



Nevada State Public Charter School Authority

Site Evaluation Report
Nevada Connections Academy
Evaluation Date: October 19, 2020¹
Report Date: November 16, 2020

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¹ This site evaluation took place on October 7th & 19th, 2020

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Appendices

A: Nevada State Performance Framework

<http://www.doe.nv.gov/Accountability/NSPF/>

B: SPCSA Academic Framework

http://charterschools.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/CharterSchoolsnvgov/content/News/2019/19062_8-Academic-Performance-Framework-Guidance-Document.pdf

C: SPCSA Organizational Framework

http://charterschools.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/CharterSchoolsnvgov/content/News/2019/19062_8-OPF-Att-1-Ratings-Scorecard.pdf

INTRODUCTION AND SCHOOL BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

This Site Evaluation Report offers an analysis of evidence collected during the school evaluation that took place on October 19, 2020. The State Public Charter School Authority (SPCSA) conducts a comprehensive review of evidence related to all charters within the portfolio during the 1st, 3rd, and 5th year of operation. This comprehensive analysis addresses the academic success of the school and the effectiveness and viability of the school organization.

An analysis of the school's academic and operational success is undertaken by reviewing the most current versions of the Nevada State Performance Framework (Appendix A) and the State Public Charter School Authority Academic Framework (Appendix B) as well as the Organizational Framework (Appendix C).

In addition, the Site Evaluation Team conducts classroom observations within the areas of classroom environment and instruction. The purpose of these observations is to collect evidence using a rubric which has been normed by our team. All classroom rating outcomes will be displayed within this report so that school leaders have an overall idea of what is happening in general, at any time, in any classroom. The overall numbers will provide information about the school outcomes on this one day.

SPCSA staff will track "best practices", using a checklist and a summary of best practices observed, and will be contained within the report. Using information from focus groups of students, parents, staff, school leaders and the school's board, the SPCSA team will conduct focus groups and summarize results for schools within the report. The operational portion of the evaluation will be observed and take-aways recorded using a checklist and observing all aspects of the school's operational components as outlined in the SPCSA operational framework.

This evaluation has been designed to focus on teaching and learning (e.g. curriculum, instruction, assessment, and services for at-risk students) as well as leadership, organizational capacity, and board oversight. The SPCSA uses the established criteria on a regular basis to provide schools with a consistent set of expectations leading up to renewal.

SCHOOL BACKGROUND

Nevada Connections Academy is located in Reno, Nevada in at facility at 555 Double Eagle Ct. Suite 2000. The school serves 1,399 students (according to the 2018-2019 Validation Day data) in 9th – 12th grade. The mission of Nevada Connections Academy is: "To help each student maximize his or her potential and meet the highest performance standards through a uniquely individualized learning program at our virtual school in Nevada."

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

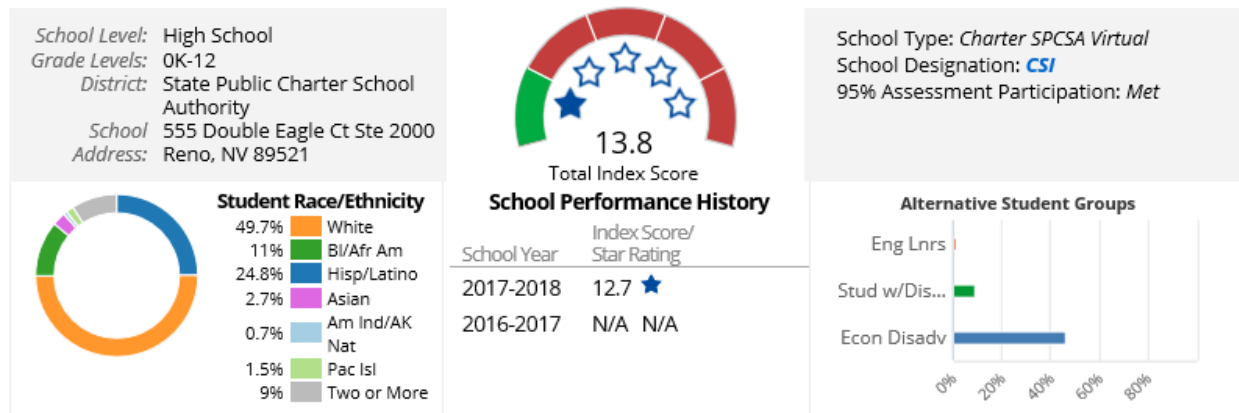
Nevada Connections Academy Math and ELA Results Nevada School Performance Framework 2019

Nevada Connections Academy serves 1,399 students in grades 9 - 12

High School

Nevada Connections Academy

School Year 2018-2019 Nevada School Rating




Nevada Connections Academy
Math and ELA Results
Nevada School Performance Framework
2019

