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2. Approval of the June 24, 2016 SPCSA Action Minutes (**Page 1**)
3. Approval of Consent Approval  
*Information concerning the following consent agenda items has been provided to Board members for study prior to the meeting. Unless a Board member has a question concerning a particular item and asks that it be withdrawn from the consent list, items are approved through one action. (Page 5)*
  - Possible Approval of the ACT Aspire Contract
  - Possible Approval of the Charter Application Timeline
4. Update and discussion of the NACSA agency recommendations (**Page 10**)
5. Consideration and possible action on the America Leadership Academy charter application (**Page 71**)
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10. Consideration and possible action on the Somerset Academy amendment request (**Page 148**)
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12. Quest Academy and Silver State Charter School receiver update (Josh Kern, The Ten Square Group) (**Page 163**)
13. Update and possible action regarding staff discussions with Nevada Connections Academy regarding school's plan for improvement. The Board will receive an update on and may discuss the status of discussions between SPCSA staff and School officials and attorneys regarding the school's efforts to develop a plan of improvement. The Board may register approval or disapproval of the plan or direct staff to take further action or require adjustments to the plan. (**Page 166**)
14. Update and possible action regarding staff discussions with Beacon Academy regarding school's plan for improvement. The Board will receive an update on and may discuss the status of discussions between SPCSA staff and School officials and attorneys regarding the school's efforts to develop a plan of improvement. The Board may register approval or disapproval of the plan or require adjustments to the plan (**Page 167**)
15. Update, discussion and possible action regarding the State Public Charter School Authority's Strategic Plan (**Page 168**)
16. Authorization for the Agency to budget and charge up to 2 percent to support NACSA business findings and ongoing discussions regarding Agency budget request (**Page 172**)

STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY

SUPPORTING DOCUMENT

**S U B J E C T: Approval of the June 24, 2016**

**SPCSA Action Minutes**

- /  /   Public Workshop
- /  /   Public Hearing
- /  /   Consent Agenda
- /  /   Regulation Adoption
- /  /   Approval
- /  /   Appointments
- /  x/   Information
- /  x/   Action

MEETING DATE: July 29, 2016  
 AGENDA ITEM: 2  
 NUMBER OF ENCLOSURE(S): 1

**PRESENTER(S): Adam Johnson, Chair SPCSA**

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

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**BUDGET ACCOUNT (FOR PRINTING CHARGES ONLY):**

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**LENGTH OF TIME EXPECTED FOR PRESENTATION (IN MINUTES): 5 Mins**

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**SUBMITTED BY:** \_\_\_\_\_

**NEVADA STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY**

**June 24, 2016**

Legislative Building  
Room 2135  
Carson City, Nevada

And

Grant Sawyer Building  
Room 4400  
Las Vegas, Nevada

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING**

**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:**

**In Las Vegas:**

Adam Johnson  
Marc Abelman  
Robert McCord  
Nora Luna

**In Carson City:**

Melissa Mackedon  
Kathleen Conaboy

**Teleconference:**

Elissa Wahl

**BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT**

**None**

**AUTHORITY STAFF PRESENT:**

**In Las Vegas:**

Robert Whitney, Deputy Attorney General  
Patrick Gavin, Director, State Public Charter School Authority  
Brian Scroggins, Deputy Director, State Public Charter School Authority  
Nya Berry, Education Program Professional, State Public Charter School Authority

**In Carson City:**

Jessica Hoban, Administrative Services Officer, State Public Charter School Authority  
Joan Jurgensen, Education Program Professional, State Public Charter School Authority  
Danny Peltier, Management Analyst I, State Public Charter School Authority  
Tanya Osborne, Administrative Assistant, State Public Charter School Authority

**LEGAL STAFF PRESENT:**

**In Las Vegas:**

Greg Ott, Deputy Attorney General

**AUDIENCE IN ATTENDANCE:**

**In Las Vegas:**

Attendance Sheet Attached

**In Carson City:**

Attendance Sheet Attached

**CALL TO ORDER; ROLL CALL; PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE; APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

**Member Abelman moved for a flexible agenda. Member Conaboy seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.**

**Agenda Item 1 – Public Comment**

**Agenda Item 6 – Quest Academy Receiver Update**

Josh Kern summarized the key developments of Quest Preparatory Academy.

**Agenda Item 2 – Approval of the May 12 and 13, 2016 SPCSA Retreat Action Minutes and May 20, 2016 SPCSA Action Minutes**

**Member Conaboy moved to approve minutes with corrections as submitted. Member Mackedon seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously. No further discussion.**

**Agenda Item 3 – Update, discussion and possible action regarding the State Public Charter School Authority’s Strategic Plan**

Director Gavin spoke about the strategic plan for opening and sustaining all the public schools that reflect the demographics in their community.

**Agenda Item 5 – Update on Notices of Intent received by the SPCSA for the 2016 Summer Application Cycle**

Director Gavin spoke about the receipt of 18 notices of intent by the deadline set forth by the Authority.

**Agenda Item 4 – Discussion and possible action on the SPCSA Pre-K Memorandum**

Nya Berry spoke about early learning and the pre-K program.

**Member Luna motioned that we grandfather self-authority to enter into an LOU with pre-K. Member Abelman seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously. No further discussion.**

**Agenda Item 7 – Update on the Leadership for Education Equity Fellow**

Director Gavin spoke about Leadership for Education is a national no profit organization.

**Agenda Item 8 – Public Comment #2**

None

**Chair Johnson adjourned the meeting at: 11:46 am**

## STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY

SUPPORTING DOCUMENT**S U B J E C T: Approval of Consent Approval**

<u>  /  /  </u>	Public Workshop
<u>  /  /  </u>	Public Hearing
<u>  /  /  </u>	Consent Agenda
<u>  /  /  </u>	Regulation Adoption
<u>  /  /  </u>	Approval
<u>  /  /  </u>	Appointments
<u>  /  x/  </u>	Information
<u>  /  x/  </u>	Action

MEETING DATE: July 29, 2016

AGENDA ITEM: 3

NUMBER OF ENCLOSURE(S): 1

**PRESENTER(S): Adam Johnson, Chair SPCSA****FISCAL IMPACT:****BUDGET ACCOUNT (FOR PRINTING CHARGES ONLY):****LENGTH OF TIME EXPECTED FOR PRESENTATION (IN MINUTES): 5 Mins**

- Possible Approval of the ACT Aspire Contract
- Possible Approval of the Charter Application Timeline

**SUBMITTED BY:** \_\_\_\_\_

**BRIAN SANDOVAL**  
*Governor*

**STATE OF NEVADA**

**PATRICK GAVIN**  
*Executive Director*



**STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY**

**1749 North Stewart Street Suite 40  
Carson City, Nevada 89706-2543  
(775) 687 - 9174 • Fax: (775) 687 - 9113**

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**BRIEFING MEMORANDUM**

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**TO:** SPCSA Board  
**FROM:** Patrick Gavin  
**SUBJECT:** Agenda Item # 3: Consent Agenda  
**DATE:** July 29, 2016

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**Attached please find two separate briefing memoranda with recommendations for possible action:**

- 1) ACT Aspire Contract Recommendation**
- 2) Winter Application Cycle Timeline Recommendation**

**BRIAN SANDOVAL**  
*Governor*

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**BRIEFING MEMORANDUM**

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**TO:** SPCSA Board  
**FROM:** Patrick Gavin  
**SUBJECT:** ACT Aspire Policy  
**DATE:** July 29, 2016

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**Background:**

The Authority's current ACT Aspire contract remains in effect through December 31, 2019. The Agency is currently pursuing Interim Finance Committee approval to increase the funding amount transferred from the reserve category to ensure that there is sufficient money available to fund additional ACT Aspire testing for schools with increased enrollment in the tested grades.

Following the 2015 statewide testing irregularity, Agency staff consulted with the Department of Education to determine the best course of action to ensure that the Authority was able to fulfill its legal obligations related to an annual assessment of academic performance for each charter school in its portfolio. Due to the irregularity, the timeline for the issuance of new NSPF ratings and the proficiency status and student academic growth data necessary to calculate elementary and middle school student achievement outcomes under the Authority framework would be delayed until the fall of 2017 at the earliest. Moreover, delays in the rollout and applicability of the End of Course examinations were likely to limit high school data to only two measures, the 11<sup>th</sup> grade ACT and the graduation rate calculated by the Department, until 2019 or later. The outcome of these delays was likely to result in a 3 to 5 year delay in growth and status data for charter schools statewide. Based on the Authority's pre-existing contract with ACT Aspire for the high school grades, the alignment of the assessment with the Nevada Academic Content Standards, and the need to begin the funding and contract expansion processes immediately to ensure the expansion of the contract in time for a spring administration, staff sought initial guidance from the Authority on this matter in the summer of 2015. Following initial guidance to proceed with the expansion of Aspire, staff began the IFC and contract expansion processes and notified schools of the need to expand their testing calendars to accommodate Spring Aspire testing in July 2015.

The SPCSA Board approved staff's recommendation of the expansion of the ACT Aspire assessment at the September 28, 2015 Board meeting. Subsequent to that vote, Congress passed the Every Student Succeeds Act in December 2015. The requirements of the Act will impose further delays in the calculation of statewide



accountability ratings, extending the elementary and middle school data delay until 2018. Pursuant to Authority approval, staff continued to pursue and obtained Interim Finance Committee and Board of Examiners approval for purchasing additional grade levels. BOE approval was granted on [December 8, 2015](#) contingent upon IFC approval. That approval was granted at the December 16, 2015 Interim Finance Committee meeting via Work Program #C34196.

After extensive stakeholder engagement, including an un-budgeted day-long meeting on January 27, 2016 with administrative representation from schools from across the state, staff recommended that the Authority provide schools with some flexibility in the grades they test at the February 22, 2016 Authority meeting. The Authority elected to provide schools with such flexibility, providing each charter school system with the option to commit to one of three different testing options for 2015-16 and beyond:

- Option 1
  - Test all grades 3-10
    - This option provides the most robust and consistent dataset
    - It allows for growth calculations across all grade levels
- Option 2
  - Test grades 3-4, 6-7, and 9-10
    - This option has the advantage of avoiding triple-testing in the heavily assessed 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades
    - It allows for growth calculations between some grade levels
- Option 3
  - Test grades 4-7 and 9-10
    - This option has the advantage of limiting assessments in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, addressing concerns about first time high stakes test takers being overwhelmed, while avoiding triple-testing in 8<sup>th</sup> grade
    - It allows for growth calculations across most grade levels

Schools concluded ACT Aspire testing in late May 2016. We anticipate that participation and assessment results will be available by the early fall.

### **Recommendation:**

Approve staff's request Interim Finance Committee approval to increase funding authority for the ACT Aspire to ensure that the contract is sufficient to cover enrolled students at each school, based on their 2015-16 testing plan. Delay in approval by the Authority will delay review of the request by the Executive Budget Office and the Legislative Counsel Bureau and subsequent direct or delegated IFC and BOE approval. Any delay in their review may impact schools ability to plan effectively due to concerns about the availability of the assessment at the beginning of the testing window due to the timing of all necessary legislative and executive approvals.

**BRIAN SANDOVAL**  
*Governor*

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**BRIEFING MEMORANDUM**

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**TO:** SPCSA Board  
**FROM:** Patrick Gavin  
**SUBJECT:** Winter Application Cycle  
**DATE:** July 29, 2016

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Staff makes the following recommendations regarding the upcoming winter charter application cycle:

1. Utilize the same Track A-D RFP templates with minimal changes based on staff and applicant feedback.
2. Application goes live on SPCSA website on/about August 15 (may vary slightly depending on timing of bullet 4a).
3. Notice of Intent deadline of October 1.
  - a. Based on feedback from applicants that they needed significantly more time between filing the Notice, receiving applicant training, and submitting the application. In a recent survey of applicants, 25 percent of respondents felt that the current 45 day opening was sufficient. The remaining 75 percent recommended a full 120 day. An October 1 due date provides 105 days for development of the application after submission of the Notice of Intent.
  - b. October 1 Notice of Intent deadline also permits applicants to submit an early application for Federal Charter Schools Program funding by NDE's proposed mid-October deadline.
  - c. October 1 Notice of Intent deadline also allows for the scheduling of separate application trainings at donated school sites in both the North and the South (most likely coinciding with an Authority board meeting), as 100 percent of applicants surveyed reported that video-conferenced training was inadequate due to limited technical capabilities at donated school sites.
  - d. NOI submission could be done via existing Wufoo platform or via new Epicenter platform (see 4a) depending on status of workflow design.
4. Application deadline of January 15.
  - a. The Agency intends to roll out a new application submission process using the Epicenter platform to allow for more streamlined submission and at least initial review.
5. Likely applicant hearings/charter award decisions in April/May depending on any related purchasing/contracting timelines for external reviewers, including approval of work programs necessary to fund external reviewers.

These timelines would not impact the invitational, expedited track for proven providers approved by the Board in December 2015.

## STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY

SUPPORTING DOCUMENT**S U B J E C T: Update and discussion of the  
NACSA agency recommendations**

<u>  /  /  </u>	Public Workshop
<u>  /  /  </u>	Public Hearing
<u>  /  /  </u>	Consent Agenda
<u>  /  /  </u>	Regulation Adoption
<u>  /  /  </u>	Approval
<u>  /  /  </u>	Appointments
<u>  /  x/  </u>	Information
<u>  /  x/  </u>	Action

MEETING DATE: July 29, 2016

AGENDA ITEM: 4

NUMBER OF ENCLOSURE(S): 1

**PRESENTER(S): Adam Johnson, Chair SPCSA****FISCAL IMPACT:**  

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**BUDGET ACCOUNT (FOR PRINTING CHARGES ONLY):**  

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**LENGTH OF TIME EXPECTED FOR PRESENTATION (IN MINUTES): 30 Mins**  

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**SUBMITTED BY:** \_\_\_\_\_

**BRIAN SANDOVAL**  
*Governor*

**STATE OF NEVADA**

**PATRICK GAVIN**  
*Executive Director*



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### **BRIEFING MEMORANDUM**

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**TO:** SPCSA Board  
**FROM:** Patrick Gavin  
**SUBJECT:** Agenda Item # 4: NACSA  
**DATE:** July 29, 2016

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#### **Background:**

Pursuant to [NRS 388A.150\(3\)](#), the State Public Charter School Authority is expected to “[s]erve as a model of the best practices in sponsoring charter schools and foster a climate in this State in which all charter schools, regardless of sponsor, can flourish.” Further, [NRS 388A.223\(2\)](#) requires that all sponsors “develop policies and practices that are consistent with state laws and regulations governing charter schools.” The statute further requires that sponsors “review and evaluate nationally recognized policies and practices for sponsoring organizations of charter schools” in their development of those policies and practices. Over the past decade, Nevada’s statewide charter authorizing function has sought to align its policies and practices with the [Principles and Standards](#) of the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA).

Since 2011, Nevada has participated in two federally funded external evaluations of its policies, practices, and implementation conducted under a National Activities grant of the Federal Charter Schools Program. NACSA is a subrecipient of that grant through the National Charter School Resource Center and Safal Partners. The most [recent evaluation work](#) was conducted by NACSA in the fall of 2015, following the passage of [SB 509](#) during the 2015 Legislative Session. NACSA staff [presented](#) their findings from that evaluation of the Authority’s practices in January of this year. That work built on a far [earlier evaluation](#) of state level authorizing practices which was conducted on the eve of the passage of [SB 212](#), the bill which moved Nevada’s statewide authorizing function from the Department of Education to the newly created Authority during the 2011 Legislative Session.

The most recent external evaluation identified a key concern of Authority members and Agency leadership: a significant gap between the Agency’s statutory responsibilities and its capacity to effectively execute its duties and powers as a charter school authorizer. Indeed, the Authority board had previously directed staff to commission a more in-depth review of the Agency’s capacity in light of the Authority’s multiple roles: state agency, charter school authorizer, and local education

agency. Following an open procurement, the Agency engaged NACSA to conduct an evaluation of the Agency's capacity, organizational structure, and processes in light of its unique statutory and regulatory context. The specific statutory authority to evaluate the Agency's capacity rests in [NRS 388A.223\(2\)\(a\)](#), which requires the Authority to determine the "organizational capacity and infrastructure of the sponsor for sponsorship of charter schools" as a key component of the policies and practices adopted by the Authority.

Based on that review, NACSA has compiled an analysis and recommendations. This document can be found in the Meeting Materials and is linked to within this memorandum. The authors of the current report, Elisa Westapher and Laurence Stanton, will spend the first portion of their presentation providing an overview of authorizing and NACSA's *Principles and Standards* and then will discuss their report. Board members are requested to review the linked materials with particular attention to both the NACSA *Principles and Standards* and their latest report on Nevada, [Charting the Course: An Assessment of Organizational Structure and Capacity to Support High Quality Charter School Authorizing](#). Those members wishing to learn more about the evolution of the state's authorizing policies and their implementation may wish to review the past evaluations and the presentation from the January Authority board meeting. Authority members may wish to prepare questions in advance as there will be an opportunity for questions and answers at the end of the presentation.

