

NCA's Amendment to Proposed Cure for Alleged Deficiency in Four Year Cohort Graduation Rate

In accordance with the permission of the Authority during the August 23, 2017, hearing, NCA submits the following additional proposal to cure the alleged deficiency in the high school's four year adjusted cohort graduation rate.

1. Judicial and Agency Review Waiver - Shall be included in Settlement Stipulation as provided in NCA's proposed cure submitted August 23, 2017

2. Enrollment Cap & Immediate Enrollment Freeze for 11th & 12th Grade Cohorts -Have been incorporated into Charter Contract agreed upon by the Authority and NCA

- NCA's high school enrollment as of 11/2/17 was 1,813 students
- - NCA's high school program will not grow beyond 1500 and enrollment will immediately stop in the 12th and 11th grade cohorts. This is a decrease of 300 students from current levels. This will still accommodate returning students and no currently enrolled NCA students shall be withdrawn solely based on this cap.
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3. Annual Reporting, Benchmarks & Consequences

The following operational provisions shall not be rigidly required if the school identifies that certain proposed changes to operations are not having the desired effect of helping increase the graduation rate and, even if completed, will not be considered to satisfy the school's obligation to increase the graduation rate if the graduation rate does not increase. The school shall complete the promised reporting to both the NCA board and the Authority board on a quarterly basis beginning in April 2018. With its first report, NCA will provide a schedule for reporting the remaining quarters for the upcoming year.

The reporting shall include subgroups of students similar to those presented by NCA at the Phase I hearing through the testimony of Matt Wicks and shall include students who are 2 or more years behind in credits in high school as well as students who are not credit deficient. The reports shall focus on how these students are doing once they arrive at NCA.

Both NCA and its academy to serve credit deficient students (currently the Every Student Succeeds Academy, ES2) will submit annual (by January 30 following the close of the preceding Academic Year) reports to the Authority tracking school performance (all data will be validated by a third party mutually agreed upon with the Authority and the school) in the following areas:

- a. for each credit deficient student (using only a Connexus ID not name, to avoid PII issues – and, at the Authority’s request, a state issued ID), the grade student entered the high school, credits deficient at time of enrollment, credits earned during year under review, total credits earned to date, expected graduation date if student remains at that school
- b. school state required test scores compared to state averages; ACT and other college prep scores compared to state average—track improvement of ACT scores based on cohort
- c. students who transfer out (ID's by Connexus ID); where that student transferred to or entered GED or Alternative ED program; NCA students being accepted into college or career tech. school
- d. grad rate - students all 4 years at NCA or Alternative School; of those continuing in school after 4th year, numbers graduated (or %) at conclusion of 5th year (measured as of 9/30 in year following close of 5th academic year); at conclusion of 6th year (measured as of 9/30 in year following close of 6th academic year)

Clear benchmarks for improvement and consequences if those benchmarks are not met: certain Authority board members suggested at the August hearing that the school needed to provide benchmarks and consequences if those benchmarks were not met. The school did so in the propose charter contract included as part of the cure and hereby incorporates those provisions which require a 49% graduation rate for 2017-18 and a 60% graduation rate for 2018-19 Whether NCA achieves or fails to achieve these benchmarks shall be a consideration in any renewal proceeding for NCA in 2020. In addition, if NCA does not achieve the 49% benchmark, enrollment for 11th and 12th grade shall remain frozen for the 2018-19 school year and the maximum enrollment for the high school will decrease to 1,200 students.

4. *Implement Best Practices for Tracking Mobile Students*

NCA's graduation rate is impacted significantly by students who transfer out to pursue other educational programs without informing the school of their plans. As students withdraw, some are coded by default as drop-outs due to lack of data about where those students end up. In conferring with other charter schools in Nevada, some schools have developed best-practices and processes to track these students in ways that yield significant increases in graduation rates. Accordingly, NCA proposes to implement best practices for tracking these students:

- NCA is actively collecting information on these approaches and will continue to implement improvements to how they track and counsel students during the withdrawal process.