High School

Math Proficient				Math Proficient Points Earned: 1.5/10			
Groups	2019 %	2019 % District	2019 % MIP	2018 %	2018 % District	2018 % MIP	
All Students	10.5	25.8	32.83	11	23.8	29.29	
American Indian/Alaska Native	-	-	23.12	-	16.6	19.07	
Asian	-	50	50.27	-	54.7	47.65	
Black/African American	0	7.5	18.42	4.7	6.2	14.12	
Hispanic/Latino	18.3	18.5	22.93	4.5	17.5	18.87	
Pacific Islander	-	16	29.26	-	6.2	25.54	
Two or More Races	0	26	36.96	10	26.1	33.64	
White/Caucasian	8.9	32	44.25	15.8	28.4	41.31	
Special Education	8.3	6	12.38	0	2.2	7.77	
English Learners Current + Former	-	5	14.52	-	10.9	10.02	
English Learners Current	-	0	-	-	2.4	6.96	
Economically Disadvantaged	2.7	14.5	24	7.3	13.3	20.01	

ELA Proficient				ELA Proficient Points Earned: 3.5/10			
Groups	2019 %	2019 % District	2019 % MIP	2018 %	2018 % District	2018 % MIP	
All Students	35.7	53.8	48.54	28.7	44.5	45.83	
American Indian/Alaska Native	-	-	36.76	-	36.3	33.43	
Asian	-	71	65.11	-	68.4	63.27	
Black/African American	21.3	32.7	31.39	11.9	21.6	27.78	
Hispanic/Latino	35.1	47.2	36.5	20.6	39.5	33.15	
Pacific Islander	-	52	48.75	-	37.5	46.05	
Two or More Races	21.3	62.5	58.07	30	46.9	55.86	
White/Caucasian	39.1	59.7	62.25	34.1	50	60.26	
Special Education	16.6	18.8	15.71	4.3	9	11.27	
English Learners Current + Former	-	18.1	17.52	-	21.8	13.18	
English Learners Current	-	10.5	-	-	9.7	6.9	
Economically Disadvantaged	23.6	41.8	37.66	22	31.2	34.37	

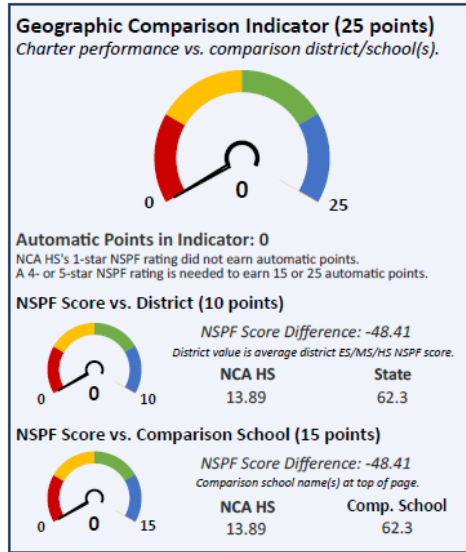


Graduation Rates Indicator

Measure	School Rate	District Rate
4-Year	63.7	70.0
5-Year	53.5	69.0

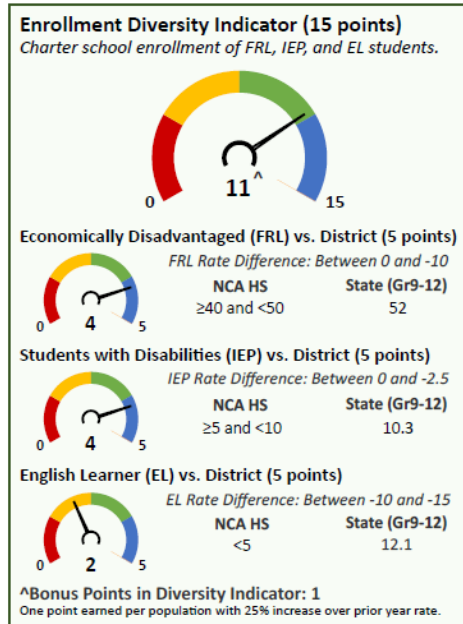
SPCSA Academic Performance Framework (provided for informational purposes only) Geographic Comparison Report

High School



SPCSA Academic Performance Framework Diversity Comparison Results

High School



CLASSROOM OBSERVATION TOTALS

A total of ten classrooms including live lessons, one on one, and small group advisement times were observed for approximately 25 minutes on the day of the evaluation.

I. CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT					
Areas 1 & 2 Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport Establishing a Culture for Learning	Distinguished	Proficient	Basic	Unsatisfactory	Not Observed
	Classroom interactions are highly respectful and the teacher demonstrates a passionate commitment to the subject.	Classroom interactions reflect general warmth and caring and a genuine culture for learning.	Classroom interactions are generally appropriate and free from conflict with a minimal culture for learning.	Classroom interactions between the teacher and students are negative and do not represent a culture for learning.	This criterion was not observed or rated.
	Total:	Total: 6	Total:	Total:	Total: 4
	Students ensure maintenance of high levels of civility among classmates and assume much of the responsibility for establishing a culture for learning.	Interactions reflect cultural and developmental differences of students. Teacher and students are committed to the subject.	Interactions may be characterized by occasional displays of insensitivity and inconsistent expectations for student achievement.	Interactions are characterized by sarcasm, put-downs, and/or conflict. There is a low teacher commitment to the subject and few instances of students taking pride in their work.	This criterion was not observed or rated.
	Total:	Total: 3	Total:	Total:	Total: 7
Areas 3 & 4 Managing Classroom Procedures Managing Student Behavior	Distinguished	Proficient	Basic	Unsatisfactory	Not Observed
	Classroom routines and procedures appear seamless and student behavior is entirely appropriate.	Classroom routines and procedures have been established and the teacher ensures smooth functioning with little loss of instruction time.	Classroom routines and procedures have been established but function inconsistently, with some loss of instruction time.	Classroom routines and procedures are nonexistent or inefficient, resulting in the loss of much instruction time.	This criterion was not observed or rated.
	Total:	Total: 3	Total:	Total:	Total: 7
	There appears to be no misbehavior during the observation. The teacher monitoring of student behavior is subtle and/or preventative.	Teacher responds to student misbehavior in ways that are appropriate and respectful of the students.	Teacher tries to establish standards of conduct for students and monitor behavior. These efforts are not always successful.	Teacher is unsuccessful in monitoring student behavior.	This criterion was not observed or rated.
	Total:	Total: 1	Total:	Total:	Total: 9

II. CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION

Area 5					Not	
	Distinguished	Proficient	Basic	Unsatisfactory	Observed	
Purpose and Explanation of Content, Lesson, Unit or Classroom Activity	The purpose of the lesson or unit is clear and connects with student's real- life experiences. The explanation of content is imaginative, and students contribute to the lesson by participating and/or explaining concepts to their peers.	The purpose for the lesson or learning activity is clear. The teacher's explanation of content is appropriate and connects with students.	The teacher attempts to explain the instructional purpose with limited success. The explanation of the content is uneven. Some explanations are done skillfully, but other portions are difficult to follow.	The purpose for the lesson learning activity is unclear. Teacher's explanation of the content is unclear, confusing or uses inappropriate language.	This criterion was not observed or rated.	
	Total:	Total: 3	Total:	Total:	Total: 7	
Area 6	Distinguished	Proficient	Basic	Unsatisfactory	Not Observed	
Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques	A	Students formulate and ask high-level questions.	Teacher formulates and asks several high-level questions.	Teacher questioning and discussion techniques are uneven with some high-level questions.	Teacher makes poor use of questioning and discussion techniques, with low level questions, limited student participation and little true discussion.	This criterion was not observed or rated.
		Total:	Total: 4	Total: 2	Total:	Total: 4
	B	Students assume responsibility for the participation of most students in the discussion.	Teachers assumes responsibility for the discussion which includes most students.	There is some attempt by the teacher to initiate student discussion and student participation.	There is little to no student discussion even though the opportunity is there.	This criterion was not observed or rated.
Total:	Total: 3	Total: 3	Total:	Total: 4		

II. CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION (continued)

II. CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION (continued)					
Area 7 Engaging Students in Learning	Distinguished	Proficient	Basic	Unsatisfactory	Not Observed
	Students are highly engaged throughout the lesson. The pacing and structure of the lesson allows high levels of student engagement.	Students appear to be intellectually engaged throughout most of the lesson. The pacing and structure of the lesson is suitable for this group of students.	Students are partially engaged throughout the lesson.	Students are not at all intellectually engaged in significant learning.	This criterion was not observed or rated.
	Total:	Total: 3	Total: 4	Total:	Total: 3
	Students make contributions to the representation of content.	There are appropriate activities and materials and instructive representations of content.	The representation of content or structure/pacing is uneven.	There are inappropriate activities or materials, poor representations of content or lack of lesson structure/pacing.	This criterion was not observed or rated.
Total:	Total: 3	Total: 2	Total:	Total: 5	
Area 8 Using Formative Assessment in Instruction	Distinguished	Proficient	Basic	Unsatisfactory	Not Observed
	Students are aware of the learning goals/targets for themselves during this instructional timeframe.	Most of the students are aware of the learning goals/targets for themselves during this instructional timeframe.	Some of the students are aware of the learning goals/targets for themselves during this instructional timeframe.	Students are not aware of the learning goals/learning target during this instructional time frame.	This criterion was not observed or rated.
	Total:	Total:	Total:	Total:	Total: 10
	The teacher purposefully and consistently provides clear, descriptive feedback in regard to student's demonstration/understanding of the learning goal/target. The feedback is timely and is in a reasonable amount.	Much of the time, the teacher, provides clear, descriptive feedback regarding student's understanding/ demonstration of learning goal/target. The feedback is timely and is in a reasonable amount.	At times, the teacher provides clear, descriptive feedback but not in a consistent manner regarding learning goal/target. Observing where the work was meeting and where it was not. The feedback is timely and is in a reasonable amount.	The teacher does not provide clear, descriptive feedback regarding learning goal/target and does not observing where the work is and where it is not meeting. The feedback is not timely and is not in a reasonable amount.	This criterion was not observed or rated.
Total:	Total:	Total:	Total:	Total: 10	

The purpose of this portion of the report is to provide a numerical value to the total number of best practices seen during the classroom observational portion as a whole. This number is indicated at the end of each best practice descriptor/line.

Evidence of adapted materials/assessments: Area #

- Lessons are designed to encourage student curiosity and learning beyond classroom time.
- The explanation of the content is imaginative.