**Recommendation:**

Approve NACSA's recommendations regarding staffing changes, including those specifically required by statute, and direct staff to appeal to the Governor's Office for consideration of these investments in the Agency Budget Request.



**CHARTING THE COURSE:  
AN ASSESSMENT OF  
ORGANIZATIONAL  
STRUCTURE AND CAPACITY  
TO SUPPORT HIGH-QUALITY  
AUTHORIZING**

**NEVADA STATE PUBLIC  
CHARTER SCHOOL  
AUTHORITY**

**Presented by:  
Elisa Westapher  
Larry Stanton  
July 29, 2016**

# <sup>14</sup>AGENDA

- About NACSA
- Authorizing Principles
- Organizational Structure and Capacity Report
  - Policy Analysis
  - Proposed Staffing Structure
  - Next Steps

# <sup>15</sup> ABOUT NACSA

## MISSION

To improve student achievement through responsible charter school oversight in the public interest.

Not-For-Profit, Non-Partisan,  
Membership Association

117 Authorizer Members

- Representing 3,700 charter schools (approximately 60% of charter schools)

## AUTHORIZER DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

- Authorizer Start-Up
- Application Decision-Making
- Performance Management
- Board and Staff Training
- Authorizer Evaluation
- Due Diligence

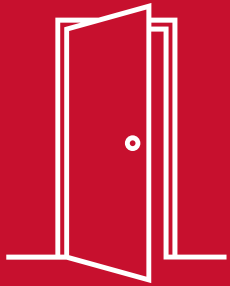


# PRINCIPLES OF CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZING



**IMPROVE  
EDUCATIONAL  
OUTCOMES**

# IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS



## APPROVING

Approving only strong, demonstrably viable applications.



## RENEWING

Renewing schools only if they meet or exceed performance expectations.

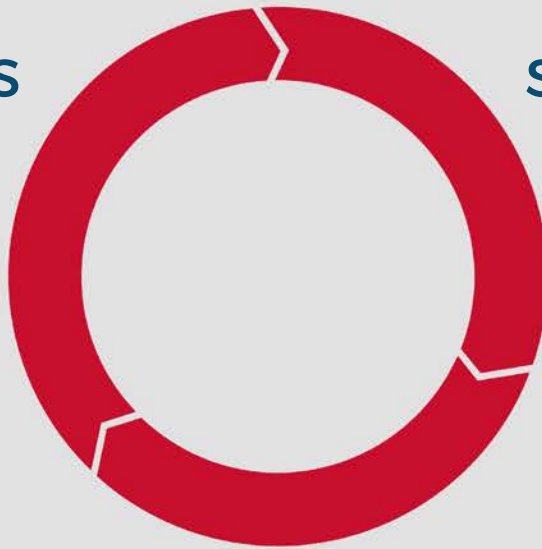


## CLOSING

Making the hard decisions to close the schools that persistently fail.

# <sup>18</sup> ESSENTIAL PRACTICES

PRINCIPLES



STANDARDS

ESSENTIAL  
PRACTICES

## APPLICATIONS

- Timeline
- Criteria
- Interview
- External Panel

## PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

- Initial five-year term
- Performance contract
- Financial Audit
- Annual report
- Renewal criteria
- Revocation criteria

## CAPACITY

- Mission
- Authorizing staff

<sup>19</sup>  
**PERFORMANCE  
MANAGEMENT CYCLE**



20

# PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

Academic

Is the academic program a success?

Financial

Is the school financially viable?

Organizational

Is the organization effective and well run?

# CHARTING THE COURSE: AN ASSESSMENT OF ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND CAPACITY TO SUPPORT HIGH-QUALITY AUTHORIZING

NEVADA STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL  
AUTHORITY

# <sup>22</sup>POLICY ANALYSIS

## Statutory Roles and Responsibilities

- Purpose
- Authorizing Responsibilities
- LEA Designation

# 23 STATUTORY PURPOSE

- Authorize charter schools of high-quality
- To provide oversight to ensure schools maintain high educational and operational standards
- Serve as a model of best practices



# AUTHORIZING RESPONSIBILITIES

## Statutory Responsibilities

- Explicit set of authorizing responsibilities
- Lifecycle of charter
- Written charter school law
- Performance frameworks
- Renewal and revocations tied to performance framework
- Reconstitution

# <sup>25</sup>POLICY ISSUES & CHALLENGES

- Staffing
- LEA Designation
- Budget
- Administrative Procedures Act
- Regulatory Powers

# <sup>26</sup>STAFFING

## Statute

- May employ such persons as it deems necessary
- Qualified
- SB 509's staffing mandates

## Current Context

- No authorizing staff
- Current staff does not meet SB 509 mandates
- Budget requests for additional staffing denied

SPCSA must have staff dedicated to charter school authorizing responsibilities.

Make-up of current staffing does not comply with Nevada's charter school law.

# LEA<sup>27</sup> DESIGNATION

## Statute

- For certain purposes
- Directing funds for state and federal categorical grant programs
- Paying special education program units to eligible charter schools
- Schools that receive funds must comply with reporting requirements

## Current Context

- Unusual for ICBs
- Staff spends most time here
- LEA for all purposes per NDE

SPCSA's current LEA responsibilities go beyond such responsibilities outlined in law. Staff spends more time on LEA duties than other comparable authorizers.

# <sup>28</sup>BUDGET

## Statute

- Permitted fee of up to 2%
- To cover administrative costs associated with sponsorship
- Two-year budget; legislature must approve
- Budget office must approve amendments

## Current Context

- Budget = 1% fee
- Large reserves but can't access
- Lengthy and cumbersome budget amendment process
- Trouble accessing appropriated funds

At a minimum, SPCSA should have access to the full 1.5 percent sponsorship fee.

SPCSA's inability to access its appropriated funds is severely limiting its ability to do its job.

# ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES ACT

## Statute

- To establish minimum procedural requirements for the regulation-making and adjudication procedure of all agencies
- Applicability/non-exempt
- Required regulations
- Contested cases

## Current Context

- Fuzzy
- Questioning of performance frameworks
- More opportunities for litigation
- Only applies to SPCSA (not other authorizers in state)

SPCSA should pursue an exemption from the APA as the APA will put the SPCSA at a disadvantage compared to other authorizers in the state and will open the SPCSA up to increased litigation, which will be time-consuming and resource intensive.

# REG<sup>30</sup>ULATORY POWERS

## Statute

- Requirement to develop policies and practices in key areas
- SB 509 granted SPCSA express regulatory power and required SPCSA to adopt regulations in additional areas and included extensive detail regarding what must be included in those regulations
- Must also review nationally recognized policies and practices for charter school authorizers

## Current Context

- Applicability of APA
- Level of detail
- Legal counsel

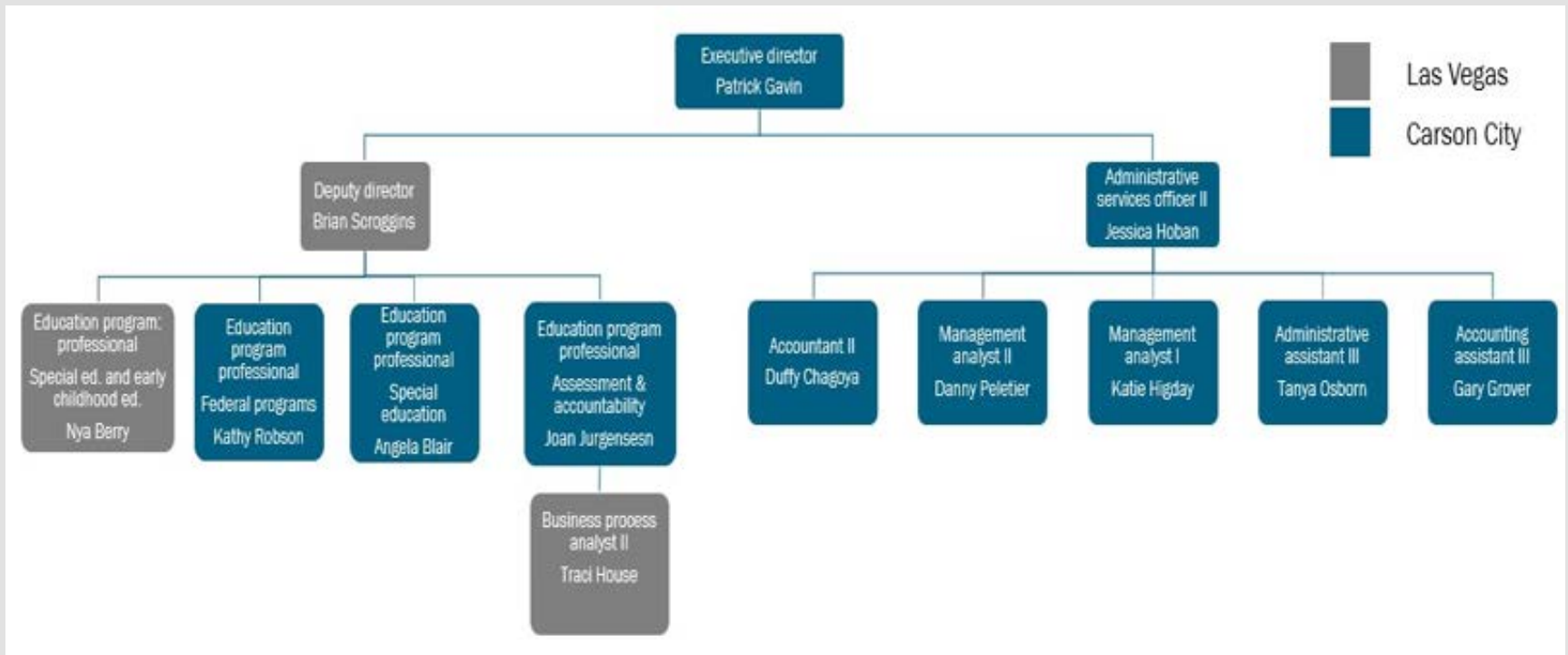
In developing regulations, SPCSA should work closely with a legal counsel and ensure that such regulations are not duplicative, are necessary, and are not too narrowly defined.

# STAFFING RECOMMENDATIONS

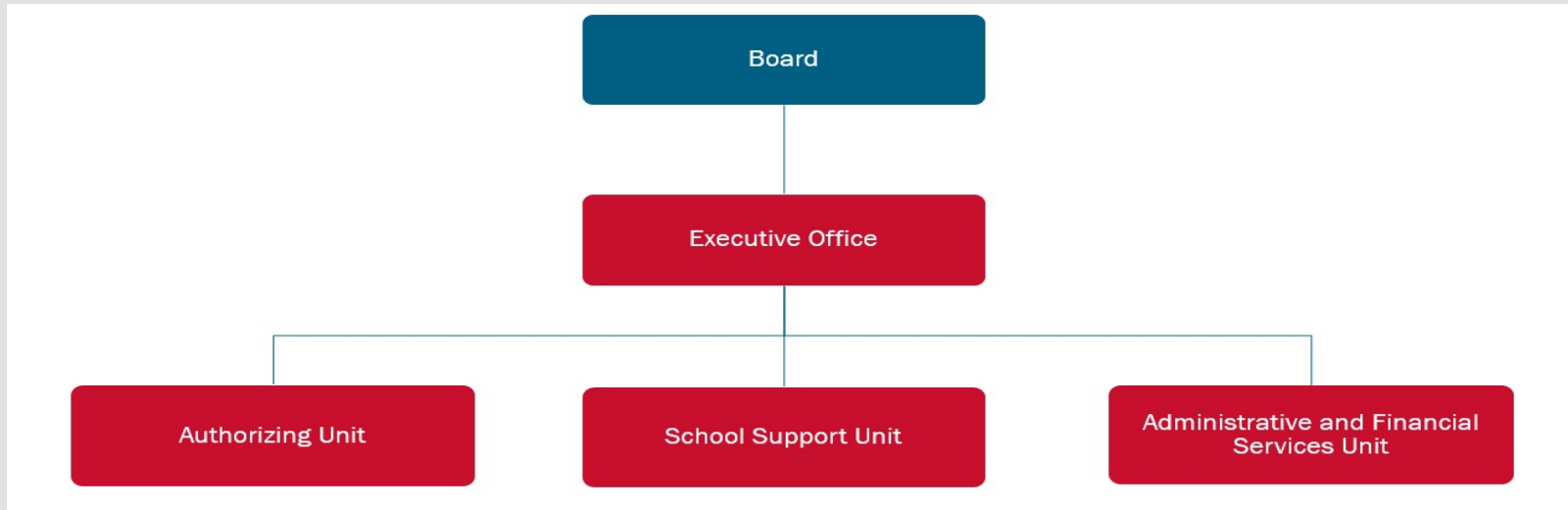
- Build an authorizing unit with capacity necessary for application review, contracting, monitoring and renewal processes
- Review and reconsider the level and nature of school support, oversight and compliance monitoring
- Build capacity in the Las Vegas office
- Provide all staff with continuing education on charter schools and charter school authorizing



# 32 CURRENT ORGANIZATION



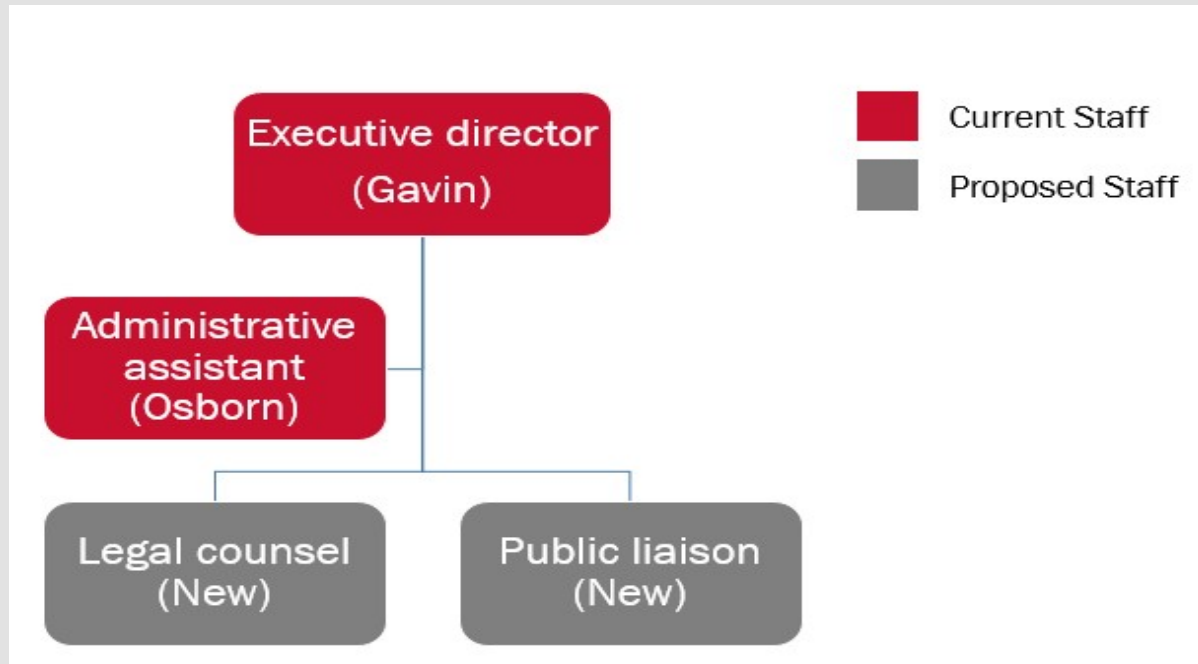
# 33 PROPOSED STRUCTURE



The proposed structure is based on four assumptions:

1. The SPCSA needs to substantially increase the resources available for authorizing activities.
2. The portfolio of schools and enrollment will continue to grow.
3. The SPCSA needs to continue to provide LEA services to schools.
4. The increases in staff will be phased in over the next three years.