- As part of NCA’s ongoing efforts to improve graduation rates, the school will continue to provide training to all staff emphasizing the importance of asking for next school or program information when a caretaker initiates withdrawal. Unfortunately, many of the caretakers still do not provide this information. When a withdrawal is initiated without next school information, an NCA homeroom teacher and an administrative assistant both contact the family through phone calls and emails in order to obtain information. If the information is still not provided, the student's name is placed on a list and a team from Connections Academy works to contact the family and obtain a verification of enrollment.
- Multiple strategies are used to obtain next school information including searching for students in Bighorn and Infinite Campus, searching social media, reaching out to caretakers via personal email addresses, multiple phone call and text attempts, and the use of a people finder tool online. When information is acquired, a Verification of Enrollment form is sent to the new school or program in order to obtain proof of enrollment. If no information is found and the area in which the student moved to or is currently living is known, a Verification of Enrollment form is sent to possible schools the student is zoned for in that area. Attempts to verify enrollment are continued until verification is received, or the end of the validation period for the cohort.

5. Quarterly Metrics

Every quarter in the school year, NCA and the Board will review the Quarterly Metrics to see where the school is doing well and where the school can improve.

The Quarterly Metrics are a useful starting point for school improvement planning and any needed action plans and ensure that school performance is being monitored on a regular basis against key metrics that have been shown to contribute to school and student success. The Figures below show the name of the metric and the Quarters in which that metric will be reported. The School Leader will be given access to ongoing calculations for these metrics in order to "progress monitor" the metrics.

Figure 1. Personalize & Monitor Student Learning

Metric	Quarter(s) Reported
% 1 st Semester “core” courses successfully completed for ELA, Math, Science & SS	Q1 - Reported as % on track for successful completion (earning a passing score) Q2 – Reported as % successfully completing course (earning a passing score)
% 2 nd Semester “core” courses successfully completed for ELA, Math, Science & SS	Q3 - Reported as % on track for successful completion (earning a passing score) Q4 – Reported as % successfully completing course (earning a passing score)
% of High School Students with cohort status “graduate on time”	Q1, Q3
% of High School Students within 1.5 credits of cohort status “graduate on time”	Q2, Q4
% completing Scantron Formative Assessment Pre, Mid and Post Test	Q1 – Pre-test Q3 – Mid-Test Q4 – Post-Test

Metric	Quarter(s) Reported
% of students assigned by RTI Tier	Q1, 2, 3, 4 – Reported as % assigned Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3
% students with Compliant IEPs	Q1, 2, 3, 4 – Reported as average of annual and triennial required reviews.

Figure 2. Ensure High Levels of Student Engagement

Metric	Quarter(s) Reported
% on-time Welcome Calls	Q1, 2, 3, 4 – Reported as % of welcome calls completed within 7 days of enrollment
% completed Welcome Calls	Q1, 2, 3, 4 – Reported as % of welcome calls complete
% Start Up Tasks completed on-time	Q1, 3 – Reported as % start up tasks completed within 21 days of enrollment
% Curriculum Based Assessments (CBA) Target Met	Q1, 2, 3, 4
% Student Contacts Met	Q1, 2, 3, 4 – Reported as % of students with status “contacts met” indicating a successful synchronous contact
% Learning Coach Contacts Met	Q1, 2, 3, 4 – Reported as % receiving at least: -1 successful call by Q1 -2 successful calls by Q2 -3 successful calls by Q4
% completed notification of Preliminary Retention status	Q3 – Reported as % of students marked “retain or unsure” with a successful retention contact during the Preliminary Promotion/Retention period
% completed End of Year contact	Q4 – Reported as % of students successfully receiving an End of Year call
% “On Track” escalation status	Q1, 2, 3, 4 – Reported as % of students meeting school-determined participation thresholds to demonstrate active engagement in a virtual school.
% During School Year Withdrawals	Q1, 2, 3, 4 – Reported as % of students who withdraw during the school year (after meeting “engagement” criteria)

