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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 SHANNON S. PIERCE**

9 I, Shannon S. Pierce, hereby declare under penalty of perjury as follows:

10 1. The matters set forth in this declaration are based on my own personal knowledge.

11 If called upon to testify, I am competent to testify to the matters set forth herein.
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13 2. I am the parent of an elementary school student with Nevada Connections
14 Academy ("NCA"). I make this declaration in support of NCA relative to closure proceedings
15 before the State Public Charter School Authority held on May 25, 26, and 27, 2017, and
16 continued to an unspecified date in 2017.

17 3. My son has attended NCA since early 2017, and my husband and I are in the
18 process of registering my daughter so that she can also attend NCA in the 2017-2018 school
19 year. Both of our children will be in elementary school-level grades.
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21 4. Previously, my son attended Excel Christian School in Sparks, Nevada. We
22 decided to switch to NCA because we believed our son would benefit from a school environment
23 that provided greater flexibility. In addition, at my son's prior school, he was beginning to fail
24 for reasons unrelated to his academic ability. The school environment was far from positive,
25 with teachers and administrators creating pressures that were causing my son to fail not because
26 he could not understand the material, but because the pressure of performing in a traditional
27 classroom environment (especially an environment run by teachers and administrators who did
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1 not seem to understand my son's particular needs) was causing him to psyche himself out and
2 underperform. At the same time, I was concerned that learning at NCA would be challenging for
3 our family, in that my son might have trouble focusing on his tasks and motivating himself to
4 stay on top of his classwork. I also worried that my son would not have any meaningful student-
5 teacher interaction. My concerns began falling away as soon as I first interacted with my son's
6 teacher. Before speaking with my son, the teacher called me to learn about my son's interests.
7 Upon learning that he is a Star Wars fanatic, the teacher then held a lengthy call with my son
8 where they talked about little other than Star Wars. This went a long way, as some of my son's
9 prior teachers had traumatized him to the point that he didn't want to interact with teachers or
10 learn anything from them. By making the choice to devote the first interaction to discussing Star
11 Wars with my son, the teacher gained instant credibility in my son's eyes, which carried over
12 into the learning experience.

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15 5. My family and I have regular interaction with my son's teacher. My son's teacher
16 holds bi-weekly calls with my son, both to gauge his progress and to identify issues that may be
17 interfering with his learning. My son's teacher is also available by email or phone if we need to
18 contact her outside of our normally scheduled calls. She has always timely responded to the
19 emails I have sent her. I have also communicated with the NCA staff on several occasions about
20 issues such as registration and IT issues. The NCA staff has always been professional and
21 helpful.

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23 6. In addition to personalized interaction with teachers, I was pleasantly surprised to
24 learn how user-friendly NCA's curriculum and systems are. NCA has time-management
25 systems in place to enable my son to stay on top of his curriculum while also gaining the
26 flexibility he needs. In other words, my son can now get his classwork done on his schedule, but
27 NCA's software, regular teacher interactions, and other systems ensure that he stays on track to
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1 succeed. By enabling my son to have greater flexibility while also ensuring that he stays on
2 track to learn what he needs to learn, NCA has enabled my son to rebuild his self-confidence and
3 succeed. In fact, whereas my son was receiving low marks toward the end of his time at his last
4 school (due to his struggles in that environment, not due to a lack of comprehension), he is
5 ending this year with all A's. His grades now reflect how incredibly smart he is. And while my
6 son probably wouldn't admit it, I believe he is starting to enjoy learning again. In his spare time,
7 he now picks up books to read. He never did that at his prior school.

9 7. Regarding the quality of academics at NCA, I was initially worried that since we
10 were transitioning from a private school to an online public school, the curriculum may not have
11 been advanced enough for my son. I was wrong. Immediately upon starting at NCA, my son
12 was expected to perform complex language arts and math assignments that far surpassed what he
13 was learning at his prior school. He was also required to learn handwriting (cursive), which his
14 prior school had not begun to teach him. Beyond the subject matter being taught, however, I was
15 impressed with the manner in which students are expected to prepare their work. At my son's
16 prior school, when he was given a writing assignment, he was given one opportunity to write
17 down whatever he was going to write, and then he was done. At NCA, my son has learned how
18 to outline a writing assignment, prepare a first draft, and then polish that draft. While my son
19 regularly complains about being required to complete assignments this way (since it requires
20 much more effort on his part), this process is so good for him in that it prepares him for life after
21 school. In my career as a trial attorney, I am constantly preparing motions and other documents
22 to be submitted to the courts. The process I follow is the same that NCA is teaching: I outline
23 (either in my head or on paper) what I want to convey to the courts, then I write a draft, then I
24 polish that draft until it is up to my (and my clients') standards. It is comforting to know that
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1 NCA is teaching this same system to my son, so that he can be successful in whatever career he
2 ends up choosing.

3 8. As the parent of an NCA student, I have the opportunity to be more involved in
4 my son's education, which can also involve more work for me at times. My husband and I do
5 not have the luxury of sending our kids to someone else for 6 hours per day. My husband is the
6 primary learning coach for my son (since I work full time), and I regularly see him sitting with
7 his laptop in the evenings planning out the next day so that the learning day will proceed more
8 smoothly. I have also served as a learning coach for my son and have been pleasantly surprised
9 by how user-friendly each lesson is. I appreciate that the Connections internet platform gives us,
10 for each lesson, both a student page and a learning coach page. The learning coach page
11 contains helpful suggestions for how to respond to certain questions and otherwise assess
12 whether my son is learning the material at issue in that particular lesson.
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15 9. I hope for the chance to continue to educate my son at NCA because it works for
16 my son's learning style and has provided him with the environment necessary to excel in school,
17 and even to enjoy learning. Our satisfaction with the school is evident in our decision to register
18 our daughter with NCA for the upcoming year.

19 I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of Nevada that the
20 foregoing is true and corrected and was executed this 8th day of June, 2017, in Reno, Nevada.
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24 SHANNON S. PIERCE
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