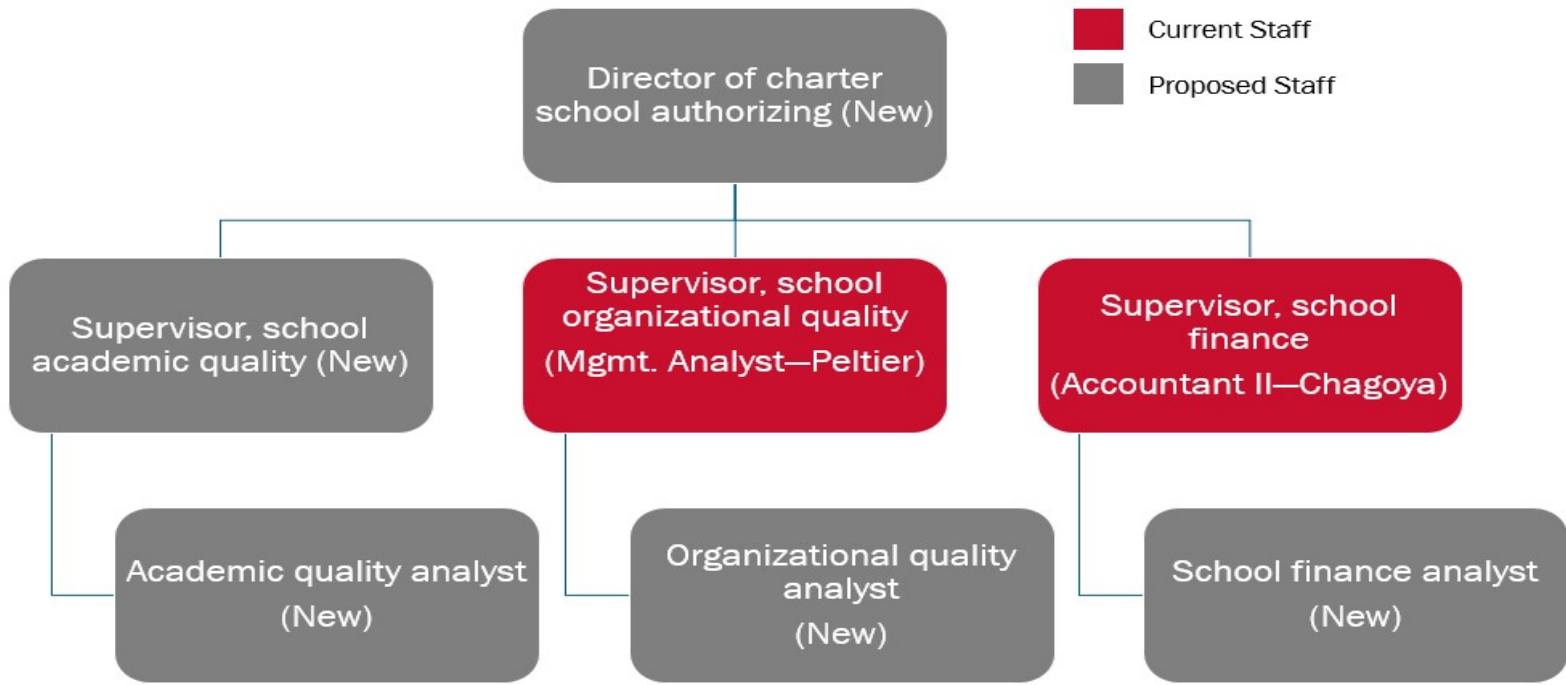
# EXECUTIVE OFFICE



## Charge:

- Providing leadership for the SPCSA and the Nevada charter school sector
- Managing SPCSA staff and resources
- Ensuring that the SPCSA acts consistent with the law and applicable regulations
- Communicating with stakeholders

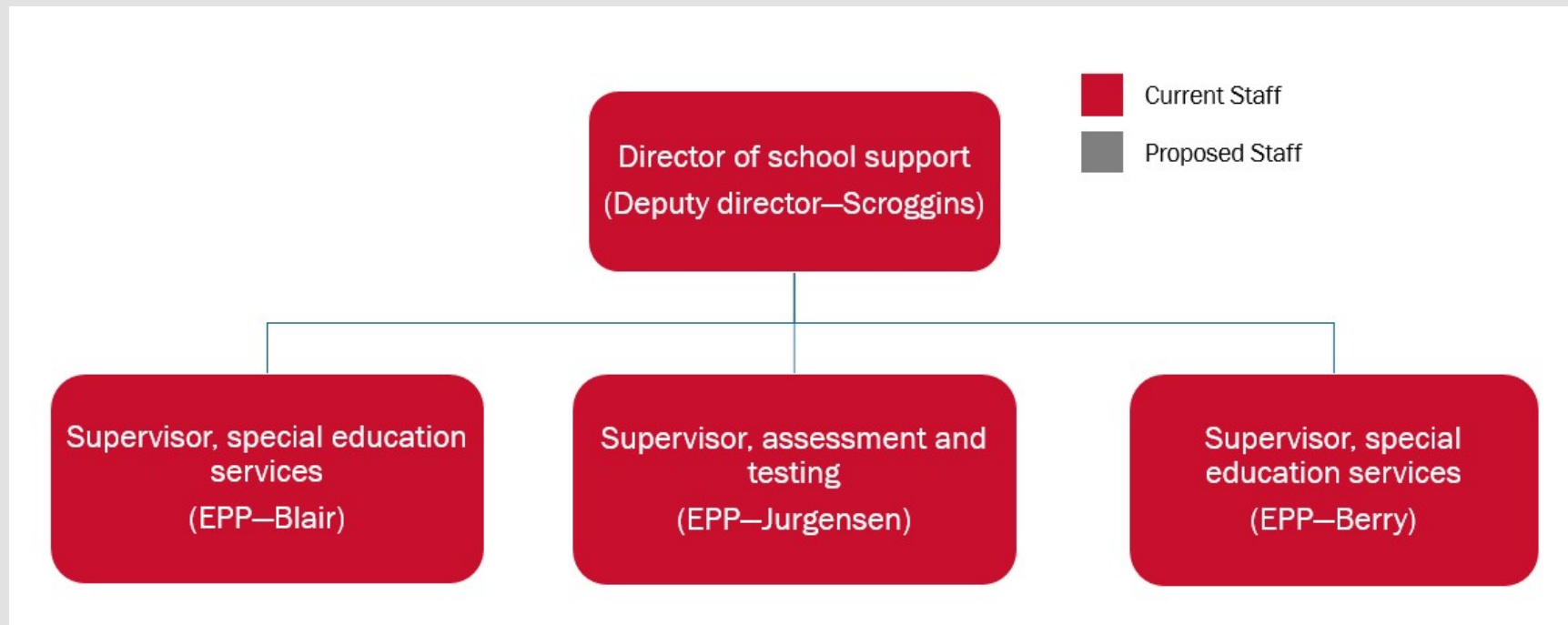
# AUTHORIZING UNIT



## Charge:

- Ensuring that SPCSA authorizes schools consistent with state law and its own policies
- Application review, contracting, monitoring and renewal

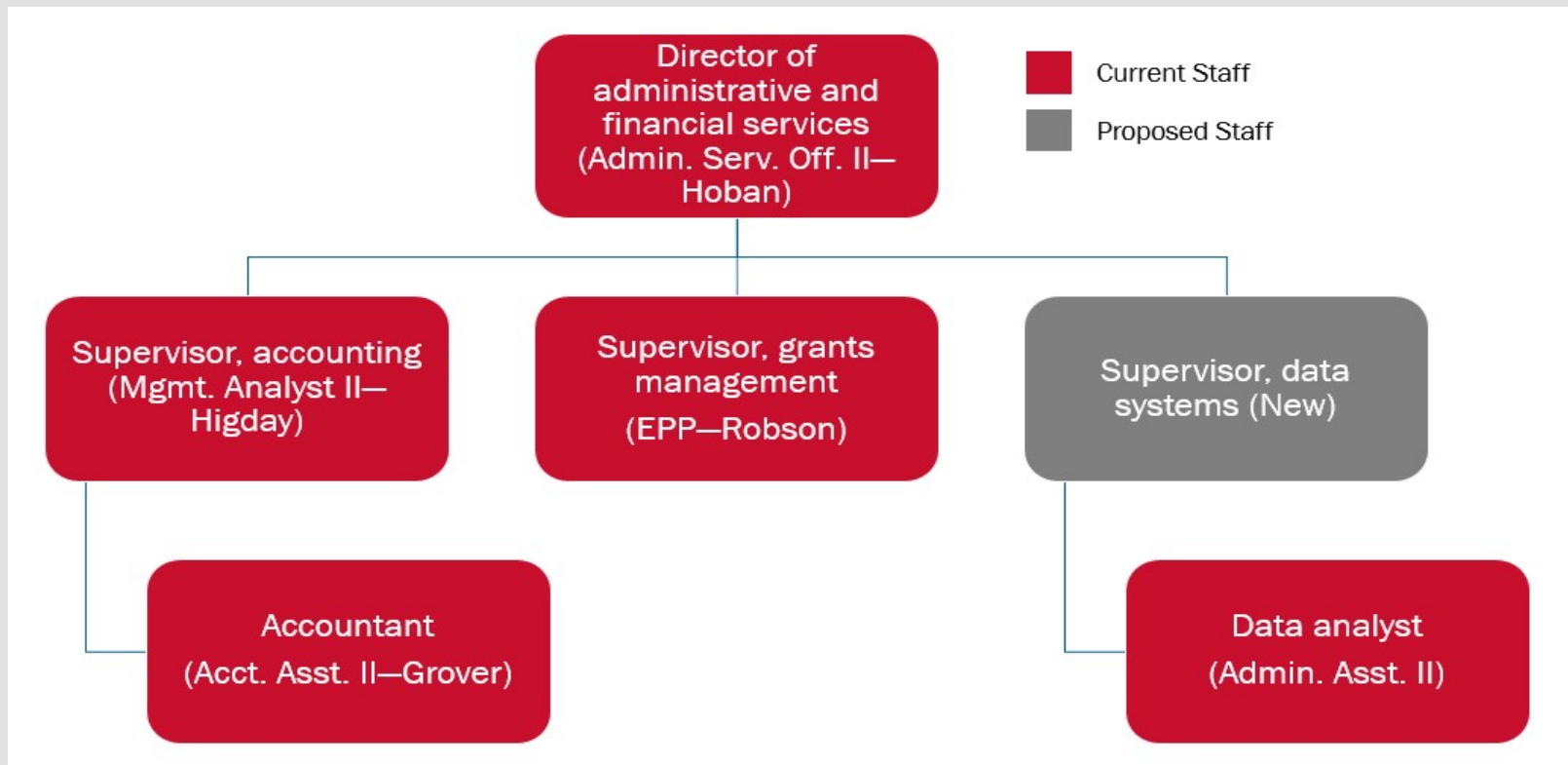
# SCHOOL SUPPORT UNIT



## Charge:

- Provides supports to school and monitors compliance to fulfill the SPCSA's LEA responsibilities regarding special education, federal programs, assessments, and grants management

# ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL SERVICES UNIT



## Charge:

- Allocation, disbursement and monitoring of state and federal funds to schools
- Prepares and manages the SPCSA budget
- Manages the SPCSA's Infinite Campus systems

# STAFFING BENCHMARKS

State-Wide Authorizers	# of Schools/Campuses	# of Students	Total Staff	Authorizing staff	Non-Authorizing staff
Colorado Charter School Institute	35	14,000	18	~9	~9
Hawaii State Public Charter School Commission*	34	~10,000	18	NA	NA
South Carolina Public Charter School District	32	18,500	20	~12	~8
District of Columbia Public Charter School Board*	126	39,000	34	NA	NA
<b>SPCSA (2015-16)</b>	<b>22/37</b>	<b>25,988</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>~2</b>	<b>~11</b>

- The two authorizers with LEA responsibilities, CO and SC, have substantial non-authorizing staff
- All four have staffing levels that are comparable to what is being proposed for SPCSA

# TRANSITION PLAN

## **Phase 1:** Building the SPCSA's leadership capacity

- Director of charter school authorizing
- Supervisor, school academic quality
- Legal counsel

## **Phase 2:** Building authorizing capacity

- Public liaison
- Supervisor, data systems
- Academic quality analyst

## **Phase 3:** Building authorizing depth

- Finance analyst
- Organizational quality analyst

Hire new staff over the next 3 years to match school and enrollment growth.



# RECRUITMENT

Two of the new positions merit a national search for strong candidates with authorizing experience:

- Director of charter school authorizing
- Supervisor, school academic quality

For the other new positions, authorizing experience is less important than experience working with schools, the right mindset and a capacity and willingness to learn.

## Recommendations

- Positions should not be “classified”
- Need competitive salaries
- Conduct national search
- Consider flexibility on location

# STAFF TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- New and incumbent staff need substantial training about charter school authorizing
- Structured orientation program
- NACSA and National Alliance for Public Charter Schools conferences
- NACSA leaders program
- Executive coaching

NACSA's Knowledge Core is a key resource available to SPCSA

# <sup>42</sup> QUESTIONS & ASSISTANCE

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CHARTING THE COURSE: AN ASSESSMENT OF  
ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND CAPACITY TO SUPPORT  
HIGH-QUALITY CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZING

Prepared for:

**NEVADA STATE PUBLIC CHARTER  
SCHOOL AUTHORITY**

Prepared by:

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Date:

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## CHARTING THE COURSE: AN ASSESSMENT OF ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND CAPACITY TO SUPPORT HIGH-QUALITY CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZING

For the past few months, NACSA has worked with the Nevada State Public Charter School Authority (SPCSA) to assess its organizational structure and capacity in relation to its responsibilities under state and federal law and NACSA's *Principles and Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing*. The impetus for this work was a formative authorizer evaluation report NACSA conducted for the SPCSA in fall 2015 (the NACSA Authorizer Evaluation Report). A central theme of the NACSA Authorizer Evaluation Report was the lack of resources (both in terms of time and staffing) being devoted to the SPCSA's authorizing duties. As further described below, existing SPCSA staff members spend approximately 90 percent of their time on school compliance, support and technical assistance and managing relationships with other state entities and only 10 percent on charter school authorizing.

The SPCSA's current allocation of time and resources largely ignores their primary responsibility as a charter school authorizer. As a result, this report further explores this issue and provides the SPCSA with a recommended staffing structure that more closely mirrors the SPCSA's statutorily-defined roles and responsibilities. In addition, this report also addresses certain challenges that are limiting the SPCSA's ability to serve as a high-quality authorizer and fulfill its statutory duties.

This report is divided into the following five sections:

1. Policy Analysis;
2. Current State Analysis;
3. Transition Plan;
4. Human Capital Action Plan; and
5. Recommended Priorities for Authorizing Practice Tool Development.

The Policy Analysis provides a comprehensive assessment of the statutory and regulatory responsibilities of the SPCSA and also addresses certain challenges created or magnified by this legal framework. The Current State Analysis describes how staff time and resources are currently allocated and proposes a new organizational structure to fulfill the SPCSA's statutory responsibilities and key functions of a high-quality authorizer. The Transition Plan outlines how the proposed organizational changes should be implemented and includes suggestions for staff recruitment. Based on the findings of the Current State Analysis, the Human Capital Action Plan provides recommendations for staff training and professional development. Lastly, the Recommended Priorities for Authorizing Practice Tool Development builds off of NACSA's Authorizer Evaluation Report and identifies key areas for practice development and corresponding tools that will help the SPCSA align its processes with national best practice.

## POLICY ANALYSIS

The purpose of this Policy Analysis is to outline the state and federal requirements for which the SPCSA is responsible as both a charter school authorizer and the designated LEA for certain purposes. This policy analysis will serve as a foundation for and frame the staffing and human resource allocation recommendations set forth in the Current State Analysis report below. In addition, the SPCSA's current statutory and regulatory context present multiple challenges for the SPCSA and directly impact the SPCSA's day-to-day work and ability to serve as a quality authorizer. As a result, this Policy Analysis will also identify these challenges and at times, present recommendations for addressing them.<sup>1</sup>

This Policy Analysis is divided into four sections. The first section will discuss the SPCSA's primary roles and responsibilities under Nevada revised statutes, NRS 388A.010 et. seq., and Nevada administrative code, NAC 386.010 et. seq. (together, hereinafter referred to as the "Nevada Charter School Law"). The second section will address the federal laws which the SPCSA is subject to as the LEA for certain designated purposes. The third section will focus on the applicability and impact of the Nevada Administrative Procedure Act, NRS 233B.010 et. seq., on the SPCSA's work. The fourth section will discuss the State Budget Act, NRS 353.150 et. seq., which is currently limiting the SPCSA's ability to use the funds appropriated to the SPCSA by the Nevada legislature.

### Section 1. The SPCSA's Primary Roles and Responsibilities under the Nevada Charter School Law

The Nevada Charter School Law was substantially amended during the 2015 legislative session with the passage of Senate Bill 509 (SB 509). SB 509 addressed a multitude of issues related to charter school authorizing, accountability and autonomy. SB 509 became fully effective as of January 1, 2016 and the changes created by this legislation are incorporated into the analysis below.

**A. A Quality-Driven Purpose.** Pursuant to NRS 388A.150, the SPCSA's purpose is three-fold: (1) to authorize charter schools of *high-quality* throughout Nevada with the goal of expanding the opportunities for students in Nevada, including at-risk students; (2) to provide oversight to the charter schools that it sponsors to ensure that those schools maintain *high educational and operational standards*, preserve autonomy and safeguard the interests of pupils and the community; and (3) serve as a *model of best practices* in sponsoring charter schools and foster a climate in Nevada in which all charter schools, regardless of sponsor, can flourish. Important to note from this purpose statement is the focus on quality and high standards. The SPCSA is to authorize not simply charter schools, but charter schools of high-quality, and its oversight responsibilities are to ensure that schools maintain high educational and operational standards, rather than achieve minimal standards of performance. Lastly, the purpose statement does require that the SPCSA look beyond its role as an authorizer and serve as a model for other authorizers in the state, but it does not direct the SPCSA to provide technical assistance to charter schools. Aside from the executive director, the current organizational structure, as outlined in the Current State Analysis, does not include individuals directly devoted to

<sup>1</sup> Note: This Policy Analysis does not constitute a legal opinion or purport to provide legal guidance regarding the interpretation of certain statutes and regulations or whether recommendations presented in this section would be permissible under Nevada law.

authorizing. As a result, the current organizational structure does not allow the SPCSA to fulfill its statutorily-defined purpose.

