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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

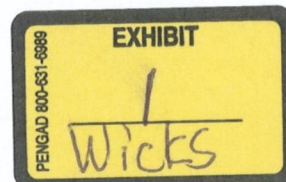
**DECLARATION OF MATTHEW WICKS**

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

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

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

3. I have been involved with K-12 online learning for 18 years. Prior to my current position with CE, I served as Chief Operating Officer for the International Association for K-12 Online Learning (“iNACOL”). Before that, I operated my own online learning consulting practice, and was one of the co-founders of the Illinois Virtual High School and served as Director for five years. Prior to my work in online learning, I served as Chief Information Officer at the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy. I also worked for Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory and AT&T. I have a Bachelor of Science in Computer Science from Purdue University and a Master of Science in Computer Science from Northwestern University.



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.  
6

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:  
15

- 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 9<sup>th</sup> Grade and the EOC exams in ELA II and Math II in 10<sup>th</sup> 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 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> 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:

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

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

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

- 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

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

- Further, even if one were to accept Member Mackedon’s conclusion that the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate demonstrated how well a school with a highly mobile population and large portion of credit-deficient students was serving its students, instituting an enrollment cap will not necessarily change the school’s four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate, as the cap doesn’t have the ability to impact the proportion of credit deficient students that will enroll.
- The only way to significantly change NCA’s graduation rate is to change the type of students who are enrolling. I am not suggesting NCA stop accepting credit-deficient students; the data shows NCA is able to serve them (based on the number of students who persist in their education to a 5th and 6th year, the number of students who go on to earn a GED certificate, the number of students who transfer to an adult education program, etc.) and by enrolling in NCA it is an opportunity for those students to re-engage.
- The Authority’s seemingly narrow view that only a 60% graduation rate indicates a school is adequately serving its students is an incentive for schools to stop accepting credit deficient students or, in other words, for schools to stop serving those students with the greatest need. I find this morally reprehensible in addition to promoting terrible public policy.
- It is my opinion that the creation of an alternative school to serve current NCA students who qualify would separate students distinguishing them based on their different needs, and allow concentration and focus on the unique needs of those students enrolled in the alternative school to serve them as best a school can.
- 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 12<sup>th</sup> 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%

6 Dropout – no reason available: 7.6%

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

8 Received adjusted diploma: 1.1%

9 Dropout – juvenile detention: 0.4%

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

11 Transfer to another NV public school: 66.7%

12 Moved out-of-state: 15.2%

13 Transfer to home school: 5.3%

14 Transfer to district charter school: 4.6%

15 Transfer to Charter Authority charter school: 4.4%

16 Transfer to private school: 2.7%

17 Moved out of country: 0.6%

18 Incarceration: 0.2%

19 Deceased: 0.2%

20 **Transfer-out Students – Reasons\* for withdrawal**

21 Mismatch – family schedule: 16.5%

22 Life change / moving: 16.3%

23 Mismatch academic: 13.0%

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

25

- 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 16<sup>th</sup>.

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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 12<sup>th</sup> day of June, 2017, in Aurora,  
Illinois.

  
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MATTHEW WICKS