Evidence of questioning and discussion techniques: Area #

- Questions are planned ahead of time and tied to learning target(s):
- Teacher questions are open ended: 1
- Teacher allows time for students to answer – 3 seconds or more: 1
- Teacher extends the thinking and discussion by encouraging students to say more, restate or summarize:
- Teacher purposefully signals to entire group of students to wait/think before volunteering a response:
- Teacher provides the opportunity for all students to answer the question (think, pair, share, written response): 1

Evidence of engaging students in learning area: Area #

- Active learning is taking place (rather than just listening or viewing): 1
- Students are using reasoning and critical thinking:
- The lesson is rigorous and includes cognitively complex tasks:
- Students engage in several types of activities during the lesson including:
 - Speaking Writing Reading Listening Discussing Creating Problem Solving
- Cooperative groups:
- Student-led classroom:
- Technology is integrated into learning/outcomes: 10
- Project-based learning:

Evidence of Formative Assessment During Instruction: Area #

- Teachers provide the students feedback about their learning referring to examples taking anecdotal notes:
- Students incorporate the feedback by revising their work:
- Students receive frequent and meaningful feedback regarding their work:
- A wide range of instructional practices that are likely to motivate and engage most students are used during the lesson:

Other:

The SPCSA Site Evaluation team observed interactions between students and instructors at the school in ten instances. On the first day of the evaluation, the team observed and took notes in live classroom settings as well as recorded lessons. As a full-time virtual school, the Nevada Connections Academy relies on the web-based platform Pearson Connexus to structure their academics. Students, teachers, learning coaches, and administrators use Connexus for a variety of purposes including but not limited to lessons, monitoring student progress, daily schedules, and grades. After the initial evaluation, the SPCSA team met again with the Connections Academy school leaders and Superintendent for the purpose of understanding more about the learning platform. This information helped the SPCSA team to better understand the learning process at Nevada Connections Academy.

FOCUS GROUP SUMMARIES

FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY

Group	Number of Participants	Duration of Focus Group
Governing Board ¹	2	30 minutes
Parents/Families	9	30 minutes
Students	4	30 minutes
School Leadership	3	30 minutes
Staff	7	30 minutes

Governing Board²:

- Board members shared that they see the key design elements of the school in alignment with the mission. They reported that they track data and make data-based decisions in order to ensure that all students at the school succeed. Board members shared that they are working to make better decisions as a board to guarantee that students don't get behind. For example, the school's college and career readiness approach is a part of the School Improvement Plan. Within the School Improvement plan, the board has decided to focus on dual enrollment, the ACT and testing results. The board has recently put in place an additional agreement with Truckee Meadows Community College to increase access and supports for dual credit courses. Board members communicated that they saw an increase in participation from families when the school was facing potential closure. Board members put out a notice to recruit parents to as potential board members and received some responses from Washoe, Clark, and Churchill Counties. Board members report that they are keeping these possible members in mind should there be another opening on the board.
- Board members report that they currently meet about two or three times per month. This is due to the current COVID-19 monitoring and several recent changes at the school. Board members shared that the board has been unstable due to the many changes happening lately. They report having lost a few members but have added board members as well. One board member shared that the board is very committed to the school and have come together as a team to move the school forward. It was reported that there are no vacancies on the board currently. When new members join the board, they receive training on open meeting law and attend a five-part training from the National Institute of Charter Schools. They are planning a board retreat to take place, once societal conditions allow.
- The board receives financial updates regularly. Members report that this is an area of strength and indicate that financial information is always in their board packets. The focus group members shared that one big challenge has been the recent costs of attorney's fees and the board would rather spend this on the students. To this end, the focus group board members said they would like to work on an amicable relationship between themselves and the SPCSA board. They don't want relations to be adversarial.

² (2) members of the (7) member board participated. Quorum was not met, and open meeting law was not violated.

FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY continued

- The board has taken steps to ask more questions and continue to monitor progress at Nevada Connections Academy. The focus group board members indicate that they understand that it is important for them to make sure they know what is going on at the school. One board member commented, “We have gone very deep to see how all school elements are lining up.” The board evaluates Pearson Online and Blended Learning (EMO) and takes the responsibility to understand what is happening with the school and EMO. Board members reported that they take an active role in evaluating the school leaders as well. When results don’t seem to be as the board expected, they go back to the EMO and ask follow-up questions.