**B. Staffing Mandate.** NRS 388A.199 states that the SPCSA “may employ such persons as it deems necessary to carry out the provisions of” NRS Chapter 388A and that the staff employed by the SPCSA “must be qualified to carry out the daily responsibilities of sponsoring charter schools” in accordance with the Nevada Charter School Law. Despite this broad authority to hire “such persons as it deems” necessary, SB 509 included specific staffing mandates and qualifications for those serving as SPCSA staff. As a result, the SPCSA staff *must* include:

- (1) Attorneys with experience with laws concerning education, special education and nonprofit organizations;
- (2) Persons with experience overseeing the annual audits and financial operations of school districts, nonprofit organizations or corporations;
- (3) Persons with experience conducting assessments and evaluations for a school district;
- (4) Administrators with significant experience overseeing special education programs and programs while employed by a school district, charter management organization, educational management organization or other operator of charter schools;
- (5) Policy analysts with significant experience in the areas of charter schools and education policy; and
- (6) Any other persons that the SPCSA determines are necessary. SB 509, Sec. 15-16. (NRS 388A.199(2)(f)).

In addition, with the passage of SB 509, the SPCSA is now required to periodically evaluate and make decisions concerning the number of persons employed by the SPCSA and the qualifications and compensation of such persons based on guidance from the National Association of Charter School Authorizers. The SPCSA must also periodically evaluate and make decisions concerning a strategic plan for recruiting charter school operators and the needs of charter schools sponsored by the SPCSA. While these changes to the law are designed to help the SPCSA secure funding to expand its staff and hire qualified applicants, these provisions may also limit the SPCSA’s ability to adjust its organizational structure and the qualifications needed to fulfill certain positions if it is not able, in all cases, to find the “ideal” candidate with the “ideal” set of qualifications and experience.

**Analysis.** As further described in the Current State Analysis, the SPCSA’s current staff does not include individuals with many of the qualifications noted above. Specifically, the SPCSA does not have an attorney on staff, persons with experience overseeing the annual audits and financial operations of school districts, nonprofit organizations or corporations, or policy analysts with significant experience in the areas of charter schools and education policy. In terms of other areas of need, the SPCSA currently lacks individuals with any authorizing or general charter school experience, aside from the executive director. The executive director reported that the SPCSA has submitted budget requests that include positions required by law, including an attorney, and that these requests have been denied by the state budget office despite the specific statutory staffing mandates noted above. Most recently, the SPCSA’s budget request for the next biennium, which included funding for these positions or individuals with the qualifications noted above, was denied without justification. See *Section 4 below for a further discussion of the SPCSA’s budget and challenges in accessing appropriated funds.*

- C. Explicit Authorizing Responsibilities Anchored by a Performance Framework.** The Nevada Charter School Law provides the SPCSA with an explicit set of authorizing responsibilities. Such responsibilities cover the charter school lifecycle and more. These laws cover: charter school applications; charter school contracts, including amendments; the pre-opening period; monitoring the performance and compliance of charter schools; the renewal process; charter school revocations and closure; and annual reports of charter school performance and compliance.

NACSA's *Principles and Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing* state that a quality authorizer "executes charter contracts that plainly: define clear, measurable, and attainable academic, financial, and organizational performance standards and targets that the school must meet as a condition of renewal, including by not limited to state and federal measures." The Nevada Charter School Law expressly requires that each charter school sponsor adopt a performance framework and enter into a written charter school contract with each school that incorporates a performance framework. NRS 388A.270 and 388A.273. This performance framework "must include, without limitation, performance indicators, measures and metrics for the categories of academics, finances and organization." NRS 388A.273. The law provides further definition regarding the types of information that each category must address. In addition, a school and a sponsor may agree to the inclusion of additional, mission-specific performance indicators, measures and metrics, provided such indicators, measures and metrics are rigorous, valid and reliable. *Id.* The governing board of the charter school, in consultation with the sponsor, is charged with "establishing annual performance goals to ensure that the charter school is meeting the performance indicators, measures and metrics set forth in the performance framework in the charter contract." *Id.*

Following approval of a charter, all of the SPCSA's authorizing duties with regard to high-stakes decisions are anchored to the performance framework. For example, regarding renewal of a school operating under a charter contract, the Nevada Charter School Law requires the sponsor to provide a school up for renewal a written report of its performance on or before the June 30<sup>th</sup> immediately preceding its final school year. This written performance report must include four components including "the criteria the sponsor will apply in making a determination on the application for renewal based upon the performance framework for the charter school and the requirements" of Chapter 388A. NRS 388A.285 To the extent there was any ambiguity in the existing law, SB 509 further amended this section to note that "such criteria must include, without limitation, the performance indicators, measures and metrics included in the performance framework." Furthermore, the sponsor's renewal determination must be based on "the criteria of the sponsor for the renewal of charter contracts; and evidence of the performance of the charter school during the term of the charter contract in accordance with the performance framework for the charter school." *Id.*

With regard to revocations and closures, the Nevada Charter School Law identifies persistent underperformance, as measured by the performance indicators, measures and metrics set forth in the performance framework for the charter school, as one of a number of conditions under which a sponsor is permitted to revoke a charter, terminate a charter contract, or reconstitute the governing board of a charter school. This reconstitution power was added under SB 509. However, until January 1, 2020, the statute's language specifically limits the revocation criteria for persistent underperformance to schools that have a charter contract. NRS 388A.330. Approximately 43 percent of charter schools in the SPCSA's portfolio are currently not under a



charter contact as they were approved prior to passage of this law and have not yet been up for renewal.

In addition, the annual report that a sponsor is required to submit to the Nevada Department of Education (NDE) must include a summary “evaluating the academic, financial and organizational performance” of each charter school within the sponsor’s portfolio “as measured by the performance indicators, measures and metrics set forth in the performance framework for the charter school.” Similar to the revocation language, this requirement is limited to those schools with charter contracts until January 1, 2020. NRS 388A.351

**Analysis.** As further discussed in the Current State Analysis and as described in the formative SPCSA Authorizer Evaluation Report, the SPCSA is currently not fulfilling many of the responsibilities of a high-quality authorizer in the area of performance-based accountability. While the SPCSA has an established performance framework for charter school academic, financial and organizational performance, it does not currently have any personnel dedicated to implementing the performance frameworks. As a result, school performance is monitored periodically, at best, and at renewal, the SPCSA is scrambling to collect school performance data that should have been collected, monitored and communicated to schools throughout the terms of their charters. While the SPCSA and its board cite a number of valid reasons for their failure to close a number of extremely low-performing charter schools, a primary reason is that the SPCSA does not have a strong record of evidence to base its decisions and withstand a legal appeal. It’s not to say that the SPCSA does not have evidence, but rather that the SPCSA has not been consistently monitoring school performance in accordance with its performance frameworks, communicating to schools about their performance, and intervening as necessary when performance is below established thresholds. With no personnel dedicated to authorizing work, aside from the executive director, this record of evidence is sparse and prevents the SPCSA from closing schools for fear of legal challenges.

- D. Express Regulatory SPCSA and Draft Regulations.** SB 509 granted the SPCSA the express authority to develop and adopt regulations in certain key areas. SB 509 amended the former NRS 386.540 to direct the SPCSA to adopt regulations that prescribe the process for submitting the following and the contents of said submissions:
- (1) An application to open a charter school;
  - (2) An application to renew a school’s charter; and
  - (3) A request to amend a written charter contract. In addition, SB 509 requires the SPCSA to prescribe regulations for the “investigation” of each of these items and the criteria the SPCSA will use to evaluate these applications.

While SB 509 provided the SPCSA with this regulatory power, the SPCSA already had the authority and was required by law to “develop policies and practices that are consistent with state laws and regulations governing charter schools” in the following areas:

- (1) The organizational capacity and infrastructure of the sponsor for sponsorship of charter schools;
- (2) The procedure and criteria for evaluating charter school applications and renewal applications;
- (3) A description of how the sponsor will maintain oversight of the schools it sponsors; and
- (4) A description of the process of evaluation for the charter schools it sponsors. NRS 388A.223

SB 509 further refined this list and added extensive details about what the policies and practices in two of these areas needed to include. For the “description of how the sponsor will maintain oversight,” SB 509 added that such description must include, without limitation: “an assessment of the needs of the charter schools that are sponsored by the sponsor that is prepared with the input of the governing bodies of such charter schools” and “a strategic plan for the oversight and provision of technical support to charter schools that are sponsored by the sponsor in the areas of academic, fiscal and organizational performance.” In addition, NRS 388A.223 also requires sponsors “to review and evaluate nationally recognized policies and practices for sponsoring organizations of charter schools.”

Earlier this year, the SPCSA posted draft regulations to its website, many of which are intended to address SB 509 requirements. These draft regulations cover a wide range of issues including, but not limited to: performance framework terms; accountability requirements for multi-campus schools; the possible conversion from multi to single campus schools and vice versa; policies, procedures and criteria for reconstitution, restart, revocation and termination decisions; procedures and criteria for soliciting and evaluating charter school applications; differentiated and expedited charter school application tracks; and procedures and criteria for evaluating charter school renewal applications, including differentiated and expedited tracks.

**Analysis.** The draft regulations posted on the SPCSA’s website provide a level of detail more often seen and more appropriate for agency guidance or process-related forms and instructions. Once adopted, such detailed regulations will provide schools with numerous avenues for challenging the SPCSA’s high-stakes decisions for minor process-based deviations from established regulations. SPCSA should reconsider promulgating such specific regulations because many of the regulations and the details included in the draft regulations are not required under statute and may interfere with SPCSA’s authorizer decision-making.

The SPCSA has submitted the draft regulations to the legislative counsel’s office for review and comment. In their current form, the draft regulations are confusing and hard to follow. In order to help the SPCSA organize the draft regulations and determine which ones are necessary pursuant to the Nevada Charter School Law and SB 509, NACSA will provide the executive director with a chart outlining the proposed regulations, including threshold questions to determine whether the proposed regulation is needed and the extent to which existing statutory definitions may apply.

- E. SPCSA’s LEA for “Certain Purposes” Designation.** Pursuant to NRS 388A.159, the SPCSA is deemed an LEA for the specific purposes of: (1) directing the proportionate share of any money available from federal and state categorical grant programs to charter schools which are sponsored by the SPCSA that are eligible to receive such money and (2) paying the special education program units directly to those charter schools that are eligible to receive special education program units. Charter schools that receive money pursuant to the first stated purpose above must comply with any applicable reporting requirements to receive the applicable grant funds. NRS 388A.159 While the Nevada Charter School Law is clear that the SPCSA shall serve as the LEA for its schools, it is also clear that this designation is solely for the two purposes noted here.

**Analysis and Recommendation.** The SPCSA’s staff currently spends the vast majority of its time on LEA-related duties to the detriment of their authorizing duties. The executive director reports that the SPCSA is treated as the LEA for all purposes by NDE rather than for the specific

purposes noted above. Some of these additional LEA-related duties include monitoring assessments, managing a student information system, and administering state grant applications. These activities go beyond the specific purposes outlined above and as such, should not be the responsibility of the SPCSA.

## **Section 2. SPCSA's General Responsibilities as LEA under Federal Law**

As discussed in Section 1(E), the Nevada Charter School Law designates the SPCSA as the LEA for “certain” purposes related to directing funds to charter schools it sponsors for state and federal categorical grant programs and special education program units. The SPCSA’s dual role as both the authorizer and the LEA for the schools it authorizes is not unusual. Ninety-two percent of authorizers have this dual role, but the vast majority of these authorizers are districts and state education agencies, which generally have the internal capacity and systems in place to manage this dual role without much additional burden. In fact, the SPCSA is one of a very small number of independent charter boards (ICBs) across the United States that also serve as the LEA for their schools. NACSA’s research identified only two ICBs across the country that have a large charter school portfolio that also serve as the LEA for their schools—the Colorado Charter Schools Institute and the South Carolina Public Charter School District. For the vast majority of ICBs, charter schools serve as their own LEAs. Since the SPCSA is the LEA for “certain purposes,” it must use existing staff to fulfill obligations as both the authorizer and the LEA.

As the LEA for the “certain purposes” of state and federal categorical grant programs and special education program units, the SPCSA must ensure that charter schools in its portfolio are: (1) receiving the right amount and types of federal funds; (2) that such schools are using allocated funds for the right purposes; and (3) that the charter schools are meeting all legal requirements for the use of such funds. In addition, as the LEA for the above-mentioned purposes, the SPCSA must also ensure that all required reporting is submitted to the proper agencies. The key federal programs for which the SPCSA serves as the LEA are:

- Title I provides financial assistance to LEAs and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards.
- Title II provides funding to increase the quality of teachers, principals, and school leaders.
- Title III, VI, VII, and parts of IX address specific programs for special populations of students, including English learners and immigrant students, Native American and native Hawaiian, homeless youth, and certain geographic communities.

The SPCSA is also responsible for paying the special education program units directly to those charter schools that are eligible to receive special education program units. As public schools, charter schools are required to abide by federal law and regulations such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Americans with Disabilities Act, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Since the SPCSA is responsible for paying special education program units directly to charter schools, it must ensure that those schools are receiving the appropriate amount of funding, using such funds appropriately, and otherwise complying with state and federal law regarding the provision of services to students with disabilities.

**Analysis Recommendation.** As described in the Current State Analysis below, SPCSA staff currently spend approximately 90 percent of their collective time on school compliance with state and federal programs, school supports and technical assistance. As the SPCSA builds out its authorizing staff, it

is important that the SPCSA clearly distinguishes the “authorizing” duties from the “compliance” duties with regard to federal and special education programs. While the authorizing and compliance duties may be performed by different individuals, it is important that these individuals or offices work together to minimize duplication of efforts in terms of monitoring, compliance and accountability.

### **Section 3. Applicability and Impact of Nevada Administrative Procedure Act**

- A. Purpose and General Applicability.** The purpose of the Nevada Administrative Procedure Act (APA) is to “establish minimum procedural requirements for the regulation-making and adjudication procedure of all agencies of the Executive Department of the State Government and for judicial review of both functions,” except to the extent an agency is specifically exempted from the act. Since the SPCSA is a “board” of the executive department of the state government and is now, pursuant to SB 509, expressly authorized to “make regulations,” it is covered by this act. NRS 233B.031.
- B. Required Regulations.** The adoption of SB 509, as discussed above in Section 1(D), gave the SPCSA express authority to adopt regulation in certain areas. Charter school or management company attorneys have also cited the definition of regulation in the APA to support their assertion that the SPCSA’s established performance framework is not valid and enforceable because it was not adopted in regulations. The APA defines regulation, in part, as “an agency rule, standard, directive or statement of general applicability which effectuates or interprets law or policy, or described the organization, procedure or practice requirements of any agency.” NRS 233B.038. However, defining what does and does not constitute a “regulation” in the APA is not the same as a requirement that the SPCSA must adopt regulations in certain areas. Furthermore, when the SPCSA adopted its performance frameworks, it did not yet have regulatory authority and therefore was not subject to the APA at the time such frameworks were initially adopted. However, the APA does requires agencies to adopt such regulations as are necessary to the proper execution of the functions assigned to it by law and to adopt “rules of practice, setting forth the nature and requirements of all formal and informal procedures available, including a description of all forms and instructions used by the agency.” NRS 233B.040 and 233B.050.
- C. Contested Cases.** The Nevada Charter School Law defines the decision-making process for renewals and revocations, and under SB 509, the SPCSA must adopt additional regulations to further define these processes. Nevertheless, it is not clear whether SPCSA renewal and revocations decisions also fall within the legal definition of a “contested case” under the state’s APA. A contested case means “a proceeding, including but not restricted to rate making and licensing, in which the legal rights, duties or privileges of a party are required by law to be determined by an agency after an opportunity for hearing, or in which an administrative penalty may be waived.” NRS 233B.032. If renewal and revocation decisions are found to be “contested cases,” such proceedings will require a quasi-judicial process that adheres to NRS 233B.121 through 233B.150. Such requirements would include the right of each party to respond to and present evidence, call and examine witnesses, introduce exhibits, and cross-examine and impeach opposing witnesses. General rules of evidence would also apply. NRS 233B.121-123.

**Analysis and Recommendation.** It is NACSA’s view that the statutory requirements for renewals and revocations as set out in the charter school law are appropriate and sufficient for meeting the highest standards of professional practice provided that the SPCSA adopts rules consistent with those requirements. Conversely, if the SPCSA is subject to the APA, performance

management and school accountability are likely to become more litigious and time consuming in ways that do not serve the best interests of the children that charter schools are intended to help. It is noteworthy that if the APA is deemed applicable, the SPCSA would be the only charter school authorizer in the state and, to our knowledge one of very few in the entire country, whose accountability procedures are subject to a general administrative procedures act.