Figure 3. Develop and Collaborate Professionally

Metric	Quarter(s) Reported
% of Teachers in a Professional Learning Community (PLC)	Q1 – Reported as % of teachers reporting a PLC IA number in their Staff Profile data view
% of PLCs in a school with a SMART goal	Q2 – Reported as % of PLCs with a school leader approved SMART goal for the 2017-2018 school year
% of PLCs in a school making progress towards SMART goal	Q3 – Reported as % of PLCs within a school with documented progress towards attaining SMART goal, as acknowledged by school leader
% of PLCs in a school with end of year SMART goal attainment	Q4 - Reported as % of PLCs within a school with documented attainment of SMART goal, as acknowledged by school leader
% of teachers completing Connections-led Professional Learning sessions (100, 200, 300-level)	Q1, 2, 3, 4 – Reported as % of teachers with a participation date listed for each monthly session that falls within a reporting quarter

Figure 4. School Operations

Metric	Quarter(s) Reported
% of open teaching positions filled by the student first day of school	Q1
% of teachers with Teacher Orientation course complete	Q1
% of Students Enrolled “On Time”	Q1 – Reported as % of students enrolled on or before the first student day of school
% of eligible “Returning” students enrolled	Q1 – Reported as % of students eligible to return the following school year who enrolled by 9/25
% of open teaching positions filled by June	Q4
% Teachers Returning	Q4 – Reported as % of teachers not indicating they wouldn’t not returning via the Teacher Intent to Return process
% eligible Students Returning	Q4 – Reported as % of students indicating they would returning via the Student Intent to Return process

6. Adult Advocates for students at-risk for dropping out

As recommended by the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences’ (ICS) Dropout Prevention Practice Guide¹, the school will assign adult advocates to serve students at-risk of dropping out to serve as mentors/advisors. As noted in the Practice Guide, “research suggests that students who have ongoing relationships with adults feel a greater sense of school membership, attachment, and involvement” and that additional benefits of these relationships include “reduced risky behaviors, reduced absentee rates, improved grades, and improved communication and social skills. Recognizing that these are all areas that are key indicators of school success, the school’s adult advocates will mentor, build relationships, and engage with students in the following ways:

- Small group LiveLesson Advisory Sessions
- Advisory Teachers/Designated Counselors
- Student Engagement Team (SET)
- Teacher and staff Professional Development (guidance and training on support to at-risk students and dropout prevention)
- Learning Coach Support

SMALL GROUP LIVELESSON ADVISORY SESSIONS

The ICS Dropout Prevention Practice Guide provides specific suggestions regarding the types of responsibilities adult advocates should undertake, including that regular time in the school day or week should be established for students to meet with the adult. This will be accomplished through weekly small group LiveLesson advisory sessions.

¹ https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/dp_pg_090308.pdf

ADVISORY TEACHERS/DESIGNATED COUNSELORS

The Advisory Teacher/Counselor will be the key person within the high school team who is responsible for keeping a comprehensive view on all students they are assigned. These will be synchronous small group (15 students or fewer) advisory sessions conducted 1-2x per week with the Advisory Teacher/Counselor to support student engagement, academic success, and career readiness.

The advisory teacher/counselor will watch for gaps in learning as well as the most likely gaps in positive learning habits in order to support student success in the online environment. They will use the data systems outlined in section 2.1 to support the identification and support of students at-risk for dropping out.

COUNSELING PROGRAM

The counseling program will offer individual and group counseling, as needed, and will focus on academic development, personal and social growth, and college and career readiness activities through a variety of communication tools (LiveLesson sessions, phone calls, message boards, Virtual Library, newsletters, and face-to-face field trips and events that will take place throughout the state).

The counseling team will have an established system for early identification of students who are behind in earning high school credits, or those who are off track for graduation. Once identified, counselors will work with these students to identify support needed to be successful in earning credits, and a plan to get back on track to graduate with his/her cohort. Specifically, school counselors will be working directly with students to identify a course of study that works to get the student back to graduating with his or her cohort. Potential options include credit recovery courses, additional credits each semester, block scheduling, and summer school. Counselors will work with students and families individually to identify what is best for the needs of each student. Further, counselors will work with students individually and in groups to instruct students on the mindsets and behaviors necessary to be a successful virtual school student. Students will learn about organizational and time management skills, assertiveness in working with teachers, and the skills necessary to become a self-regulated learner. Finally, school counselors will also collaborate with special educators to support students with IEPs transition plans.