Parents/Families:

- When asked how often the school communicates with them, parents said the school communicates many times a day through webmail, and at least once a week for phone calls. Parents also said the school sometimes communicates via text. A few parents said there were too many messages per day and it was difficult to keep up with the volume. Parents indicated that the most useful communication is when teachers call and let them know what assignments are due, and when they call to discuss student grades. Parents also indicated that text messages are used frequently and have been really helpful for parents to be able to understand what is going on at the school. When asked about communication improvement the school could implement, parents said overall they think the communication is done well. In addition, while parents indicated that Live Lessons are helpful, they can also generate a large amount of work, which can be hard on parents. One parent said it feels like all of the tests and portfolios come in at once which can be difficult on the students. Parents also said they would like emails to more clearly indicate the course so they could more quickly differentiate between different lessons and classes.
- Parents were asked about the relationships between the teachers and students and overall parents said the experience has been great. Parents shared that the teachers are amazing, and they have been more connected with their student than in other brick and mortar schools. All of the parents said the relationships between their children and the teachers are great and they particularly appreciate that teachers are willing to help with questions at any time. One parent spoke about how teachers will allow students to take tests again if they did not do a good job. This way they can bring their grade up and they can actually learn the materials instead of being stuck with a low grade. Another parent said their ability to re-watch Live Lessons is nice too because students can go back and catch things, they may have missed the first time through. Parents were asked about the behavioral expectations the school has for the students. Parents said that teachers are clear about when students need to be in attendance for lessons. They put items in the students’ planners which makes sure that everyone attends. If they are unable to attend, they can catch up by watching a recording of the live lesson.

FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY continued

- When asked about barriers they experience in an online environment, parents said they did not have barriers they could speak of. They said the school has helped their students when little issues had come up, but overall, they were happy with their experience. However, one parent did say their child is suffering with not having the social aspect of a brick and mortar school. The parent also mentioned that they were concerned about the possibility of cheating going on due to parents answering for their students so they could get A's on their assignments. Another parent suggested that the school could provide better communication to learning coaches to help ensure that the lessons that are listed on their child's planner align to those that are expected to be completed by the teacher. This parent indicated that there are often assignments that are listed in the portal as being dropped or as the wrong assignment has completed, which can lead to confusion.
- When asked about their commitment and how that impacts their child's success at the school, parents said that their own commitment definitely made a difference. Parents said they really appreciate the school and love having this as an option. They said the brick and mortar schools did not provide the kind of education their children needed, and this school has been great for many reasons.

Students:

- When asked about what they like about the online learning format, students said they like that it is available at any point in time, that you can always connect with the teachers, and you don't have to worry about getting bullied and hurt like at a regular schools. They also said they are able to take control of their own learning. Students also mentioned the flexibility that the school model allows them. Students also mentioned the one-to-one teacher time as a big factor in why they liked online learning. It allows them to have direct, meaningful, communications with their teachers. Students pointed out that teachers have the ability to teach students across the state. One student took a summer class and the teacher was in Tennessee, but they were still able to connect with one another. When asked if there was anything they did not like about online learning students responded that sometimes parents don't know everything that is going on as learning coaches which can be difficult. Another student said students can't communicate with other students face-to-face. Some of the students also have technology issues which can slow down classes.
- Students mentioned job fairs, field trips, and field days as ways they communicate and hang out with one another. The most recent field day was held at a park and it allowed for students to see each other in person. Students also said the school does roller rink outings for graduation and honor roll which allow for students to socialize in person. When asked about what motivates students to attend school each day, students said the teachers have a big role in encouraging attendance. Students said they feel more connected at NCA as opposed to in-person school because they are fully engaged with NCA. They said there are less distractions in online school which helps them be able to get their schoolwork done. Other students mentioned learning foreign languages as a major motivator in attending school. Students also spoke about clubs they are part of. Some of the clubs mentioned were leadership and debate.
- When students were asked how they monitor their own academic progress, they spoke about the feedback they received from their teachers as one way. One student said they created and managed a calendar which helps them stay on track. The live lessons and

phone calls with teachers were other ways that kept them on track. Another student talked about the planners that NCA provides, which they can then use to help plan their week. The planner allows students to schedule their work in a way that works for them individually. NCA also has a link on the homepage that lists all of the graduation requirements for students and they can use that to ensure they are still on track. When asked about if they feel respected in their classes, students said they feel very respected in their classes. They said they feel more respected in the virtual school than they did when they attended brick and mortar schools. They said the teachers also include their parents in discussions which helps keep parents up to date with what is going on. Even in the online environment, and the challenges that communication pose, students stated that the teachers are always really nice to the students when they have questions. Students also mentioned they were much more comfortable asking questions in class in the virtual setting as opposed to in-person classes.

- When asked why they think some students don't return to NCA, students said that some people need to be in an in-person environment. They said some students just don't fit well in a virtual school. When asked about the Flipped Model³ change NCA implemented, and what their thoughts were, students said it had benefited them a lot. They said that it allows the teachers to teach how they want to teach which has been good for the teachers. They said the videos allow them to pause, rewind, and replay so they can take notes. There are no disruptions in the lessons which has also helped. A few students said they would like to see the school grow the number of clubs that are offered which would help with their college applications. They said the offerings were limited and it would be good to have more. They also mentioned they would like to have the school create connections with branches of the military for students who were looking to enter that field. The students said the school has also been more open to bringing new clubs to the school which has been really appreciated. Another student said they would like to see Home Economics offered at the school. Students said the Dual Credit offerings have also been really helpful because it allowed them to get credits for college too. They said it is nice to be able to be on a college campus but save the money that they would have had to spend in those first years.

