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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

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8 **DECLARATION OF DIANNE KARP**

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

16 3. I have been with NCA as the Senior Special Education Manager since August
17 2007. I have a master’s degree in education with a special education focus. I also have a
18 bachelor’s degree with a school psychology focus. I am licensed as a Special Ed Generalist
19 teacher, school psychologist, general education high school psychology teacher, and alternative
20 education teacher. I obtained my initial education license in 1995. I am previous licensed as a
21 substance abuse counselor in Nevada, I and worked in a 28-day program for several years. I also
22 previously worked for several years for the Crisis Center in Reno as a Youth Outreach
23 Coordinator (prevention of teen suicide program) and as a Rape Crisis intervention counselor. I
24 worked as a mental health tech on the adolescent and children’s units for what is now Truckee
25 Meadows Hospital for five years.

1 4. As Senior Special Education Manager, my first contact with families occurs prior
2 to enrollment, as I review all enrolling students' special education documents, input information
3 into the system and contact families to discuss our program, the child's needs, and what to expect
4 after they are enrolled. After enrollment, I support families and staff by participating in IEP
5 meetings, and both reaching out to struggling families and responding to parent concerns about
6 their students. When a student on an IEP is struggling, the special education teacher is the first
7 line of support. However, if that individual is unable to engage the student and family to
8 increase support/success, we begin by holding a revision IEP meeting and review the current
9 supports. We add in any further supports the child may need and hold a discussion with the
10 parent and, hopefully, the student as well. We review the supports already in place and
11 determine if the student is taking advantage of them. For example, we discern whether the
12 student is attending general education LiveLessons (where special education teacher provides
13 push in support) and Academic Support LiveLessons (where special education teachers provide
14 more targeted support). We review the level of direct phone communication which is or is not
15 occurring and also review the amount of webmails between the family and both the general
16 education and special education teachers. If the family/student is not engaged in LiveLessons or
17 direct contacts, we encourage the student to participate fully so that we may provide the support
18 in their IEP. If the student is not completing lessons, we discuss the reasons why this is
19 occurring and problem solve with the family so that the student is more likely to increase lessons
20 completion. We then set up a date to meet again and review progress on IEP supports, goals, and
21 level of engagement. This is usually one or two weeks after the initial meeting

22 5. As part of my responsibilities reviewing special education documents for all
23 enrolling students, I have learned that about half of our students are learning disabled. The other
24 half is equally made up of students with autism and other health impairments. A very small
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1 number of students come to us with one of the other eligibility categories – developmental delays
2 (Kindergarten only), visually impaired, hearing impaired, traumatic brain injury, and emotionally
3 disturbed. Our students with ADHD (OHI) have trouble completing work and staying focused in
4 a regular classroom setting. Other students who are OHI have medical conditions which make it
5 difficult or impossible to attend school all day. In their home district, they would be placed on
6 “Home” and “Hospital” which is, academically, not really ‘being in school’. With us, due to our
7 flexibility, they can complete a full day’s course load. Our students with autism both struggle
8 with the limited time in each subject class and also with the chaotic physical school setting –
9 which, even in the best-run school building, can be overwhelming for a student with autism due
10 to environmental overload. Many of our emotionally disturbed students struggle with day to day
11 interactions with peers or have social anxiety or some other issue which makes being in a regular
12 school building difficult for them and results in poor attendance (and thus not earning credits) or
13 in poor performance in the classroom (again not earning credits).

16 6. NCA offers students struggling in the traditional classroom setting with a rigorous
17 program aligned to the NV Common core standards. Our special education students are being
18 successful in that same general education, grade-level setting even though many of them were in
19 resource or self-contained settings prior to enrolling with NCA. We provide students with in-
20 home supports to assist them with accessing the curriculum such as text to speech and speech to
21 text software to support reading and writing disabilities along with the direct support from a
22 special education teacher.

24 7. I have lost track of the number of special education students who arrive at NCA
25 credit-deficient. Family after family tells me the same story, and often names the same schools:
26 their child struggled to keep up with the limited time a teacher had to support them in the
27 classroom and the social issues of which we are all aware, and the child was refused admission to
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1 other virtual charter schools and even to their home district’s virtual program. I have spoken to
2 high school counselors from other schools while they were trying to get a child enrolled with us.
3 I have asked why, if a virtual setting is so perfect for this child, are they not enrolling him/her in
4 tier own virtual high school program. In response, I have been told: “it is an academy. Since the
5 child is credit deficient/on an IEP/etc, he/she is not eligible to attend there.” And yet, these
6 students enroll with NCA, get caught up and graduate – often with a standard diploma.
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8 8. A parent with two sons in NCA wrote to me recently. One son earned 5 credits
9 this year, whereas last year, at a different school, he had earned none. The second son enrolled
10 after the first son was already here. She wants both boys to be with the same special education
11 teacher next year. Does the 17-year-old with 2 credits graduate within four years as the
12 Authority expects of them? Of course not. But if that individual completes high school at age
13 20, I refuse to consider him or her a drop out. NCA provided a means whereby a child who was
14 going to be a burden on society has the skills to be a contributing member of that same society.
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16 9. I support efforts to reconsider the definition of graduation rate relative to these
17 proceedings. Under a Nevada statute, a child who attained a Certificate of Completion
18 (completed 22.5 credits but did not pass one or more exit exams) is not a drop out, but that
19 individual did not graduate from high school and cannot attend college. The student who
20 attained an adjusted diploma DID graduate from high school and can attend college --- but is
21 considered a drop out. Clearly, the data gathered and used for determining graduation rates does
22 not reflect reality. I have no difficulty with reporting a “four-year cohort rate” if it is clearly
23 labeled as such, so long as we ALSO report the “5th year plus” graduation cohort rate. If we do
24 not, we encourage districts such as Clark and Washoe to continue to shove their struggling
25 students off on other programs so that their four year cohort rate improves – and everyone else’s
26 plummets.
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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 9th day of June, 2017, in 2017,
Nevada.



DIANNE KARP