The technology available in Connexus will allow for teachers and counselors to monitor students' participation and performance in course work to identify students who are behind in lessons or performing poorly in current courses. Teachers and counselors will assist these students in successfully completing courses through frequent calls and access to additional resources, as needed.

Counselors will help monitor students' performance against drop out and on-track indicators and prepare students for college, career, and/or employability with

- College and career readiness data view focusing on steps needed to meet post-

graduation goals;

- Interactive LiveLesson sessions connecting families with real-time information on financial aid and scholarships, college application processes, entrance requirements, and more;
- College test preparation courses for the SAT/ACT;
- Early identification of students who may be off track for graduating on time; and
- 1-to-1 counseling with students as needed to provide resources and assistance with post-secondary planning, including career options, vocational training, and selecting the right college.

In addition, there will be additional supports and activities available to support a student's college and career goals including the following:

- Counseling LiveLesson sessions each Friday for high school students (including Career Fireside Chats on the fourth Friday of each month);
- College admissions LiveLesson sessions;
- Career and vocational options LiveLesson sessions;
- College newsletters sent to high school students each month;
- Chat-with-a-Grad sessions; and
- Connexus tools such as the Progression Plan Manager.

Students will have access to the national counseling LiveLesson session program, which delivers weekly guidance curriculum lessons and national college admissions sessions throughout the school year. The sessions include the Career Fireside Chats on the fourth Friday of each month. Previous sessions have covered such topics as Teen Dating Violence Awareness, Educational/Training Opportunities After High School, Why School Matters: Navigating Your Educational Development Plan, How to Develop a Growth Mindset, Aligning Individual Goals & Abilities, and ACT & SAT Overview. A college newsletter is sent to high school students each month.

Students will be encouraged to enroll in College and Career Focused clubs. Each club includes regular LiveLesson sessions with a career and college counselor. There are several clubs focused on post-secondary planning including: College Planning Club, First Generation Club, High School Career Club, and Middle School Career Club.

The counselors will also plan additional LiveLesson sessions, and small group advisory sessions, for students which will address specific student needs. The counselor will be a resource to students, families, and staff in ensuring that all students are safe.

7. Targeted Professional Development and Changes

TEACHERS

Teachers and Staff at NCA will participate in additional training, and have access to on-demand resources, to support them with:

- motivating and engaging at-risk students;
- recognizing potential drop-outs and implementing strategies for dropout prevention;
- recognizing and supporting students in distress;
- determining appropriate instructional and behavioral supports;
- identifying on-track indicators for high school graduation;
- creating a college-going culture; and
- providing guidance and support to students who may choose to go to work after graduation.

NCA BOARD MEMBERS

In addition to the professional development for the teachers and staff, the Board will also receive training throughout the year. A sample of a training schedule is included in Figure 6.

Figure 5. Board Professional Development

Month	Training	Description
August	<i>What is the Monthly School Report? What does it mean?</i>	The monthly school report is provided to the board at each month's board meeting. This report contains enrollment data (by grade band), student demographics (including FARM eligibility and Special Population numbers), contacts between teachers and students, and performance metrics (attendance, participation and overall performance). After the training, the board should be able to interpret the data on the monthly school report and see trends and issues at the school.
September	<i>What are the Quarterly Metrics and what do they mean for the School?</i>	At the end of each Quarter (October, January, April, and July) Connections Academy will report to the Board on operational metrics related to the School Focus Goals, Core Model & Standards and School Year Cycle. These are metrics that Connections expects will help drive Efficacy as measured by the School Focus Goals. These metrics are either in addition to those shared on the Monthly School Report, or are sharing comparative results across the schools for what is shared on the Monthly School Report. The training will explain each metric that will be used, what it means, how it is calculated.
October	<i>What are our school goals and how are they calculated?</i>	This training will go over the school goals (as the School Leader goes over his state of the school report). The school goals will be discussed/explained in terms of how they will be measured, monitored, and what actions the school will be taking to meet them.
November	<i>What were the key takeaways of the Leadership team from the 2017 National Dropout Prevention Network Conference?</i>	The conference is to be held October 22-25, 2017 and is put on by the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network at Clemson University. Key members of the leadership team plan to attend the conference. Conference strands include credit and recovery opportunities, parent and family engagement, alternative educational contexts, strategies for specific populations, civic/community engagement, leadership and administration issues, and chronic absenteeism. The attendees at the