Leadership:

- The NCA Leadership Team said that there are objectives at the beginning of the live lesson format. Teachers make sure that students understand what they are working on. These are typically posted, and the overarching objectives are looked at. The over-arching standards are reviewed.
- The leadership team described how teachers maintain websites that are very interactive. Students are able to access online tools. Even in grades that are not tested, all students have preparation for the ACT exam.
- Each leadership team member manages a staff of people and have mid-year and end of year evaluations. This provides time to talk about progress, to reflect, and to look at how things are going throughout the year. By evaluation time, teachers are well-informed about how they are doing.

³ The Flipped Classroom is a blended learning model in which traditional ideas about classroom activities and homework are reversed, or "flipped." In this model, instructors have students interact with new material first.

- The leadership team explained that teachers foster academic talk in the flipped classroom. The flipped model means there is a lesson via recording that is provided in advance to students. For example, students have access to sample problems along with a recording of content. Then, students may work together in a small group setting and have access to a one-on-one learning format as well. The recordings are sent out early in the week, prior to the live lesson.

Staff:

- The staff shared that they use pre recordings to begin instruction and then go to one-on-one or small group instruction. The biggest adjustment this year is the one-on-one contact they make through phone calls which helps get students caught up. In addition, the Special Education teacher has targeted live lessons, where the same content is taught at a slower pace. Teachers also use breakout rooms, and then holds one on one live lessons if a student needs additional assistance. The Special Education teacher said, “In this way I can privately teach these students.”
- Staff explained that the *Connexus* system is set up so students can complete their work on their own. The data in the system shows who needs assistance and who does not. The instruction begins with recorded lessons at the beginning of the week. These include showing students the portfolio or project which will be expected to be completed so that students know where they are headed. After this happens, staff reported that they can adjust their instruction and support based on what is needed.
- The staff communicated their thoughts regarding the newly implemented flipped classroom at the school. A portion of the focus group staff remarked about the pros with this implementation. Some staff shared that the flipped model really works better because it takes the traditional classroom and effectively removes the “sage on the stage.” However, the system has been built to let students work at their own pace. Instructional staff explained that they can supplement materials and checking in with students as needed. One staff member said, “This is a big change. One day one whole class and we removed this and are sending students out at the beginning of the week to independently consume (learn) the pre-recorded content and then come back to instructional staff to communicate what is still needed for the targeted learning to take place.
- There were also cons identified to the “flipped classroom” implementation as well as pros. From one person’s perspective, the flipped model is a difficult model for those students who have learning gaps. This would include those students below grade level, those with an IEP or 504 plan. Another person said that some students don’t like the flipped model and that some students are struggling because of this change. In many cases, students have some confusion about what they are supposed to do. One teacher remarked, “I take a lot more time calling students, doing live lessons with kids and it is different. It has created a lot more work but more communication too.” A math teacher said that there is a need for feedback with math and this can be challenging with this model. In all, the staff seemed to agree that the flipped model seems good for the self-starter students, but the classroom environment is needed for others.

ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

The SPCSA uses the Organizational Performance Framework to collect evidence of performance and evaluate schools, at least annually, to monitor schools throughout their charter terms, to report to schools and the public annually, to intervene in schools that do not meet expectations and to make high-stakes decisions, including: renewal, non-renewal, possible revocation, expansion or replication. Most of this work is done through routine submissions by the school to the SPCSA.

A limited number of measures within the organizational performance framework may be at least partially evaluated during the site evaluation process. Measures are partially evaluated based upon evidence from school focus groups, school observations, documents reviewed and information from the school presentation portion of the evaluation. SPCSA staff will note the evidence provided by the school and also outline any questions or potential concerns.

Measure	Description	Evidence Collected Through	Takeaways
1a	The school implements material terms of the education program.	School Presentation Epicenter Submissions NSPF Report	Nevada Connections Academy provides students with a distance education program which has been approved by the Nevada Department of Education. Every staff member is evaluated on an annual basis.
1b	The school complies with applicable education requirements.	School Presentation	Nevada Connections Academy's management partner, Pearson Online and Blended Learning, is evaluated by the NCA Board on an annual. This is evidenced in Board meeting minutes. As NCA students reside throughout the entire state, students are primarily recruited via television advertisements, on-line advertisements, as well as by word of mouth.
1c	The school protects the rights of students with disabilities.	School Presentation Classroom Observations	Special Education students are identified using the flagging process through enrollment. IEP's are closely monitored throughout the year. When necessary, annual IEP meetings are scheduled along with revision IEP meetings. The student and parents are invited to attend along with the student's case manager, teachers, administration and special education manager.
1d	The school protects the rights of ELL students.	School Presentation Classroom Observations	The WIDA Screener is used to identify students. ELL students are invited to get support via Live Lessons that are geared towards their proficiency level. Monitored students each have an Issue Aware ticket created where all teachers are invited to share information about the student's success and difficulties on a monthly basis. English Language Learners complete the ACCESS for ELs 2.0 Test (WIDA) on an annual basis.