Given the potential challenges the APA presents, especially with regard to high-stakes decisions, the SPCSA should seek a full or partial exemption from this act. A number of similar governmental entities, either in terms of type or substantive focus area, are exempted or partially exempted from this act, including: the Nevada System of Higher Education (full exemption); the State Gaming Control Board (full exemption); the Nevada Gaming Commission (partial exemption); the Department of Education (partial exemption); the State Board of Education (exemption for certain regulations); and the Public Utilities Commission of Nevada (exemption regarding judicial review of decisions). NRS 233B.039.

In seeking an exemption, the SPCSA should further explore the full exemption given to the State Gaming Control Board and the partial exemption provided to the Public Utilities Commission of Nevada. While both of these organizations are substantively quite different from the SPCSA, each of these entities is a regulatory body charged with providing oversight in the public interest. Each entity has the power to grant and revoke rights as part of its oversight duties. If these entities were subject to the APA (or the full act in the case of the Public Utilities Commission), this power to effectively regulate an industry and fulfill their statutory obligations would be drastically curtailed by the APA's extensive judicial requirements for proceedings and the multiple avenues for appeal.

#### **Section 4. SPCSA's Budget Challenges Stymies SPCSA's Work**

The SPCSA's challenges in accessing and making use of appropriated funds and making adjustments to its existing budget came up repeatedly in NACSA's interviews with SPCSA staff and board members. The SPCSA's lack of control over its budget and appropriated funds is severely impacting the SPCSA's ability to do its job. As a result, this Policy Analysis outlines the current statutory context under which the SPCSA must operate to access funds to fulfill its statutory duties.

- A. Sponsorship Fees and Reserves.** The SPCSA is permitted to collect a sponsorship fee of up to two percent pursuant to NRS 388A.414, but the legislature only approved a 1.5 percent sponsorship fee for the SPCSA's last two-year budget. The NDE withholds these funds from the schools and these funds are supposed to cover the "administrative costs associated with sponsorship." Despite these funds being designated to cover administrative costs associated with sponsorship, the SPCSA does not have direct access to them. Instead, since these funds are subject to the provisions of the State Budget Act (as further discussed below), SPCSA staff must submit requests to access and use appropriated funds that exceed the agency's approved budget and are placed in reserve.

**Analysis and Recommendation.** According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, "three percent of public charter school per-pupil funding is generally regarded as adequate funding for authorizers in most states, particularly where start-up funding is allocated for the establishment of new authorizers like a statewide commission," acknowledging that once an authorizer has charter schools for a few years and oversees a critical mass of charters, it might

be able to consider reducing the fee.<sup>2</sup> Not only does the SPCSA receive only one-half of the three percent identified as “generally adequate” by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, SPCSA’s current approved budget only has the SPCSA using one percent of the 1.5 percent fee charged to charter schools. The remaining half a percent is placed in a reserve account, which the SPCSA cannot access. For comparison, Colorado Charter School Institute’s funding is based on a three percent fee, and the South Carolina Public Charter School Board’s funding is based on a two percent fee. Ideally, the legislature would raise the fee toward a target of three percent. At a minimum, the SPCSA should have access to the full 1.5 percent that has already been appropriated.

- B. SPCSA’s Budget and Budget Amendments.** Pursuant to the State Budget Act, NRS 353.150 to 353.246 inclusive, the budget division of the office of finance is responsible for administering the budgets of all the agencies, boards, commissions, departments, divisions and any other units of the Executive Department of the State Government. The SPCSA is a state agency within the Executive Department of the State Government. As of July 1, 2015, the office of finance was moved to the office of the governor pursuant to Assembly Bill No. 469. Since the state operates on a biennium, the state’s budget is adopted in two fiscal year periods. As a state agency, the SPCSA must develop and submit a two-year budget to the budget division for review and consideration. The chief of the budget division is then responsible for preparing the proposed budget for the entire Executive Department of the State Government, which includes the SPCSA. The budget must be approved by the governor and the legislature. NRS 353.185.

**Analysis and Recommendation.** Since the adopted budget is for a two-year period, it is not surprising that state agencies, including the SPCSA, may need to make adjustments to the approved budget during this two-year period. When a state agency needs or wishes to make an amendment to its approved budget, it must follow a detailed process set forth in NRS 353.220. Under this process, the SPCSA must submit the request, in the required form and with the required supporting documentation, to the governor through the chief of the budget division. Changes that would amount to more than \$30K and serve to increase or decrease allotment within a work program by 10 percent or \$75K require approval by the interim finance committee, unless such changes are due to an emergency or require expeditious action, as determined by the governor. The interim finance committee has 45 days to consider the amendment request and in making its decision, is to consider “the need for the proposed revision” and “the intent of the legislature in approving the budget for the present biennium and originally enacting the statute which the work program is designed to effectuate.” NRS 353.220.

Given the recent statutory changes which govern the SPCSA and the growth in the number of charter schools authorized by the SPCSA, it is not surprising that the SPCSA continually needs to submit work program amendments. However, the lengthy process for obtaining approval, if it is even granted, has severely limited the SPCSA’s ability to do its job and fulfill its statutory responsibilities. SPCSA staff report extreme delays (up to six months) in approval of expenditure requests and that some work programs requests are denied even though funds are available. In addition SPCSA staff state that seemingly simple requests require extensive and excessive documentation. SPCSA staff and board members note that approval of such expenditure

<sup>2</sup> A New Model Law For Supporting The Growth of High-Quality Public Charter Schools, pg. 12, [http://www.publiccharters.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/ModelLaw\\_P7-wCVR\\_20110402T222341.pdf](http://www.publiccharters.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/ModelLaw_P7-wCVR_20110402T222341.pdf)

requests often seem at the discretion of individuals within the office of finance, which is now in the governor's office.

Both Colorado Charter Schools Institute and the South Carolina Public Charter School Board report having access to and control over the funds generated by the authorizer fee. The board of the Colorado Charter School Institute approves the budget developed by the staff and any subsequent budget amendments. If the Institute wishes to change its organizational structure or hire for new positions, it only requires the approval of their board. The South Carolina Public Charter School District's budget does require yearly state approval, but after the budget is approved, the District has substantial autonomy in implementing the budget and accessing and spending funds generated by the authorizer fee.

The SPCSA's current funding structure does not allow the SPCSA to budget for organizational effectiveness and stability. It is interfering with SPCSA's ability to fulfill its statutory obligations and be an effective authorizer and should be modified to allow the SPCSA greater authority to adjust its budget and access funds.

## CURRENT STATE ANALYSIS

During May 2016, NACSA interviewed all active SPCSA staff and board members to determine how staff time and resources are currently allocated and the extent to which that allocation aligns with and satisfies SPCSA's responsibilities, mandates, and goals as a charter school authorizer and LEA. In addition, NACSA reviewed the previous Authorizer Evaluation Report, existing position descriptions, and a SPCSA-created time-study in order to identify the changes necessary to satisfy any unmet responsibilities. To further inform this analysis, NACSA compared SPCSA's current organizational structure to other statewide independent chartering boards (ICBs) across the country, both in terms of staffing and allocation of staff between authorizing and other school support related duties. As described in the Policy Analysis, only two other ICBs with a large charter school portfolio across the country also serve as the LEA for its schools. Those two authorizers are the Colorado Charter School Institute and the South Carolina Public Charter School District. NACSA conducted interviews with representatives from both of these ICBs to discuss their organizational structure, role as an LEA, and budget autonomy.

Based on this information and research, the Current State Analysis will begin with a summary of the key findings and recommendations in the following areas:

- Charter school authorizing;
- School support and monitoring;
- SPCSA's budget;
- Geographical allocation of staff; and
- Staff capacity and development.

Next, the current state analysis will outline the SPCSA's current organizational structure and will conclude with a proposed new organizational structure, the rationale for this new structure, and detailed descriptions for each position in this new structure.

## Key Findings and Recommendations

### Authorizing

Findings. Although the SPCSA has established processes for application review, contracting, monitoring and renewal, authorizing processes are not being consistently implemented because the SPCSA does not have staff needed to do the work. Existing SPCSA staff members spend approximately 90 percent of their time on school compliance, support and technical assistance and managing relationships with other state entities and only 10 percent on charter school authorizing. As referenced in the Policy Analysis, there are no SPCSA staff who are fully dedicated to authorizing activities. This lack of authorizing staff and the failure of staff to implement authorizing activities was a central focus of the NACSA Authorizer Evaluation Report. Specifically, the NACSA Authorizer Evaluation Report noted that critical authorizing activities including site visits and reports on school performance were not being implemented. As a result, the SPCSA has lacked the evidence necessary to close low-performing schools.

Recommendation. Increase the size and capacity of the staff so that the SPCSA can authorize schools consistent with Nevada law and SPCSA's performance framework and application and renewal processes. Restructure and grow the staff to build an authorizing unit with capacity



necessary to implement effective application review, contracting, monitoring and renewal processes.

### **School Support and Monitoring**

Findings. Under Nevada state law, the SPCSA is the local education agency (LEA) for all its schools. NDE expects the SPCSA to provide its schools with the same level of support, technical assistance and compliance monitoring provided by districts, despite the law carving out a more narrow set of LEA-related responsibilities for the SPCSA (see Policy Analysis, Section 1(E) and 2). As a result, SPCSA staff members spend substantial time and effort coordinating and monitoring state and federal grant applications, awards, implementation, and related reporting. They also oversee state testing, special education, and English language learner services in schools.

SPCSA staff report that most schools lack the capacity to meet state and federal requirements without substantial oversight and assistance from the SPCSA. Staff also report that their school compliance monitoring is intended to eliminate all risk to the SPCSA that might result from schools failing to fully comply with state and federal requirements. The SPCSA's compliance regimen discounts the burden on schools and the impact on school autonomy. As further discussed below, the state budget office and the legislative counsel bureau reinforce this mindset by requiring the SPCSA to produce extensive reports on the allocation and use of school grant funds prior to the approval of additional fund transfers.

Recommendation. The SPCSA should work with NDE and the state budget office to review the level and nature of school support and oversight and compliance monitoring to ensure that it maintains an appropriate balance between charter school autonomy and accountability. School support and monitoring should focus on ensuring that special education students receive the services they need and on making sure that state and SPCSA assessments are administered correctly.

### **SPCSA's Budget**

Findings. Although the SPCSA is a state agency and has funds available in reserve to support additional staff positions, the state's process for releasing budgeted funds requires the prior approval of the state budget office for any new staff positions. This process has prevented the SPCSA from adding critical staff in a timely manner. The SPCSA is also unable to access reserve funds to support its authorizing work (e.g., travel to Las Vegas), and faces restrictive budgeting and state contracting requirements that make it difficult to augment staff with consultants for critical authorizing activities like application proposal reviews.

Finally, under state law, the SPCSA is permitted to collect a sponsorship fee of up to two percent, but the legislature must approve the SPCSA's budget and has only approved a 1.5 percent fee for the SPCSA. NDE withholds these funds from schools and these funds are supposed to cover the administrative costs associated with sponsorship.

Recommendation. The legislature should permit the SPCSA to collect a sponsorship fee of up to two percent, as permitted by law, and once the legislature approves the budget, the SPCSA should not have to seek approval from the budget office to make line item changes regarding how appropriated funds are allocated. Having to continually seek permission from the budget

office to make minor changes to the budget and to access appropriated funds is hindering the SPCSA's ability to do its job and meet its statutory obligations, such as hiring qualified and needed personnel to carry out its authorizing duties.

### Geographical Allocation of Staff

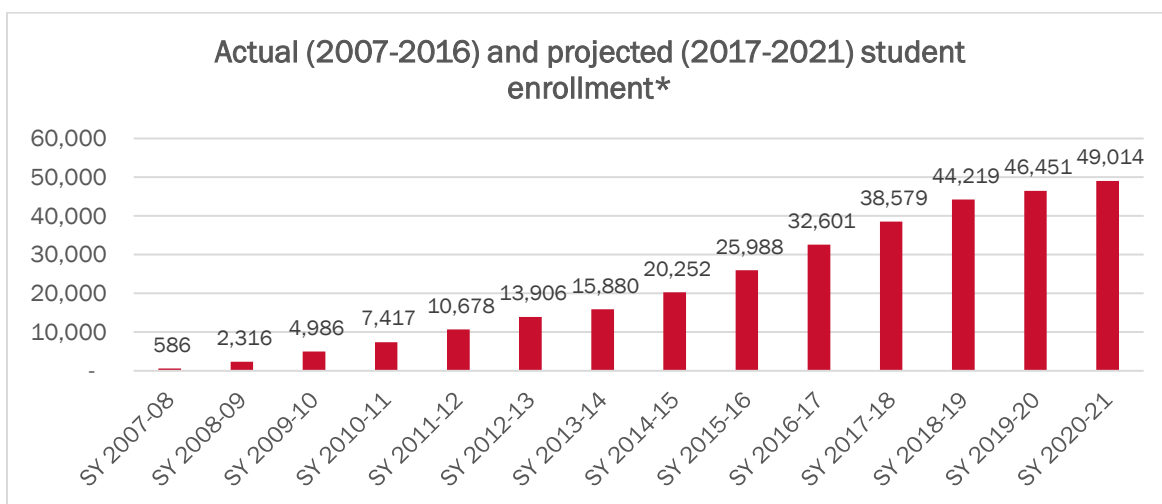
**Findings.** The main SPCSA office and three-quarters of the staff are located in Carson City, while the great majority of the campuses and one-quarter of the staff are located in the Las Vegas area. As a result, schools in the Las Vegas area have less access to SPCSA support and monitoring. Communication between the Carson City and Las Vegas offices is hampered by a freeze on travel funds by the state budget office.

**Recommendation.** As new staff are added, increase the size of the Las Vegas office to better serve schools in southern Nevada. Increase communication between the offices by allocating adequate resources for travel between offices and utilize video conferencing for staff meetings.

### Staff Capacity and Development

**Findings.** During the past three years, the SPCSA has built a robust charter school application and performance framework, but it does not have sufficient staff capacity or expertise to thoroughly review and assess applications or regularly assess school performance using the new framework. As a result, on two occasions the board has been unwilling to close persistently low-performing schools.

Over the past four years, SPCSA's portfolio of schools has grown substantially and the growth is expected to continue. The number of schools has grown from 14 in 2012 to 23 in 2016; the number of campuses has increased from 17 to 43 and the number of students has grown from 11,000 to nearly 26,000. The SPCSA now has more students than all but the Washoe and Clark County school districts in Nevada. SPCSA projects that student enrollment will grow to nearly 50,000 by 2021.<sup>3</sup>



<sup>3</sup> Enrollment projections for 2017 through 2021 were prepared by SPCSA and are based on continuing the same rate of growth as occurred from 2011 to 2016.

Except for the executive director, SPCSA staff have little experience with charter schools and charter school authorizing. Several SPCSA staff are career state employees who have moved to SPCSA from other state agencies unrelated to charter schools or education. These staff need training to help them better understand charter schools and charter school authorizing, but the SPCSA has no staff training program. Even those staff members with education and charter school experience need opportunities to continue to learn. Furthermore, aside from the executive director and the deputy director, all SPCSA positions are classified, which limits the executive director's ability to seek and hire qualified candidates with the unique skill sets and knowledge necessary for authorizing.

Recommendations. Increase the size and capacity of SPCSA staff to meet the needs of a growing portfolio of schools. Based on projected charter school growth over the next three years, increase the staff from 13 to 21 full-time staff.

Provide all staff with initial orientation and ongoing training and professional development on charter schools and charter school authorizing. Encourage and support staff efforts to participate in national charter school and charter school authorizing organizations and events, including budgeting sufficient travel funds for attendance.

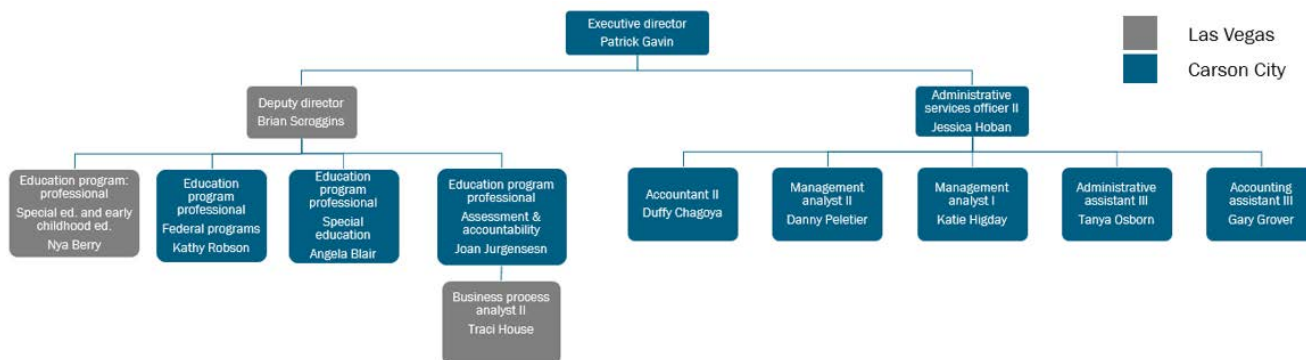
## **Organizational Structure and Staffing**

### **Current Organizational Structure**

In June 2016, the SPCSA had a staff of 13 in the following positions:

- Executive director
- Deputy director
- Administrative services officer II
- Four education program professionals
- Accountant II
- Management analyst II
- Management analyst I
- Administrative assistant III
- Accounting assistant III
- Business process analyst II

The official position descriptions are based on state classifications and do not reflect individual responsibilities or functions. The SPCSA's current organizational chart reflect the lack of authorizing staffing as noted above. Staffing is heavily focused on LEA-related duties, compliance, and school support.