Month	Training	Description
		conference will be prepared to share their takeaways with the board.
January	<i>How is NCA doing on Quarter 2 Metrics?</i>	This session would highlight the outcomes of the metrics that are reported in Quarter 2. The board should be able to gauge how successful the school is on implementing the school improvement plan and whether at the half-way point in the school year, the school is on track to make its goals.
February	<i>How is NCA preparing for state assessments?</i>	Throughout the school year NCA has been preparing its students to take the state assessments. This month the school leader (or designee) will explain all the work that has been done to prepare students academically to succeed on these important assessments. The school leader (or designee) will also talk about the logistics/planning that went into finding test sites and scheduling students – this is an important part of reaching that 95% attendance threshold.
April	<i>How is NCA doing on Quarter 3 metrics?</i>	This session would highlight the outcomes of the metrics that are reported in Quarter 3. The board should be able to gauge how successful the school is on implementing the school improvement plan and whether with three quarters of the school year completed, the school is on track to make its goals.
May/June	<i>What have we learned? Strategic Planning for next year?</i>	This session would be more of a discussion of the board and school leader. It would be a reflection on the school year as a whole – what they learned, what worked, and where the school is now. The board may consider going through a strategic planning process as they prepare for the 18-19 school year. This planning could be facilitated by an outside consultant who would help the board set new goals for the school for the coming school year.

NCA LEADERSHIP

NCA has implemented promising leadership changes. NCA's new school leader as of November 1, 2017, Dr. Chris McBride, has an impressive track record in terms of raising student achievement throughout various public schools in Washoe County School District and beyond. For example, as the director of Mariposa Academy Charter School in Reno, Mr. McBride had extensive experience managing school budgets, ensuring academic success of students, and successfully overseeing school operations, both academic and financial. Likewise, as Dean of Smithridge S.T.E.M. Academy, he successfully implemented improved student achievement measures and led implementation of several committees and programs dedicated to that success and he also served an important role in building the school improvement plan as Associate Dean of Students (alternative education) at Pine Middle School.

8. Academic support and enrichment to improve academic performance

As indicated by the ICS Dropout Prevention Practice Guide, “research shows that low academic performance, absenteeism, and grade retention are related to dropping out” and that the provision of appropriate academic supports that helps address skills gaps, can offset a cycle of

frustration, and can enrich the academic experience for students who may be disengaged.² In support of this recommendation and to improve student academic performance, NCA will continue to provide and add further academic supports beyond the standard high school course offerings and instructional supports:

- GradPoint Credit Recovery Courses (already being provided as part of Grad Rate Improvement Plan)
- Success Academy Courses - Freshman and Senior Success courses (already part of Grad Rate Improvement Plan)
- Supplemental Instructional Support Programs (e.g., Reading Plus, Imagine Math, Math XL)
- Career Technical Education (CTE) course offerings and college, career, employability supports
- Summer School (already offered and expanded through Grad Rate Improvement Plan)

CREDIT RECOVERY/GRADPOINT

To support high school students on their path to graduation and college and career, NCA is providing credit recovery course offerings during the summer and school year as a resource to help students recover credits and achieve and maintain on track status.

GradPoint credit recovery courses offer a diagnostic-prescriptive virtual learning solution. The student-centered philosophy behind GradPoint's courses includes the necessary support features to facilitate and guide customized credit recovery:

1. Prescriptive-diagnostic assessment and instructional sequencing tools that automatically tailor and deliver personalized learning for every student.
2. Engaging content and interactive, collaborative learning elements to re-engage at-risk students.
3. Instruction, activities, and assessments that address diverse learning modalities and enable students to demonstrate content mastery in a variety of ways.
4. Robust progress monitoring tools.

GradPoint's prescriptive courses provide a personalized pathway through the course based on needs, saving valuable learning time and increasing student motivation. Unlike other programs, GradPoint automatically diagnoses and prescribes content for a truly personalized learning experience. Students take a pre-test and a post-test with every module. Based on their results, they are assigned lessons in areas in which they did not demonstrate mastery and are exempted from other lessons they have already mastered.

