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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 MIRANDA SHULTS**

9 I, Miranda Shults, 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.
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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.
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18 3. I am currently the Reporting Coordinator at NCA. Prior to this roll, I served as the
19 Registrar and Enrollment Specialist, and, before that, an Administrative Assistant. In total, I
20 have worked at NCA for eight years. While working for NCA I earned my bachelor’s degree in
21 Business Management. As Enrollment Specialist, I learned about the enrollment requirements for
22 our school and Nevada, contacting applicants, and assisting people through the enrollment
23 process. While I am no longer an Enrollment Specialist, I am still part of the team involved in
24 reviewing the enrollment process to ensure state reporting needs are met, and I am a contact
25 when issues arise for a family during the enrollment process. After assisting with transcript entry,
26 I was promoted to Registrar and handled all of the data entry for high school student transcripts
27 and the transfer of records, among other tasks. This position required an understanding of
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1 transcripts in general in order to interpret the many different formats that appear from other
2 schools and states, and a specific understanding of school and state requirements for graduation.
3 In 2011, I was promoted to Reporting Coordinator, where I took on the role of handling ARC
4 reports, Graduation reports, State Testing reports, all data entry into PowerSchool (replaced with
5 Infinite Campus), overseeing Infinite Campus data entry, and the many other reports that are
6 required of schools in Nevada. While my role may consist of simply uploading data prepared by
7 others for reports related to Title programs, Billing, and certain other areas, I have a basic to
8 advanced level of involvement and knowledge of most reports that are required.
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10 4. I have gained knowledge about the types of students NCA enrolls in my previous
11 roles as Enrollment Specialist, and Registrar, and while reviewing student data for various
12 reporting reasons. While an Enrollment Specialist, I would often speak with families wishing to
13 know what our school could do to help their student get back on track. As Registrar I was able to
14 see each student's transcript and catch certain patterns, such as certain districts advancing
15 students to higher level courses when students failed, instead of having them retake the course,
16 and schedules that consisted of more than 6 credits per year, where students were overloaded
17 with electives, and often the courses that were failed were core courses.
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19 5. Due to my roles as Enrollment Specialist, Registrar, being in charge of enrollment
20 and withdrawal data in Infinite Campus, and as the person who reviews and validates the 4-year
21 and 5-year cohort data every year, I am in a unique position to understand what is behind those
22 graduation rates that we report. Despite our efforts in the enrollment process to help parents
23 understand what our program is, what is required of students when enrolled, we still enroll
24 families that later decide NCA is not for them, for a variety of reasons, including the following:
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- 26 • Families find that NCA is not flexible enough, our program is too demanding,
27 or it's not challenging enough;
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- There are parents who enroll their student because they need to try something different to try and get their student to go to school, but despite the fact that the student wouldn't attend their last school, they expect the student will do it now in a virtual environment, then leave the student to do whatever they want with no guidance whatsoever;
- A family may leave because their student wants more social experience, but they loved the program;
- There are families who refer to us as home school, and then tell the next school they were home schooled;
- There are families that use us as a revolving door for their child's education, repeatedly transferring their student back and forth between schools;
- Some families try us out for just a few days to see if online education will work them;
- There are families who don't understand that, when they leave one school to attend another, they must contact the first school to withdraw their child; and
- Varying degrees of effort or lack thereof that affect a student's ability to keep up with education: in some cases the parent cares, but the student doesn't, or neither of them cares, or both parent and student care but for whatever reason the student struggles, maybe due to pregnancy, family loss, or special needs.

6. Whatever reason a student comes to us, our main goal is to educate and to help them progress. In the event that a student decides to leave NCA, our main goal becomes to obtain whatever information we can to satisfy the state's requirement to not count them as a non-graduate, and in some cases our attempts are futile and entirely dependent on the students and

1 families who have left and their willingness to follow up with us. Examples of these difficulties
2 that affect reporting have included the following, based on my experience:

- 3 • We are faced with families who move out of state that don't know what
4 school they'll go to, and we lose all contact with them, or our attempts to get
5 proof of enrollment from that next school go unanswered;
- 6 • Parents respond to our phone and email attempts claiming that the student is
7 18, so they don't know and they don't care where they are and whether they
8 are receiving an education;
- 9 • Students have earned or will attempt an HSE;
- 10 • A parent confirms that the student graduated in another state, but we were
11 unable to contact the school they provided and are unable get a hold of the
12 parent again, so this student had to be reported as a non-graduate;
- 13 • We have experienced data issues, such as students who went to another public
14 school in Nevada, but for whatever reason their accounts did not get linked in
15 Bighorn, or they went to a private school, so that information is not available;
16 and
17 • Over and over we try to find students that were enrolled with us for just 10
18 days as long as three or four years ago, and students who disappeared two
19 months before they were expected to graduate.

20 These difficulties in obtaining the data we need to satisfy state reporting requirements—
21 unanswered phone calls, apathetic parents, transient lifestyles—are intrinsically tied to the
22 instability in the lives of so many NCA students. NCA's willingness to take all students
23 regardless of their credit deficiencies or unfortunate home circumstances means that, when these
24 already high-risk students transfer or leave, as some of them do, the school is also at high risk of
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1 losing contact with the students and families amidst the chaotic circumstances that might exist at
2 home and parents who are not involved enough to notify their child's former school of the
3 child's whereabouts. We make every effort within our means to track down our students who
4 leave: we call, email, fax, search social media, and have even hired a private investigator to track
5 down students who we can no longer affect, but who affect us.
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7 7. While I don't know all the details of the many steps our teachers go through to
8 support our high school students through graduation, our job, our goal, our mission is to teach, to
9 help students progress at some level, so we take these students in who excel, or are just your
10 average student, or they get turned away and have nowhere to go, those who we know are likely
11 to increase our denominator, but not our numerator. This is what is behind those numbers, this is
12 what we do, and those who leave NCA represent only a portion of the students we serve.
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14 I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of Nevada that the
15 foregoing is true and corrected and was executed this 9 day of June, 2017, in Reno,
16 Nevada.

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19 MIRANDA SHULTS
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