## Proposed Organizational Structure

To fulfill its statutory duties, NACSA recommends an organizational structure and size that can deliver state-wide charter school leadership, high-quality authorizing, support for schools in critical areas, and financial and administrative planning and oversight. NACSA recommends increasing the staff from 13 to 21—an increase of eight staff positions. NACSA believes this increased size is justified by the number of schools, campuses and students, and the current need to provide LEA functions related to special education, federal programs, assessments and grants management.

While authorizing environments vary from state to state, state-wide authorizers in the District of Columbia, Hawaii, Colorado and South Carolina are examples of states with comparable numbers of schools and students, and staffing levels that are comparable to what is recommended here. The Colorado Charter School Institute and South Carolina Public Charter School District are the only other state-wide authorizers that serve as the LEA for their schools. As illustrated below, each of these authorizers have a substantially larger staff and a much greater portion of their staff resources devoted to authorizing than does the SPCSA.

State-Wide Authorizers	# of Schools/Campuses	# of Students	Total Staff	Authorizing staff	Non-Authorizing staff
Colorado Charter School Institute	35	14,000	18	~9	~9
Hawaii State Public Charter School Commission*	34	~10,000	18	NA	NA
South Carolina Public Charter School District	32	18,500	20	~12	~8
District of Columbia Public Charter School Board*	126	39,000	34	NA	NA
SPCSA (2015-16)	22/37	25,988	13	~2	~11

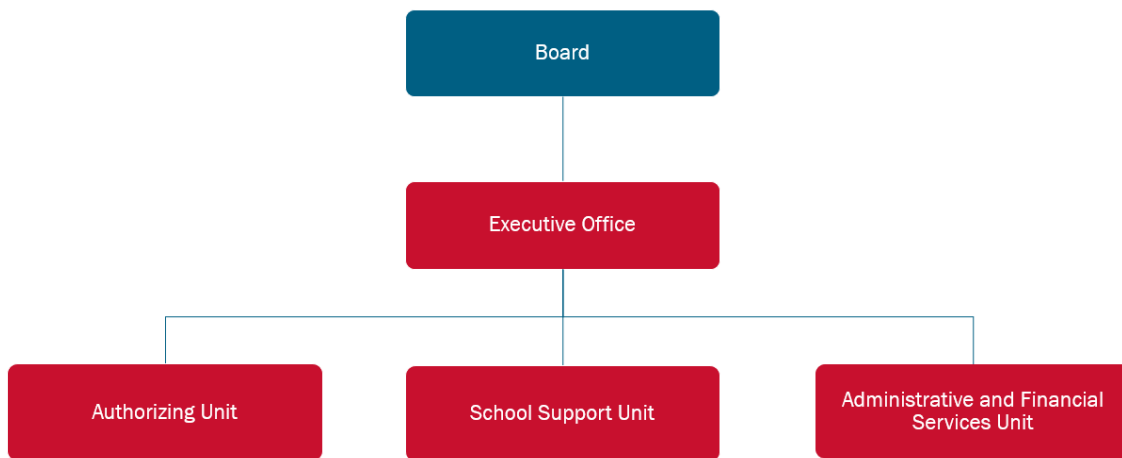
\*NA because these authorizers do not also serve as LEAs for schools in their portfolio.

The following staffing plan is based on four assumptions:

- The SPCSA needs to substantially increase the resources available for authorizing activities.
- The portfolio of schools and enrollment will continue to grow.
- The SPCSA needs to continue to provide LEA services to schools but needs to clarify the nature and level of those services.
- The increases in staff will be phased in over the next three years based on the schedule outlined in the Transition Plan, included below.

Based on these assumptions and the findings and recommendations outlined above, the following staffing plan addresses all of the SPCSA's core functions by organizing the SPCSA into four units:

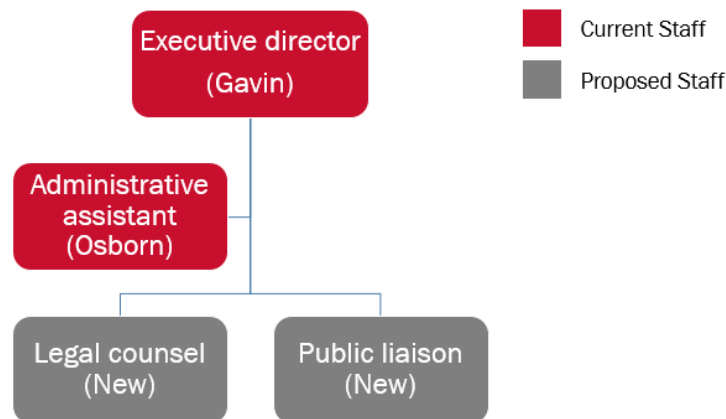
1. Executive office
2. Authorizing unit
3. School support unit
4. Administrative and financial services unit



An explanation of each unit and organizational charts for each unit are included below.

### Executive Office

The executive office is responsible for providing leadership for the SPCSA and the Nevada charter school sector, managing SPCSA staff and resources, ensuring that the SPCSA acts consistent with the law and applicable regulations, and communicating with stakeholders. The executive office has two new positions, legal counsel and public liaison.



### Executive Office Position Descriptions

Executive director (Executive director – Gavin). Provides leadership and overall direction consistent with the SPCSA strategic plan. Provides statewide leadership on charter school issues. Hires and manages staff, works with the board to meet SPCSA goals, represents the SPCSA with the legislature and other state entities and serves as the spokesperson for the SPCSA. Responsible for development and implementation of SPCSA policies and procedures. The executive director reports to the SPCSA board.

Administrative assistant (Administrative assistant II – Osborn). Provides administrative support including managing schedules and calendars for senior staff, coordinating travel and processing travel reimbursements. Serves as the SPCSA board secretary with responsibility for scheduling meetings, preparing and posting meeting minutes, and providing assistance to individual board members.

Legal counsel (new position). Serves as counsel for both the LEA and authorizing functions of the SPCSA. With regard to the authorizing function, the attorney will be responsible for the review and approval of all charter school contracts and amendments, the development of any legal documents the SPCSA will use to support its key authorizing duties, including ensuring that such documents comply with all applicable laws and regulations, and managing any new or pending litigation involving the SPCSA. Also responsible for the development and implementation of any required administrative procedures and regulations. Serves as liaison with the office of the attorney general.

Statutory authority: NRS 388A.199; SB 509, Sec. 15-16.

Public liaison (new position). Public liaison works with the executive director and the board to communicate the SPCSA's priorities and accomplishments to all stakeholders and the public. The liaison also provides communication consulting to SPCSA board and staff and serves as liaison to media, schools and stakeholder groups.

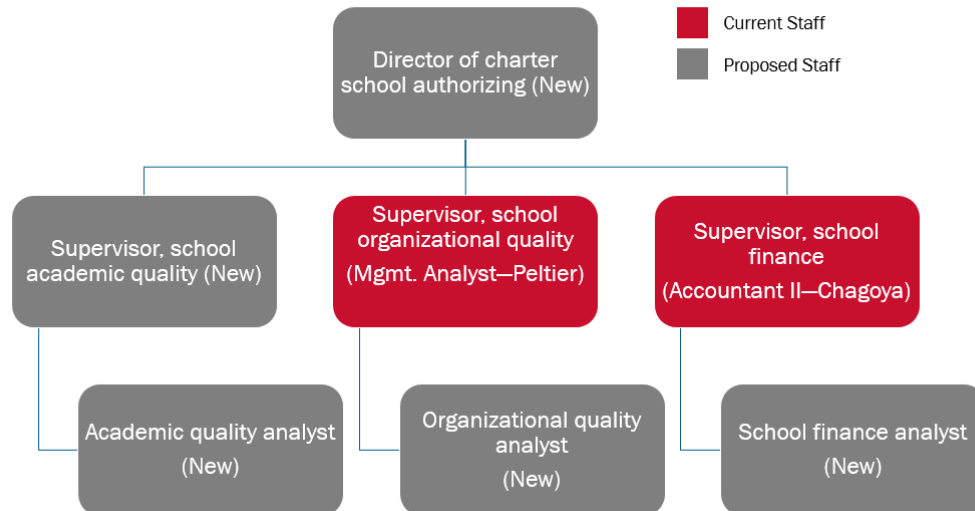
Statutory authority: NRS 388A.199; SB 509, Sec. 15-16.

## Authorizing Unit

The authorizing unit is responsible for ensuring that SPCSA authorizes schools consistent with state law and its own policies. The NACSA Authorizer Evaluation Report found that the “Authority has the authorizing policy and performance frameworks and model school contracts necessary to be an effective authorizer in place, but it lacks staff capacity to implement the policy.” The report also found that SPCSA’s application, monitoring, and renewal processes are all falling short of what is required because of a lack of authorizing staff. NACSA’s interviews with SPCSA staff and board members this past May reinforced these findings. Specifically, staff noted they were unable to fully staff the application review process, which delayed application decisions and also reported problems implementing the school monitoring and renewal processes.

Staffing levels for leading statewide authorizers range from one FTE staff member per eight schools to one FTE staff member per three schools to carry out its authorizing functions depending among other things, on the amount of back office or other support they receive from related agencies. Based on feedback from leading statewide authorizers regarding staffing, NACSA recommends a ratio of one FTE staff member per five schools for the authorizing unit. The proposed authorizing unit takes into account both the total number of schools and campuses and expected future growth.

The proposed authorizing unit will eventually include seven staff led by a director with two staff in each of three areas: academic quality, organizational quality, and school finance. Two of the positions noted below already exist and five are new.



## Authorizing Unit Position Descriptions

Director of charter school authorizing (new position). Oversees management of charter school authorizing programs and staff. Coordinates authorizing functions to assure efficiency and maximum leverage of staff skills and knowledge. Leads efforts to improve school quality and performance. Develops systems for collecting, monitoring, evaluating and presenting evidence of school performance in accordance with the established performance framework. Leads

development of recommendations for board actions on approval, renewal, intervention, non-renewal and revocation and directly manages the SPCSA's work on charter school openings, interventions and closures with support from SPCSA staff. Leads professional development on charter school authorizing for SPCSA staff.

Statutory authority: NRS 388A.199; SB 509, Sec. 15-16.

Supervisor, school academic quality (new position). Oversees gathering, monitoring, and evaluation of evidence on academic performance of charter schools based on the SPCSA's performance framework. Manages relationship with NDE on state assessments and report cards. Organizes site visits and other means of gathering qualitative input on school performance. Prepares annual summary of school academic performance for the SPCSA's annual report. The supervisor along with the academic quality analyst is responsible for coordinating the application review and renewal processes, tracking and processing new applications, establishing review committees, and ensuring that review timelines are met. The supervisor and the analyst are also responsible for providing guidance to charter schools on academic performance requirements, and producing and helping schools to understand annual reports on school academic performance,

Statutory authority: NRS388A.199; SB 509, Sec. 15-16.

Academic quality analyst (new position). Provides ongoing, detailed review of metrics on school academic performance in accordance with SPCSA's performance framework. Brings knowledge of latest research and benchmarking methods to academic evaluation tasks.

Statutory authority: NRS 388A.199; SB 509, Sec. 15-16.

Supervisor, school organizational quality (Management Analyst – Peltier). Oversees gathering, monitoring, and evaluation of evidence on organizational performance of charter schools based on the SPCSA performance framework. Maintains the Epicenter Reporting system for gathering compliance data. Assures that school boards are carrying out responsibilities. Prepares annual summaries of compliance information for the SPCSA's annual reports. Proactively documents potential compliance problems and secures resolution. Oversees SPCSA facility leases, inspection compliance and crisis response management. The supervisor along with the organizational analyst is also responsible for ensuring compliance and providing guidance to schools on procurement, governing board requirements, facility health and safety requirements, student transportation, record keeping, student privacy requirements, and risk management.

Organizational quality analyst (new position). Provides ongoing, detailed review of metrics on school organizational performance in accordance with the SPCSA's performance framework. Assesses compliance findings to identify and address common organizational challenges.

Statutory authority: NRS 388A.199; SB 509, Sec. 15-16.

Supervisor, school finance (Accountant II—Chagoya). Oversees gathering, monitoring, and evaluation of evidence on financial performance of charter schools based on the SPCSA performance framework. Differentiates oversight according to schools' track record of financial stewardship. Uses school audits and financial reporting to identify trends and potential issues, especially those involving potential misuse of public funds. Prepares annual summary of school financial performance for the SPCSA's annual report. The supervisor along with the financial analyst is also responsible for reviewing finance-related portions of new applications, working with charter schools to establish financial performance targets, monitoring compliance with



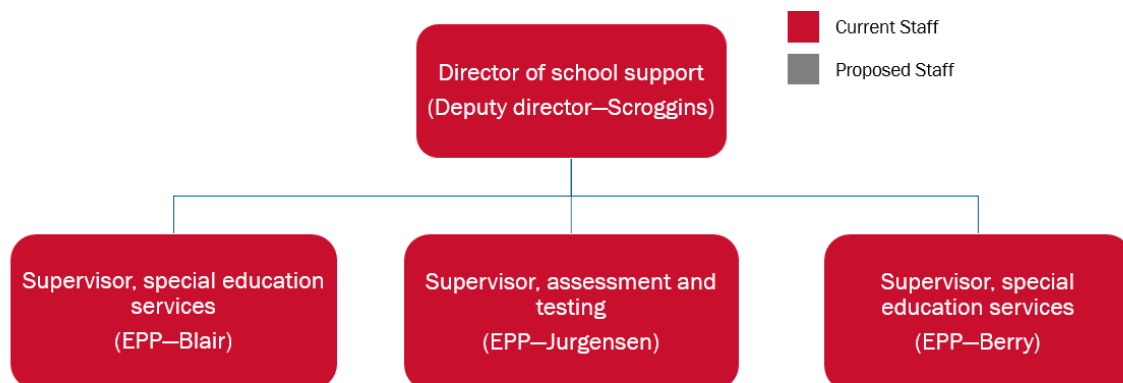
financial-related portions of charter contracts, ensuring accurate and timely reporting on financial performance, providing guidance to schools on financial performance requirements and ensuring timely annual audits.

School finance analyst (new position). Provides ongoing, detailed review of metrics on school performance in accordance with the SPCSA performance framework. Reviews school financial reports and identifies problems that need to be addressed.

Statutory authority: NRS 388A.199; SB 509, Sec. 15-16.

## School Support Unit

The school support unit provides supports to schools and monitors compliance to fulfill the SPCSA's LEA responsibilities regarding special education, federal programs, assessments, and grants management. Consistent with recommendations included in the NACSA Authorizer Evaluation Report, the unit should clarify and codify the specific LEA responsibilities of the SPCSA and communicate those responsibilities to schools. It should also work with other state agencies to reduce the reporting burden on schools and eliminate duplicative reports. The proposed unit will be made up of existing positions under the leadership of the deputy director.



## School Support Unit Position Descriptions

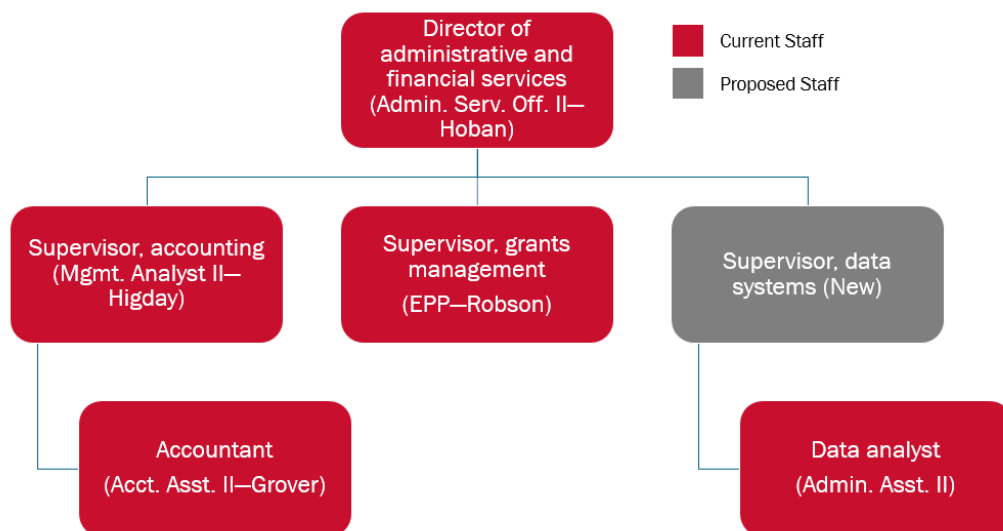
Director of school support (Deputy director – Scroggins). Oversees management of charter school support programs and staff. Assists school leaders in navigating the state system in a way that respects school autonomy while reducing the risk of non-compliance for the SPCSA. Ensures that students are receiving federal and state-funded services, particularly the special education and English language learning supports. Oversees all state and SPCSA assessments.

