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BEFORE THE STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY
STATE OF NEVADA

In Re:
Nevada Connections Academy Notice of
Closure or Possible Board Reconstitution

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DECLARATION OF MATTHEW WICKS

11 I, Matthew Wicks, hereby declare under penalty of perjury as follows:

12 1. I am currently Vice President Policy and Data Analysis for Connections
13 Education LLC (“CE”). I make this declaration in support of Nevada Connections Academy
14 (“NCA”) relative to closure proceedings before the State Public Charter School Authority
15 (“SPCSA”) held on May 25, 26, and 27, 2017, and continued to an unspecified date in 2017.

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

18 3. I have been involved with K-12 online learning for 18 years. Prior to my current
19 position with CE, I served as Chief Operating Officer for the International Association for K-12
20 Online Learning (“iNACOL”). Before that, I operated my own online learning consulting
21 practice, and was one of the co-founders of the Illinois Virtual High School and served as
22 Director for five years. Prior to my work in online learning, I served as Chief Information
23 Officer at the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy. I also worked for Fermi National
24 Accelerator Laboratory and AT&T. I have a Bachelor of Science in Computer Science from
25 Purdue University and a Master of Science in Computer Science from Northwestern University.
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1 4. Due to my role as Vice President Policy and Data Analysis for CE, I do a variety
2 of policy analysis across the many states where CE supports schools, as well as analyze different
3 performance data from schools to identify information not at the surface level of the data.
4 Pursuant to this responsibility, I have conducted an analysis of NCA's 2016 graduation rate,
5 student population composition, and the specific transience of that student population.
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7 5. As part of my role as Vice President Policy and Data Analysis for CE, I have
8 gained knowledge of Nevada law relative to criteria necessary for calculating graduation rates in
9 Nevada, in terms of which students are included or excluded in the calculation.

10 6. I testified at the May hearing before the SPCSA, and I hereby reaffirm and
11 supplement my testimony during that hearing, in an attempt to respond to and clarify certain
12 SPCSA board members' questions as voiced during the hearing.

13 7. In response to Member Snow's request for the reasons behind the NCA's
14 "impressive test results" as contrasted by its grad rate, I assert the following:
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- 16 • The four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate is a flawed measure of a
17 school with a highly mobile population's performance because it is
18 intended to measure a school's interaction with a student over a four-year
19 time period. In contrast, state assessments can be viewed as measure of a
20 school's interaction with a student over one school year.
- 21 • While there are some issues with a high mobility school's state assessment
22 results due to the high percentage of first year students and the short term
23 negative achievement impact when students change schools, state
24 assessment results are a more valid measure of a school like NCA's (with
25 a high mobility rate and large credit-deficient population) performance
26 than the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate because the
27 measurement is over a period of time the students are likely to be enrolled
28 in the school.
- While NCA's strong test results in grades 3-8 don't have an effect on the
four-year grad rate due to the length of time before those students are
scheduled to graduate, NCA's test results in grades 3-8 show solid
academic instruction at those grade levels.

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- This is also true to some extent with the high school assessments because the students taking the exams are not high school seniors and thus there is a gap in time before these students' expected graduation, when the school's graduation rate is measured and negative effects are assessed.
- Further, the students who bring down the school's graduation rate are not part of the group of students who took the state assessments for the most part. For example, the clear majority of students took the End of Course (EOC) exams in ELA I and Math I in 9th Grade and the EOC exams in ELA II and Math II in 10th Grade. The data I presented in my testimony, that was validated by a third party, showed:
 - 84% of credit deficient 2016 non-graduates arrived at NCA in their 11th or 12th grade year (163 students), and
 - 81.4% of credit deficient 2015 non-graduates arrived at NCA in their 11th or 12th grade year (127 students).
- The students having the greatest negative effect on NCA's grad rate are students who took the state assessments when they were enrolled at other schools.
- This illustrates the nature of the four-year graduation rate measurement designed to measure a school's impact on students over a four-year time period and the nature of state assessments, one year measurements of a school's impact on students during a time when those students taking the assessments are actually enrolled at that school.
- In the analysis of data I presented at the hearing, I testified that the average length of student enrollment at NCA is 1.5 years. This is due to a number of reasons, for instance NCA receiving a student late in their high school career (for example, in their 4th or 5th year) or students transferring, withdrawing, or graduating.
- In conclusion, a school's performance on state assessment paints a one-year picture of a school's performance based on a time those students taking the assessment are enrolled at the school. It is a more accurate measure of a school's performance than the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate when students are at the school less than four years.

8. In response to Member Guinasso's question regarding whether NCA had the capacity to serve students at the high school level, I assert the following:

- 1 • As I testified at the hearing, the 2016 graduation rate for students enrolled
2 at NCA for all four years of high school is 87.5%. The 2015 graduation
3 rate for students enrolled at NCA for all four years of high school is
4 83.8%. These numbers demonstrate NCA is clearly serving students well.
- 5 • When one looks at students enrolling credit-deficient, the definition of
6 what it means to “serve students well” needs to be reframed. Limiting it
7 to a four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate over 60% is not realistic.
8 Graduating in four years for students who enroll credit-deficient by one
9 semester or more should not be a measure of whether a school is
10 successfully serving those students.
- 11 • Even though NCA does not meet the definition of an alternative school, it
12 is logical to use some of the performance metrics for an alternative school
13 to assess a school’s performance in serving students who would qualify
14 for enrollment in an alternative school.
- 15 • NCA receives students arriving in their 5th year of high school. This is, in
16 itself, an indication that NCA is serving those students. These are students
17 who have limited options to pursue a high school diploma.
- 18 • There are indications students have been and are being pushed out by their
19 traditional public school and encouraged to enroll at NCA. This has the
20 effect of increasing the graduation rate of those students’ former schools.