SUCCESS ACADEMY COURSES

To further support students' success and engagement in school, NCA has been offering and will expand on two Success Academy courses: Freshman Focus and Senior Success.

² Page 22, https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/dp_pg_090308.pdf

The Freshman Focus course will orient students to resources available to them, introduce strategies for success in high school course-level work, emphasize the importance of academic integrity and producing authentic work, and build college, work, and career readiness.

Based on the positive results of the Freshman Focus Course, NCA will also offer a course that addresses needs specific to seniors, Senior Success. The Senior Success course exposes students to tools and resources designed to best prepare them for life after high school. Students will gain exposure to information about financial aid, the college application process, résumé writing, graduation information, and post-secondary options. This course also provides students the opportunity to reflect on their high school experience.

SUPPLEMENTAL INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Supplemental instructional support programs (SISPs) are assigned to students who need additional practice and/or support with the foundational skills required to be successful with grade level standards. Teachers are trained in the implementation of these programs, including analyzing and evaluating student progress using the data provided by each program. As a standard part of the SISP review process, the Connections Academy Curriculum and Instruction team evaluates programs for:

- Evidence of research
- Alignment to standards
- Ability to customize
- Feedback to students
- Direct instruction
- Teacher/Student user experience
- Diagnostic/prescriptive component
- Motivation feature
- Data and reporting, including data on discrete skills

Some of the additional SISP resources that the school will provide students will include Imagine Math,³ Math XL,⁴ and Reading Plus.

CAREER TECHNICAL EDUCATION (CTE)

As indicated in the ICS Dropout Prevention Practice Guide, students at risk for dropping out should be provided relevant instruction to better engage them in learning and to better serve them after they complete school, with a specific focus on helping students discover the purpose for completing school by incorporating career-related curricula.⁵ NCA fully supports this recommendation and will offer CTE courses that provide students the opportunity to take courses in many of the 16 nationally recognized career clusters. The courses expose students to a wide variety of career areas and help prepare them for career and college success by giving them a solid academic foundation, technical knowledge, and skills training in a wide

³ <https://www.thinkthroughmath.com/resources/case-studies/>

⁴ [http://www.pearsonmylabandmastering.com/northamerica/mathxl/educators/results/results-library.php?product\[\]=MyStatLab&hpd](http://www.pearsonmylabandmastering.com/northamerica/mathxl/educators/results/results-library.php?product[]=MyStatLab&hpd)

⁵ Page 34, https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/dp_pg_090308.pdf

variety of fields. The courses include interactive presentations, real-world activities and assignments, career connections, and an online study guide to help students obtain the skills and competencies of their chosen career pathway. NCA will explore adding additional CTE courses and certifications associated with the selected career pathways.

In addition, students will be encouraged to enroll in College and Career Focused clubs. Each club includes regular LiveLesson sessions with a career and college counselor. There are several clubs focused on post-secondary planning including: College Planning Club, First Generation Club, and High School Career Club.

SUMMER SCHOOL

Summer school provides an opportunity for many students to “catch up” and be on track for graduation. In addition, research has shown that by enrolling in academic courses in the summer months, “summer slide” is reduced and can help students achieve academically. In support of this research finding, GradPoint and targeted Connections Academy courses will continue to be offered to NCA students during the summer.

As part of students’ PLP, students in NCA’s summer school program will be closely monitored by certified teachers and counselors who will provide targeted, supplemental instruction and maintain regular contact to keep them focused on their goal of graduation. Teachers will work to ensure that students complete pre- and post-tests, progress at a pace that enables successful course completion, and participate in daily instructional and intervention activities. Students who are credit deficient will take GradPoint courses.

Summer school staff will be chosen based on their familiarity with effective instructional and motivational strategies. They will be focused on student success and already have relationships with many of the students, a foundation on which to build academic success. When students know that there is an adult that cares about their success, then they are more motivated to be successful.⁶

Every student who is behind as indicated by the On Track Indicator and Progression Plan will be encouraged and provided support to continue their school year into the summer, whether it is realistic for them to move up a grade by the end of summer or not.

1)

⁶ Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement*. Routledge: New York, p. 72.