Supervisor, special education services (Education program professional – Blair and Berry). Coordinates SPCSA's special education support to schools. Develops special education policies and procedures. Prepares and solicits special education budgets and funds. Facilitates the resolution of special education concerns and complaints. Supports school-based early childhood education programs where they exist.

Supervisor, assessment and testing (Education program professional – Jurgensen). Oversees state, federal, and SPCSA assessment systems and manages all assessment-related reporting databases. Responsible for all technical matters related to state and federal accountability.

## Administrative and Financial Services Unit

The Administrative and Financial Services Unit is responsible for allocation, disbursement and monitoring of state and federal funds to schools. The unit also prepares and manages the SPCSA budget and manages the SPCSA's Infinite Campus systems. The new unit should begin its work by clarifying the level of financial oversight required to ensure an appropriate balance between providing schools with autonomy and minimizing risk to the SPCSA. The unit is made up of five existing positions and one new position. The new position, supervisor of data systems, will coordinate implementation of Infinite Campus in all the schools.



## Administrative and Financial Services Unit Position Descriptions

Director of administrative and financial services (Administrative services officer II – Hoban). Oversees the management of SPCSA's administrative and financial programs and staff. Coordinates the allocation and disbursement of state and federal funds on behalf of the SPCSA including development of spending and disbursement plans and schedules. Prepares and monitors the SPCSA budget and prepares and submits all finance-related federal and state reports. Responsible for all agency contractual agreements, procurement requests, compliance with state accounting procedures and preparation of financial reports to the legislature. Facilitates and monitors school participation in state bonding and loan programs.

Supervisor, accounting (Management analyst II – Higday). Ensures fiscal compliance with all federal programs (special education, Title I, Title II, Title III, McKinney Vento, Early Childhood, IDEA Part B and Pre-K) as well as state categorical grants. Monitors compliance with insurance, health record and other requirements. Manages vendor contracts and approves all transactions for the agency in the statewide accounting system. Serves as liaison for state program and financial audits.

Supervisor, grants management (Education program professional – Robson). Monitors compliance and provides technical assistance for school participation in all federal programs (i.e., Title I, Title II, Title III, McKinney Vento) and state categorical and competitive programs administered by the SPCSA. Serves as program manager for state and federal English language learner programs for all of schools under the agency's LEA designation.

Supervisor, data systems (new position). Manages the SPCSA's data collection and reporting systems including the Infinite Campus system. Assists school leaders with data problems. Establishes and communicates expectations for data reporting and quality and designs and produces data reports.

Statutory authority: NRS 388A.199; SB 509, Sec. 15-16.

Accountant (Accounting assistant II – Grover). Audits and reconciles accounts using the Budget Expense Tracking System (BETS). Audits payables/receivables processes, general ledger account and fund source coding. Responsible for travel desk management for both SPCSA staff members and SPCSA board members.

Data analyst—(Administrative assistant II – House). Supports the SPCSA's Infinite Campus student information system and provides help desk support for school staff. Provides training as necessary.

## TRANSITION PLAN

NACSA understands that increasing staff from 13 to 21 will take significant time and planning. NACSA proposes adding staff in the following phases:

### Phase 1—Building the SPCSA's leadership capacity

- Director of charter school authorizing
- Supervisor, school academic quality
- Legal counsel

### Phase 2—Building authorizing capacity

- Public liaison
- Supervisor, data systems
- Academic quality analyst

### Phase 3—Building authorizing depth

- Finance analyst
- Organizational quality analyst

## Recruitment Plan

Two of the new positions merit a national search for strong candidates with authorizing experience:

- Director of charter school authorizing
- Supervisor, school academic quality

All SPCSA staff except the executive director and deputy director are classified civil service positions that fall under the state personnel system. Civil service position descriptions are generic and do not describe the specific skills and experience needed for the work. The classified staff pay scale may not be adequate to attract candidates with the skills and experience required for the positions. As noted above in the Current State Analysis, the positions should not be classified.

NACSA can help the SPCSA recruit candidates for these two positions through the alumni of its leaders and fellows programs. The SPCSA should also consider using a nationally recognized education search firm like Bellwether Education Partners, and should include funds for such costs in its budget request. Bellwether was used in the recent Nevada Achievement School District executive director search.

In order to recruit high quality candidates, the SPCSA should attempt to offer a competitive compensation package for these two positions. It may also help to be flexible on whether the positions are located in Las Vegas or Carson City.

For the other positions, authorizing experience is less important than experience working with schools, the right mindset and a capacity and willingness to learn. The SPCSA should post all positions on the NACSA and National Alliance for Charter Schools' job postings sites and other education reform job forums such as the PIE Network, On-ramps, and the Exchange Job Board.

For the long term, the SPCSA should partner with other Nevada education organizations to encourage Education Pioneers to place its fellows in Las Vegas. Education Pioneers is a national

nonprofit that recruits and develops talented students and professionals from diverse backgrounds to work for K-12 school districts, charter schools and other education organizations. As of now, Education Pioneers does not place fellows in Nevada. This would also require an additional appropriation to pay for an Education Pioneer fellow with SPCSA. In addition, the SPCSA should explore becoming a Broad residency partner, which would allow it to host a broad resident for a two-year period. Broad residents are highly capable individuals with advanced degrees, a minimum of four years' work experience, and a strong interest in urban public education. Broad residents go through a rigorous selection process and Broad subsidizes the salaries of the residents.

## HUMAN CAPITAL ACTION PLAN

### Staff Training and Professional Development

Both new and incumbent staff need substantial training about charter school authorizing. While there is no “turnkey” training program for authorizers, NACSA’s Knowledge Core is an online learning platform free to NACSA members that offers courses, tools and templates for authorizers at every level. From the basics of authorizing to advanced topics, the Knowledge Core provides a rich array of resources. They include learning modules with discussion and reinforcement of best practices and succinct topical interviews with leaders in the field.

In addition, as part of this project, NACSA representatives will travel to Nevada later this year to provide new and existing SPCSA staff with a full day of authorizer training, customized to SPCSA’s needs. NACSA will provide any materials used in this training to the SPCSA. The new director of charter school authorizing will be responsible for staff training and professional development and will need to develop and adopt a structured orientation program for new staff that provides information on charter schools, charter school authorizing and the Nevada authorizing context.

The SPCSA should also send two or three staff members to the NACSA and National Alliance for Public Charter Schools conferences. Both meetings provide unique opportunities to learn about charter school and authorizing issues from other practitioners. Specifically, the NACSA conference is a conference for authorizers by authorizers where SPCSA staff can join peers from across the country and participate in 2-3 days of targeted and customized professional development.

The SPCSA should also encourage its staff to apply to the NACSA leaders program, a program designed to provide a hands-on learning environment where participants can explore best practices with their peers for use in their own offices and learn skills for leading in a dynamic public education environment. NACSA invites current and emerging leaders in authorizing offices around the country to apply for opportunity. NACSA covers all costs associated with this program.

Lastly, the executive director would benefit from executive coaching from someone with experience overseeing a large portfolio of charter schools and managing relationships with state government. NACSA could provide suggestions for coaches with authorizing experience or organizations that specialize leadership development and training, such as New Ventures West.

## RECOMMENDED PRIORITIES FOR AUTHORIZER PRACTICE TOOL DEVELOPMENT

### NACSA 2015 Formative Authorizer Evaluation Report

The NACSA Authorizer Evaluation Report, conducted in fall, 2015, provided the SPCSA with formative, practical guidance on strengths and priorities for improvement in the SPCSA' authorizing practices. Consistent with NACSA's *Principles and Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing*, the evaluation focused on the SPCSA's primary authorizing responsibilities – application decision-making, performance contracting and monitoring, accountability decisions, school autonomy, and organizational capacity. Based on the findings and recommendation of the evaluation report, NACSA will provide the following tools and guidance documents:

- Recommendation from evaluation report: Develop and distribute evaluation criteria to applicants that describes what a quality response and application looks like.
  - Action since evaluation. The SPCSA developed an application rubric, containing criteria, for new applicants, but is planning to further customize for different application tracks.
  - Resource: NACSA core replication application and corresponding evaluation criteria. This document can also be used to develop a form expansion amendment request and corresponding criteria.
- Recommendation from evaluation report: Conduct training or orientation with evaluators who participate in the interview process to prepare them for an interview focused on assessing capacity.
  - Resource: NACSA applicant capacity interview guide.
- Recommendation from evaluation report: Issue a guidance document, similar to the performance framework guidance document, which explains the new renewal process.
  - Resource: NACSA core renewal application and guidance.
- Recommendation from evaluation report: Develop an annual performance report template, which incorporates the SPCSA's performance frameworks, and provide annual reports to schools and the public by posting on the Authority's website.
  - Resource: Forthcoming NACSA annual performance report guide and sample annual reports and scorecards from other authorizers.

While the SPCSA does need to develop or further develop the tools referenced above, the SPCSA's primary focus should be on developing authorizing capacity and implementing its existing tools, especially SPCSA's performance framework.

## STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY

SUPPORTING DOCUMENT

**S U B J E C T: Consideration and possible action on the America Leadership Academy charter application**

<u>  /  /  </u>	Public Workshop
<u>  /  /  </u>	Public Hearing
<u>  /  /  </u>	Consent Agenda
<u>  /  /  </u>	Regulation Adoption
<u>  /  /  </u>	Approval
<u>  /  /  </u>	Appointments
<u>  /  x/  </u>	Information
<u>  /  x/  </u>	Action

MEETING DATE: July 29, 2016

AGENDA ITEM: 5

NUMBER OF ENCLOSURE(S): 1

**PRESENTER(S): Patrick Gavin, Executive Director, SPCSA**

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**FISCAL IMPACT:**

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**BUDGET ACCOUNT (FOR PRINTING CHARGES ONLY):**

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**LENGTH OF TIME EXPECTED FOR PRESENTATION (IN MINUTES): 30 Mins**

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**SUBMITTED BY:** \_\_\_\_\_



# **ALA – NLV**

***American Leadership Academy – North Las Vegas***

***Charter School Application Recommendation Report***

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**Winter Cycle Charter Applications - 2016**

## Proposal Overview

### *School Name*

American Leadership Academy - North Las Vegas (ALA - NLV)

### *Mission (Application Item A.1.2)*

The mission of American Leadership Academy - North Las Vegas is to provide the best educational experience to as many students as possible in a moral and wholesome environment.

### *Proposed Location (from Charter Application Cover Sheet)*

Clark County

### *Enrollment Projections (from Charter Application Cover Sheet)*

Opening Year	School Type	Opening Grade(s)	Projected Enrollment
<b>Year 1 (2017-2018)</b>	<b>Elementary- Middle</b>	<b>K-8</b>	<b>990</b>
<b>Year 2 (2018-2019)</b>	<b>Elementary- Middle</b>	<b>K-8</b>	<b>1080</b>
<b>At capacity</b>	<b>Elementary- Middle</b>	<b>K-8</b>	<b>1080</b>

## Overview

The Recommendation Report for American Leadership Academy - North Las Vegas (ALA - NLV) is a summary of the evidence collected by the State Public Charter School Authority (SPCSA) through its interviews and dialogue with the applicant group, review of the school's Charter Application Proposal along with an analysis of performance data for other charter schools implementing the same academic model.

A recommendation to approve a charter for a six-year period is based on a comprehensive review of the proposal, performance data for replicated schools, the applicant capacity interview, follow-up discussion with applicants, and - where possible - site visits, guided by three essential questions:

1. Will the academic program be a success?
2. Will the school be an effective and accountable organization?
3. Will the school be fiscally sound?

**This report is structured around three sections: Academic, Organizational and Fiscal. Each section contains an overview of key findings based on a the totality of the evidence and concludes with the Authority’s determination on each of the three guiding questions.**

## Recommendation

### *Overall Recommendation*

***Recommendation to Approve - with conditions to be addressed prior to Execution of a Charter Contract. Exterior reviewers rate the overall application at “Approaches the Standard”.***

*The Agency found ALA - NLV “Meets the Standard” or “Approaches the Standard” in the majority of areas in the initial application process. Charter School success starts with three basic facets; an academic plan that challenges students and allows for their success; an organizational plan that grants teachers and staff of the school professional development and training opportunities building upon current skill sets allowing them to develop the tools necessary to serve the student population; a solid financial plan that takes into account current and future economic forecasts and minimizes risk. This Charter School Recommendation Application Report is designed to review perceived deficiencies in the application and allow for corrective action in a manner that does not fundamentally alter the school’s proposed program.*

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### **RATING STANDARDS**

#### **Meets the Standard**

*The response reflects a thorough understanding of key issues. It addresses the topic with specific and accurate information that shows thorough preparation; presents a clear, realistic picture of how the school expects to operate; and inspires confidence in the applicant’s capacity to carry out the plan effectively in a way which will result in a 4 or 5 star school.*

#### **Approaches the Standard**

*The response meets the criteria in many respects, but lacks detail and/or requires additional information in one or more areas.*

#### **Does Not Meet the Standard**

*The response is undeveloped or incomplete; demonstrates lack of preparation; or otherwise raises substantial concerns about the viability of the plan or the applicant’s ability to carry it out.*

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## Summary of Application Section Ratings

*Rating options for each section are Meets the Standard; Approaches the Standard; Does not Meet the Standard*

### Executive Summary

- Approaches the Standard

#### **Areas of Strength:**

- The academic model described in the executive summary is consistent throughout the petition.
- The target population, as elaborated on in the interview, is a community that may benefit from the academic program as described in the petition.

#### **Areas for Improvement/Concerns:**

- Revisions may be necessary due to the need to clarify the target population and make other changes identified below.

### Meeting the Need

- Approaches the Standard

#### **Areas of Strength:**

- While the applicant does not identify a specific target community in the narrative, the participants in the capacity interview described a smaller geographic target area, “council districts 3 and 4” that have is more homogeneous than that of North Las Vegas as whole and articulated needs related to facility overcrowding and a lack of compelling options as well as dissatisfaction with the academic performance of some local schools.

#### **Areas for Improvement/Concerns:**

- A more explicit description of the target population and its needs is necessary. The application narrative needs to be revised to reflect the specificity of the interview and to make a more compelling case for the fit of this particular model to the target community. The applicant will also need to review other areas referenced herein to ensure that the school attracts and retains a population representative of its immediate environs versus a more engaged or active subpopulation.

### Specific Subset Ratings in the Academic Section (For Reference)

- Targeted Plan  
- Approaches the Standard
- Parent and Community Involvement  
- Approaches the Standard

## Academic Plan

- Approaches the Standard

### Summary

The Committee to Form has articulated a vision where all students will be prepared for higher education, active civic participation, government service and work force participation. The vision articulates that this will be accomplished through the completion of a vigorous academic program, civic engagement and character development.

### Areas of Strength:

- The applicant has identified specific academic content and instructional practices based on a successful model implemented in Arizona.
- Socratic Seminar will be used in 6th - 8th grade classrooms and teachers will be trained in this type of instruction.
- Hake Grammar will be implemented in the 6th - 8th grade.
- Latin Alive program will offer the opportunity for Latin language acquisition in 6th - 8th grade and support vocabulary/literacy as many English words have Latin roots.
- Intervention programs for reading and math.
- Music, Art, Technology applications and Choir are weekly elective course offerings at the proposed school.
- Gifted Cluster Grouping Model provides opportunity for students in need of acceleration.
- Academic program will encompass American history, citizenry, Core Knowledge, and other programs in English, math, language and science.
- Approach to remediation appears comprehensive.
- ALA has demonstrated commitment in similar demographic communities.
- Self-monitoring practices are promoted through post assessment goal and progress tracking.

### Areas for Improvement/Concerns:

- There is a lack of clarity on assessment—it is unclear if a menu of assessment tools are traditionally used by other ALA campuses or if the school will identify a more targeted list. More specifics targets related to long-term academic outcomes should be articulated.
- Since ALA-NLV has no track record in Nevada, supplementing the academic performance data sheet with a narrative in the application discussing how the academic plan had been successful in Arizona would be helpful as well as some discussion of how the proposed academic plan fits into the community that will be served. Additional data demonstrating how this model has been met the needs of a population similar to the target community is necessary.
- Based upon the information provided in the capacity interview, the current intent is to locate the school in a more middle class area. The application is silent on this, however, and it does not

explicitly identify a target community or identify the needs of a specific set of students and families. Broadly speaking, the demographics of North Las Vegas are not reflective of many ALA Arizona schools. Identifying and analyzing a more specific target community is essential to a successful replication. Remedying this deficiency will permit the applicant to provide compelling evidence of success in schools implementing similar programs serving a similar target population than was provided initially and permit a more cogent explanation or rationale as to why this model is a good fit for the community in question.