21 The ESSA partial attendance provision was designed so schools which had the greatest contact
22 with a student would be held accountable for that student’s on-time graduation. This is an
23 indication that the federal government has recognized one of the problems with the previous
24 four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate definition.

25 9. In response to Member Mackedon’s statement that she believes the four-year
26 adjusted cohort graduation rate shows NCA is not serving its students, thus the school should
27 institute a self-imposed cap, I assert the following:

- 28 • I fundamentally disagree with Member Mackedon’s assertion that NCA is
not serving its students. Again, the four-year adjusted cohort graduation
rate is not an accurate measure of school performance for schools with a
highly mobile or credit deficient population. NCA has both a highly
mobile population of students, with the average length of student

1 enrollment at 1.5 years, and a large portion of credit-deficient students,
2 with one out of every two students enrolling credit deficient.

- 3 • Further, even if one were to accept Member Mackedon’s conclusion that
4 the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate demonstrated how well a
5 school with a highly mobile population and large portion of credit-
6 deficient students was serving its students, instituting an enrollment cap
7 will not necessarily change the school’s four-year adjusted cohort
8 graduation rate, as the cap doesn’t have the ability to impact the
9 proportion of credit deficient students that will enroll.
- 10 • The only way to significantly change NCA’s graduation rate is to change
11 the type of students who are enrolling. I am not suggesting NCA stop
12 accepting credit-deficient students; the data shows NCA is able to serve
13 them (based on the number of students who persist in their education to a
14 5th and 6th year, the number of students who go on to earn a GED
15 certificate, the number of students who transfer to an adult education
16 program, etc.) and by enrolling in NCA it is an opportunity for those
17 students to re-engage.
- 18 • The Authority’s seemingly narrow view that only a 60% graduation rate
19 indicates a school is adequately serving its students is an incentive for
20 schools to stop accepting credit deficient students or, in other words, for
21 schools to stop serving those students with the greatest need. I find this
22 morally reprehensible in addition to promoting terrible public policy.
- 23 • It is my opinion that the creation of an alternative school to serve current
24 NCA students who qualify would separate students distinguishing them
25 based on their different needs, and allow concentration and focus on the
26 unique needs of those students enrolled in the alternative school to serve
27 them as best a school can.
- 28 • I firmly maintain the importance of not viewing a low graduation rate as a
conclusion a school is not serving its students well. A school should be
viewed holistically, and through the appropriate lens, to make the
determination whether a school is performing well and serving its unique
population of students well.

10. In response to Member Gardner’s request for information on the reasons given by
NCA’s transfers out and withdrawal students in the 2016 cohort, I prepared an analysis of the
data available. This data includes:

1 **Non-graduates (263) – reason for being classified as non-graduate**

2 Enrolled until end of 12th grade without graduating: 30.0%

3 Entered GED/HSE program: 25.5%

4 Withdrawn due to lack of attendance: 22.8%

5 Entered adult education program: 8.4%

7 Dropout – no reason available: 7.6%

8 Dropout – did not re-enroll after completing school year: 4.2%

9 Received adjusted diploma: 1.1%

10 Dropout – juvenile detention: 0.4%

11 **Transfer-out students (475) – Destination after leaving NCA**

12 Transfer to another NV public school: 66.7%

14 Moved out-of-state: 15.2%

15 Transfer to home school: 5.3%

16 Transfer to district charter school: 4.6%

17 Transfer to Charter Authority charter school: 4.4%

18 Transfer to private school: 2.7%

19 Moved out of country: 0.6%

21 Incarceration: 0.2%

22 Deceased: 0.2%

23 **Transfer-out Students – Reasons* for withdrawal**

24 Mismatch – family schedule: 16.5%

25 Life change / moving: 16.3%

26 Mismatch academic: 13.0%

27 Enrolled in different school, reason not known: 12.3%

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1 Program academically too difficult: 9.2%
2 Enrolled in different school, socialization: 8.3%
3 Enrolled in different school, not socialization: 5.9%
4 Transition too difficult: 4.7%
5 Other: 13.7%

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7 *Reasons are provided by voluntary family exit survey or entered by school staff. Reasons were
8 available for 423 or 89% of transfer-out students
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10 11. Finally, in response to multiple comments made by the Authority members that I
11 conduct additional analysis related to credit-deficiency using the method that is used by the state
12 of Nevada related to the percentage of credit-deficient students at each grade level, I have
13 scheduled a meeting with Nevada Department of Education employees as outlined in NCA's
14 motion for an extension of time as submitted to the Authority on June 12, 2017, to obtain
15 information necessary to the requested analysis. Once I obtain this information, I plan to
16 perform the requested analysis for submission to the Authority by Friday, June 16th.
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I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of Nevada that the
foregoing is true and corrected and was executed this 10th day of June, 2017, in Aurora,
Illinois.



MATTHEW WICKS