baby; he spent a lot of time
2 in the ICU with his baby, worked a full time job, and still earned every credit he was enrolled in
3 here at NCA because he could complete school at night. Another student became homeless and
4 was unable to attend a zoned school due to moving around trying to find a stable place to live. I
5 have a 5th year student who will graduate after spending many months in a hospital for her health
6 issues. A common term among these students is “counseled out”—meaning that the schools they
7 attended prior to NCA advised the students to try online school and essentially counseled them
8 out of the traditional school setting after those students had spent 3 years and sometimes even
9 part of their 4th year at their zoned high school, all the while falling behind in credits. Therefore,
10 many Nevada schools are actively pushing credit-deficient students toward NCA when the
11 schools discover that those students will not graduate on-cohort.
12

13
14 7. Grad Point has proven to be a successful program to assist with the challenges
15 that receiving so many credit-deficient students from brick-and-mortar schools presents for
16 NCA, and the success up to this point demonstrates one of NCA’s attempts to better its
17 graduation rate statistic. In an attempt to get these students back on track, or help them reach a
18 place where they only needing a 5th year to complete their education, this program allows credit-
19 deficient students to recover credits in a quick and effective way. We have facilitated the
20 recovery of credits and the ability for students to get back to an on-track graduation. Our course
21 completion has increased, and I expect our graduation rate will rise in good part due to Grad
22 Point. It has also encouraged those students who have despaired of being able to graduate at all,
23 and they are making progress now even if it will take them a 5th year to achieve their diploma.
24

25 8. In continuing to implement the Grad Point program and see its positive effects,
26 we will continue to tweak our approach to achieve our goal of helping students get back on track
27 after being failed by their zoned schools. We are continually meeting as a group (everyone in the
28

1 ES2 academy—our-school-within-a-school for the at-risk students—and all the teachers of Grad
2 Point plus our administrators) to discuss ways to better support the students' success in the
3 program. We have experimented with length of time to complete the course, tutoring support,
4 Live Lesson support, and the biweekly calls. We discuss students both as a group and
5 individually to help them see success toward recovering credits and earning a diploma.
6

7 I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of Nevada that the
8 foregoing is true and corrected and was executed this 9 day of June, 2017, in Reno,
9 Nevada.

10
11 
12 GINA HAMES
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28