Measure	Description	Evidence Collected Through	Takeaways
3a	The school complies with governance requirements.	School Presentation Board Focus Group	The Nevada Connections Board meets on a regular basis and has taken steps to ask questions and monitor progress at Nevada Connections Academy. During the board focus group, board members reported that they understand that it is important for them to make sure they know what is going on at the school.
3b	The school holds management accountable.	School Presentation	School leaders are evaluated each year as overseen by the School Board.
4a	The school protects the rights of all students.	School Presentation	Cultural/inclusivity initiatives have included unconscious bias as well as allyship trainings for all staff. School staff is committed to a representative and inclusive curriculum for student population, including using names, language, vocabulary, pronouns, and visuals that include a diverse representation of race, gender, socio-economic background, orientation, abilities, and religion.
5b	The school complies with health and safety requirements.	School Presentation Classroom Observations	FERPA regulations are strictly followed. Extra caution is taken when sharing Live Lesson recordings. The counseling department holds regular Live Lessons to support Social Emotional Needs and students identified as needing extra support have an Issue Aware ticket created where counseling team monitors them and communicates with them on a regular basis.

SITE EVALUATION FINDINGS

STRENGTHS

A Summary of Strengths as observed through academic achievement indicators, classroom observations, focus group feedback and portions of the Organizational Performance Evidence are found within the body of the report and summarized here.

1. Nevada Connections Academy has taken steps during the 2020-2021 school year to strengthen their academic and organizational alignment to the school's mission statement. These steps include monitoring of the Nevada School Performance Framework, addressing school improvement issues as described in their School Improvement Plan, a new "Flipped Classroom" format and a focus on college and career readiness. There is a greater understanding and emphasis on an improved graduation rate and a new commitment to Dual Credit at the high school level.
2. Students attending Nevada Connections come from all over the state of Nevada and the online format provides an alternative way to learn. For students wishing to work ahead and those with self-monitoring skills, the school allows freedom, flexibility and success in many cases. For students with an IEP, 504 plan the teaching staff and special education teachers assist with one-on-one and small group sessions.
3. Nevada Connections Academy provides a physical and emotionally safe alternative education program. Students reported that they have direct, meaningful communication with their teachers. In addition, during the classroom observations, the SPCSA team noticed warm personal respectful interactions. Students reported that instructional staff and leadership are highly responsive to student ideas and wanted changes for curricular activities.

CHALLENGES

A summary of challenges as observed through academic achievement indicators, classroom observations, focus group feedback and portions of the Organizational Performance Framework Evidence are described within the body of the report and summarized here.

1. With performance levels previously below average, Nevada Connections Academy is working to improve achievement levels for students and subgroups. The school board, leaders, and staff reported that they have a deeper understanding of the school's index scores as they relate to the Nevada School Performance Framework. The Nevada Connections team of educators has created and submitted a School Improvement Plan and are currently taking steps to increase graduation rates as well as overall academic proficiency and growth measures of achievement. This is a primary challenge at Nevada Connections Academy.

2. Many students at Nevada Connections belong to student groups that are considered “at-risk” for not graduating from high school. This includes students with an IEP, EL students, students qualifying for Title I, as well as those in Foster Care and those experiencing homelessness. Some students embrace the online learning structure at the school because they feel safe and secure learning in this manner, however a portion of these students may be seeking the online learning environment because they have experienced trauma or barriers in the past to the brick and mortar school setting. It is not surprising that the Nevada Connections leaders have identified that engagement of credit deficient students is a challenge. To add to the complexity of this challenge, poor motivation has been identified as a decisive factor in contributing to high drop-out rates (Artino, 2008; Keller, 2008). Therefore, student motivation is considered a crucial factor for success in online learning environments (Artino, 2008; Keller, 2008). The ability to effectively motivate and engage all students including those at risk for dropping out of school and those who are credit deficient is a complex and primary challenge at Nevada Connections Academy.
3. During our classroom observations and within the explanation of the student self-directed portion of the learning platform, the SPCSA team did not observe a strong process of the implementation of formative assessment at the school. The SPCSA team did observe strong relationships between teachers and students and a complete commitment to helping students to achieve; however a system to incorporate the sharing of learning targets, providing timely and clear feedback and student goal setting seem to be inconsistently applied to each of the different learning formats that take place at the school. This is a major challenge because formative assessment comprised of clear learning targets, feedback, and student goal setting can significantly raise student achievement, empower teachers, and assist students to become self-regulated, more motivated students.
4. Nevada Connections Academy has described their learning platform as a Triad, with (1) highly trained teachers, (2) high quality standards aligned curriculum, and (3) learning coaches. At Nevada Connections Academy (NCA), virtual school parents serve as face-to-face learning coaches responsible for their children’s day-to-day completion of work. However, in grades 9–12 the school states that online students start to take charge of their education—setting goals, working independently, and exploring their future options. Although family members expressed that they have high levels of satisfaction with the school, they did say that current communication systems could be improved. Families reported that that they receive several e-mails per day from a variety of school sources and this can be confusing. Parents also said they would like to have the emails have the name of the class which would help them differentiate between different lessons and classes. In addition, school leaders expressed that one of the challenges at the school is family unresponsiveness to critically important e-mails and that the school sends up to six e-mails on a routine basis. There appears to be a need to develop a clear procedure/protocol for incoming and outgoing messaging at the school. Because this is such an important element in the school model, it is recommended that the school consider creating a clear-cut procedure for e-mail, text, and phone call communications. Improving communication is a challenge at the school.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommended items are provided so charters may increase their school-wide ratings as well as their overall success. SPCSA School Support Team members will follow up on each listed recommendation.

1. In order to improve school performance levels, the SPCSA recommends taking time to build upon the variety of distance learning practices to become more skilled, purposeful, and intentional with this platform. We suggest using what has been learned in both face-to-face and distance learning environments to leverage what works best to impact student achievement. In both settings, research has shown (Fisher, Frey & Hattie, 2020) that the following best practices apply to both settings:
 - Fostering student self-regulation is crucial for moving learning to deep and transfer levels.
 - Learning accelerates when the student, not the teacher, is taught to be in control of learning.
 - There needs to be a diversity of instructional approaches (not just some direct instruction and then some off-line independent work).
 - Well-designed peer learning impacts understanding.
 - Feedback in a high-trust environment must be integrated into the learning cycle.
(Fisher et al.,2020)

2. Continue to build “communal” social capital and “relational trust” for students in the school setting. This bonding of youth to classroom teachers, peers, and school activities through trusting and sustained relationships provides protective factors to students from academic failure. Continue to research ways to build or bridge troubled and “at risk” youth to less “at-risk” youth, families and members of the community. This intentional broadening of student perspective, building relationships outside of the school and providing connections to those with necessary resources may foster ownership, autonomy, confidence and capability for those unengaged, credit deficient students. It is recommended that school leaders and staff strengthen the implementation levels in each of these areas and continue to prioritize as you move forward. To this end, continue to track and improve Nevada Connections chronic absenteeism, and retention rates. The *What Works Clearinghouse* recommendations include the following:
 - A strong data tracking system
 - Adult advocates
 - Additional academic support
 - A personalized learning environment
 - Rigorous and relevant instruction for students

3. Guide and support school leaders, teachers, and students to join forces in establishing a clearly defined formative assessment process in order to generate powerful learning outcomes and change the culture from assessment of learning to assessment for learning. The purpose is to raise standards of achievement, improve teacher quality and control over teaching, and vastly improve students’ ability to learn more and become self-aware learners and raise levels of student resilience. It is recommended that the Nevada Connections team focus on three elements within the formative assessment process.
 - a. Establish clear learning targets and criteria for success. This means that students can do more than state an objective or explain information about an assignment. As part of each lesson, students should know what they are expected to learn and why it is important. This

is especially important in distance learning as students can get lost in the tasks and are sometimes not sure what they are supposed to be learning. When students focus on getting the work done, they may lose sight of the learning that should be taking place and do poorly on assessments. The criteria for success are used to make sure that students know what success looks like. Success criteria can look like checklists, rubrics, exemplars, and teacher modeling.

- b. Improve the use and frequency of feedback provided to students. Effective feedback affects student learning in two ways. First, information from clear feedback supports achievement. It helps students realize which knowledge and skills are strong and which are weak. It helps students move from misconceptions to a clearer understanding through targeted explanation of particular points and suggestions about what or how to study or practice next. Second, clear descriptive feedback supports motivation because students begin to see that improvement is something they can control, and they know what to do next.
 - c. Foster student goal setting. Students learn best when they are actively and intentionally engaged in their own learning. School leaders can encourage teachers to value and include skill development in goal setting as an integral part of their classroom practice. When teachers help students set goals that are just right in terms of being specific and challenging, with a high probability for success, there is a great effect on student achievement. To promote student achievement, goal setting must be a part of the daily life of the classroom and taught across the content areas and continuously refined.
4. Consider making refinements to the existing communication methods. Family members requested that e-mails have the name of the class, and teacher included in the e-mail in an easily identifiable manner. A systematic approach to sending fewer e-mails may be helpful to learning coaches, family members, and students.
 5. Use the results from the most recent CASEL inquiry at the Nevada Connections High School to guide student social emotional learning. In the most recent data, for “Self-Management” the following tasks were rated as either difficult or very difficult by the Nevada Connections Academy Student Survey results.

Getting through something even when feeling frustrated:	Difficult-43%	Very Difficult-13%
Finishing tasks even when they are hard for me:	Difficult-39%	Very Difficult-11%
Setting Goals for myself	Difficult-25%	Very Difficult-7%
Doing my schoolwork, even when I don't feel like it	Difficult-34%	Very Difficult-9%
Being Prepared for tests	Difficult-31%	Very Difficult 7%

[http://reports.nevadaschoolclimate.org/Report/2019-20%20fall/English/State%20Sponsored%20Charter%20Schools/Nevada%20Connections%20Academy%20High%20\(9-12\).pdf](http://reports.nevadaschoolclimate.org/Report/2019-20%20fall/English/State%20Sponsored%20Charter%20Schools/Nevada%20Connections%20Academy%20High%20(9-12).pdf)

From CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) School data-Renewal Application dated Oct. 2019

DEFICIENCIES

There were no identified deficiencies for Nevada Connections Academy during this site evaluation. To be clear, this does not mean that the current academic performance of the school is adequate or that it is meeting state standards. Rather, this should be understood to mean that the site evaluation did not identify a deficiency during the actual evaluation process.