- Access to Title I funds for state-sponsored charter schools is limited to schools that have large populations of students in poverty and offer a schoolwide program, as there is no mechanism to equitably distribute targeted assistance funding without disadvantaging high poverty schools. If Title I funds are not available, it is unclear who will implement interventions if Title I funding is not secured and the school is unable to afford the interventionists. Absent evidence that the school will be in a community that would likely make it eligible for schoolwide funding, Title I funding and associated programs should be omitted from the application. Assuming that such funding is not available due to location, demographics, or lack of participation in the National School Lunch Program, how will the school ensure that underperforming students are adequately supported.
- There are low income students and students who currently attend low-performing schools even in more affluent communities. Absent the Title I dependent interventionists, it is unclear from the narrative what strategies and programs the school will use to bring students up to acceptable proficiency levels who have previously attended underperforming schools.
- It is unclear why the Special Education Director will not be brought on until the third year and how these functions will be performed in years 1-2. In regards to English Language Learners, there is a need for more discussion of the research based strategies or curriculum that will be used to support language acquisition and other needs of these students.
- The petitioners will “...teach mathematics one grade level ahead...” yet they do not provide a feasible way as to how this can be accomplished; especially considering that they will be accepting students K-8 in Year 1. Based on the limited, overly broad data the petition provides about the target population, it appears that most students are not at grade level. If the population is theoretically behind in math and reading, it may not be feasible or effective to begin with such aggressive content assumptions. As noted previously, a more direct and targeted assessment of the specific targeted community will help to alleviate this tension.
- It is unclear how the academic program has effectively implemented Socratic seminars and at what levels students encounter them.
- Based on the narrative, it is unclear how frequently students will access health and physical education classes.
- The application mentions students being helped in and out of their cars by teachers and administrators as a way to have interaction between teachers and parents. There is a need for more specific information regarding other outreach efforts to support effective school-family partnerships.
- While the school plans to support the staff with professional development, it is unclear how the professional development budget will be allocated across programs and the frequency and amount of Professional Development that teachers will receive. Given the questionable return on investment of most professional development programs relative to student achievement, it is critical that the school identify a targeted, specific, data-driven approach to professional development based on student academic needs.

- Additional information on how students will develop skills in “servant leadership” is needed and how mastery of these skills will be assessed. Reference is made to hosting field trips during instructional time to students with positive behaviors. The description of the methods of discipline is vague. There is limited information provided as to how students will be encouraged to improve and thus be able to participate in external learning activities. It is unclear what strategies for positive behavioral incentives will be implemented to support the dress code and other policies.
- While the application narrative states that “[i]t is not to be construed that ALA-NLV will teach religion or be of any particular religious persuasion,” terms such as “moral and wholesome” are used repeatedly and are not explicitly defined throughout the application. These references, combined with public facing postings on the applicant group’s social media accounts raise concerns about the possibility of sectarian activity and may prompt some prospective staff or families to assume that they would be unwelcome in the school. While the applicant group was able to effectively address these concerns in the capacity interview, it is important that this language be modulated in the application to reflect the founding group’s goal of serving a student population that is representative of the larger community and ensure that there is no perception of impermissible sectarian activity.
- Moral and wholesome appear to be defined as the absence of profanity, bullying, disrespect, and immodesty and the presence of leadership traits of service, respect, and modesty. The theory of change proposes that this will be achieved through leadership instruction, classic literature, strict dress codes and service opportunities. It is unclear how the school will address concerns from families and the community regarding whether the school’s emphasis on classic literature is so strict that it may result in the perception that the program may not be welcoming to diverse student populations. It is unclear to what degree, if any, the school will incorporate the contributions of non-white and female authors whose work is firmly based in the classical tradition, e.g. Walcott, Bishop, Woolf, etc.
- “Very conservative” hair, jewelry, and makeup are part of the requirements of students. It is unclear what “very conservative” means in this context. For example, restrictions on ethnic hairstyles or religious clothing could be construed as “very conservative,” but they would impermissibly restrict enrollment by a diverse student body. The applicant must clarify how it will address this concern and identify whether the dress code or other policies may need to be modified as a result.

### **Specific Subset Ratings in the Academic Section (For Reference)**

- Mission and Vision  
- Approaches the Standard
- Transformational Change  
- Approaches the Standard
- Curriculum & Instructional Design  
- Approaches the Standard
- Distance Education Requirements

- N/A
- Pre-K Requirements
  - N/A
- High School Graduation Requirements
  - N/A
- Driving for Results
  - Meets the Standard
- At Risk Students and Special Populations
  - Approaches the Standard
- School Structure (Culture)
  - Approaches the Standard
- School Structure (Student Discipline)
  - Does Not Meet the Standard
- School Structure (Calendar and Schedule)
  - Approaches the Standard
- A Day in the Life & Scenarios
  - Approaches the Standard



## Operations Plan

- Approaches the Standard

### *Summary:*

The applicant presents a strong operating program which builds on the track record of prior ALA schools in Arizona. The governing body (ALA – NLV) will develop all policy for the school. The CEO/Superintendent reports to the governing body and will be responsible for creating procedures for the successful implementation of Board policy. During the first year, the CEO/Superintendent will act as Director of the school to economize on expenses and ensure that the culture of the school is developed in accordance to the mission and vision of the school. The Director is responsible for the overall operations of the school. The Assistant Director of the campus oversees the academic performance of the school. The prospective CEO/Superintendent (Director), Jeremy Christensen, helped develop the school model that will be replicated by American Leadership Academy in Nevada and has held a number of senior leadership positions within ALA. Mr. Christensen is a native Las Vegas which provides important insight into the community. ALA - NLV will rely upon the additional expertise of the EMO Staff. The prospective Assistant Director for ALA - NLV is Brittany Mormann and has served as a teacher at ALA - AZ for three years. Mrs. Mormann is well versed in the school's curriculum and culture and will be a vital resource in replicating the program in North Las Vegas. Prior to joining ALA, Mrs. Mormann completed her education at UNLV and lived in Las Vegas for seven years.

### *Areas of Strength:*

- Members of the committee to form have extensive real estate experience. The committee to form has presented a comprehensive operations plan.
- While the Committee to Form does not intend to participate in the Federal Free and Reduced Lunch program, it will provide sliding scale meals to families who can not afford to pay full price.
- The applicant has provided an adequate staffing plan and overview of approach to address operational areas: facilities, safety, nursing, IT, and IT policies, food program.
- The committee to form has allocated \$20K to support student recruitment efforts.
- The ALA Arizona network will serve as a back office EMO and will provide all Human Resources services to the school to limit the costs of duplicating that infrastructure. The applicant will leverage resources and talent pipeline from the EMO. The committee to form has presented what appears to be a compliant services agreement with the EMO. The partner EMO has experience in growing to scale in Arizona.

### *Areas for Improvement/Concerns:*

- The applicant must clarify what the sliding scale/discount will look like for the meals program and commit to adopting a policy and program which is easily understood and accessed by parents of modest means.
- There is a lack of clarity in the description of the organizational structure of the school and the rationale behind some structural decisions. It is unclear, for example, why the school will add a second layer of leadership in the second year of operation as the increase in span of control is minimal compared to year one. Given the scale of the school and the distance from the Arizona-based model on which it is based, it is unclear if two leadership positions are sufficient to recruit the needed students and staff and support a robust implementation with fidelity.
- It is unclear if the proposed Assistant Director is ready to be responsible for the academic program of such a large school based on a limited three year track record. The Assistant Director has been through the EMO's leadership training program, which may help address the concern above. It is unclear, however, how this role will be supported in the first few years of operation due to the distance between this person and the Arizona support structure.
- The special education director is not hired until year three of the school's operations. It is unclear how those duties will be filled in the first two years when the vast majority of students with disabilities will initially matriculate in the school and there is likely to be the most need to effective and accountable special education leadership.
- The business plan assumes a large school. The narrative does not make clear where this school stands in relation to previous new schools and whether the two leadership team members have past experience opening similarly sized schools with limited support. If the school were to miss its enrollment projections it is unclear if it would be able to be financially viable.
- It is unclear how the school plans to ensure mission alignment of the applicant pool, including for senior leaders for the organization. For example, what is the process for ensuring an on time hiring of a mission and skill aligned successor leader for ALA – NLV.
- The EMO fee of \$130 per student is low when compared to what other organizations charge for services. Additional detail on the fee and what services are included is necessary. It is unclear what services are included in the contract for all years of operation versus which ones will be discontinued and during what timeframe. The long-term plan for the EMO relationship is not specific. If services continue to gradually phase out, it is possible that ALA in NV eventually will become completely independent other than licensing logos and documents from the Arizona network.
- Since the proposed school is sharing an applicant pool with the EMO/partner school, it is unclear how the NLV campus will be able to ensure it has access to the best talent from that pool. There is a risk that the school may not be on a level playing field. It is unclear how the school will be able to take advantage of centralized HR and how hands-on that support will be for the first year, when the Nevada school will have to hire a staff to support hundreds of students.

- There are several references to the school's startup period, but it is unclear if that term is synonymous with the pre-opening period or if there is a longer term when the school will be viewed as being in startup.
- The marketing and enrollment plan does not indicate any options for reaching families without internet access or who do not know another family holding a cottage meeting. There does not appear to be a plan to ensure that families who do not have access to the online enrollment portal be able to apply.
- There are references to future expansion, but it is unclear what data and key performance indicators the governing body will use to determine whether it is ready to request authorization to expand from the SPCSA.
- The identification of only two types of expertise for the board (financial and educational) ignores the broad function of a board and the many duties and decisions a board must make. Based on a review of the information provided by the applicant, it is unclear if any of the current board members have experience in nonprofit or charter school governance. Similarly, there is little information to determine whether any of the current board members have been involved in an entrepreneurial venture such as starting up a new nonprofit organization. The dispute resolution process is not clearly defined, including the timeline for disputes that are sent to the board. The frequency of governing body meetings is not discussed. It is unclear what the rationale is for any minimum and maximum board size targets. The narrative does not address how or whether the applicant will diversify the Board to reflect the community.
- The discussion of the school safety plan is overly vague and relies on a checklist. This is inconsistent with statutory provisions related to the development of school safety plans.

### **Specific Subset Ratings in the Operations Section (For Reference)**

- Leadership Team
  - Approaches the Standard
- Leadership for Expansion (Experienced Operators Only)
  - Approaches the Standard
- Staffing
  - Approaches the Standard
- Human Resources
  - Meets the Standard
- Scale Strategy (Experienced Operators Only)
  - Approaches the Standard
- Student Recruitment and Enrollment
  - Approaches the Standard
- Board Governance
  - Approaches the Standard

- Incubation Year Development
  - Meets the Standard
- EMO Relationships and School Management Contracts (If Applicable)
  - Meets the Standard
- Services
  - Meets the Standard
- Facilities
  - Approaches the Standard
- Ongoing Operations
  - Meets the Standard

## Financial Plan

- Meets the Standard

### Summary

ALA-NLV will employ its own Business Manager to oversee accounting and purchasing. The Business Manager will be trained on the Nevada State chart of accounts and will follow GAAP and GASB standards.

### Areas of Strength:

- All purchase requests will be handled by the Business Manager and all bank accounts, credit cards and debit cards will be obtained in the name of the school.
- Payroll will be handled by the EMO as part of their licensing contract. A qualified third-party CPA will be secured to perform annual audits and shall submit a report to the governing body.
- The EMO shall also conduct an annual audit of school finance and operations to ensure all policies are being followed and that the school is in good operational standing.

### Areas for Improvement:

- The FY '17 enrollment plan of 990 and the FY '18 enrollment of 1080 are ambitious initial year goals. Marketing and enrollment efforts should be maximized to ensure potential lower enrollment does not occur and thus impact the budget and fiscal area.
- There is a discrepancy between the Budget Summary and the Cash Flow Statement.
- It does not appear that GASB 68 has not been adopted in the audited financial statements dated June 30, 2015. It would be helpful to understand when the operator intends to adopt those standards.

As the Committee to Form considers the programmatic and structural recommendations noted elsewhere in this report, it will be necessary to revisit some key budget assumptions. The applicant is encouraged to review its budgets and cash flow statements to determine what impacts any programmatic or structural adjustments may have on the financial plan.

***Should the Authority Board approve the application on the condition that the areas of improvement identified by addressed to the satisfaction of staff prior to the execution of the charter contract, those non-material revisions will move each element of the application to Meets the Standard.***

## Performance Record

American Leadership Academy is a nonprofit corporation. It holds the charter contract for all American Leadership Academy schools in Arizona. All Arizona campuses operate under the same governing body. As such, the entire organization receives one unified external audit each year instead of each campus. Additionally the school finance data is the same as the EMO finance data since they are the same entity.

The EMO provides licensing and minor services. As outlined in the application, the initial school director will become the CEO/superintendent when an additional campus is provided. The EMO will not provide a Regional Director as leadership will be provided by ALA - NLV. The EMO will not employ the school leader.

Based on a review of data published by the state of Arizona, of the five ALA campuses eligible to receive a rating on the Arizona Report Card, three were rated at an A level and two were classified at the B level during the most recent rating period (2014). The Arizona authorizer classified ALA as Meets Operational Standards on the 2015 and 2016 assessments of organizational performance and as Meets Board's Financial Standards on the 2014 and 2015 evaluations of the network's financial performance based on its independent audits.

## Evidence of Capacity

### *Summary*

The Committee to Form the School consists of five members with notable qualifications.

### *Analysis*

The Committee to Form the school are accomplished professionals with backgrounds in key areas such as accounting, finance, real estate, construction, insurance, business, education and athletics. A review of the Committee to Form's questionnaires reveals some community associations but no business or familial ties are evident.

One of the proposed board members, Mr. Bybee, states that he or his spouse is a relative of someone anticipated to apply to be a school employee. While he indicates there would be no ethical or legal conflicts of interest should he serve on the governing body, the provisions of NAC 386.345 may preclude his service if the individual were hired and he or she is related to Mr. Bybee within the third degree of consanguinity or affinity. Prior to the hiring of such an individual, Mr. Bybee would be advised to consult the Ethics Commission for an advisory opinion. In the event that such a conflict exists, the school would need to request a waiver of the provisions of NAC 386.345 for Mr. Bybee. Historically, such waivers have been limited to rural counties.

Two of the proposed board members, Ms. Curtis and Ms. Hardman, are teachers and their resumes indicates they are looking for employment in a teaching position but their disclosures indicate that they are not related to anyone who they anticipate will be applying to be a school employee so that would lead one to believe they will not be applying to teach at ALA - NLV.

Ms. Hardman disclosed that she knows another potential Board Member, Mr. Montandon. Since Mr. Montandon served as Mayor for the City of North Las Vegas for many years, this does not indicate a conflict.

There is evidence of due diligence conducted by members of the Committee to Form.

## STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY

SUPPORTING DOCUMENT

**S U B J E C T: Consideration and possible action on the Nevada Academy of Sciences and Arts charter application**

<u>  /  /  </u>	Public Workshop
<u>  /  /  </u>	Public Hearing
<u>  /  /  </u>	Consent Agenda
<u>  /  /  </u>	Regulation Adoption
<u>  /  /  </u>	Approval
<u>  /  /  </u>	Appointments
<u>  /  x/  </u>	Information
<u>  /  x/  </u>	Action

MEETING DATE: July 29, 2016

AGENDA ITEM: 6

NUMBER OF ENCLOSURE(S): 1

**PRESENTER(S): Patrick Gavin, Executive Director, SPCSA**

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**FISCAL IMPACT:**

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**BUDGET ACCOUNT (FOR PRINTING CHARGES ONLY):**

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**LENGTH OF TIME EXPECTED FOR PRESENTATION (IN MINUTES): 30 Mins**

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**SUBMITTED BY:** \_\_\_\_\_



# **NASA**

*Nevada Academy of Sciences and Arts*

*Charter School Application Recommendation Report*

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**Winter Cycle Charter Applications - 2016**

## Proposal Overview

### *School Name*

Nevada Academy of Sciences and Arts (NASA)

### *Mission (Application Item A.1.2)*

The mission of Nevada Academy of Sciences and Arts (NASA) is to provide Nevada students an excellent S.T.E.A.M. education that will help them become productive citizens in the 21st Century.

### *Proposed Location (from Charter Application Cover Sheet)*

Clark County

### *Enrollment Projections (from Charter Application Cover Sheet)*

Opening Year	School Type	Opening Grade(s)	Projected Enrollment
Year 1 (2017-2018)	Elementary	K-5	240
Year 2 (2018-2019)	Elementary	K-5	410
At capacity	Elementary	K-5	530

## Overview

The Recommendation Report for Nevada Academy of Sciences and Arts (NASA) is a summary of the evidence collected by the State Public Charter School Authority (SPCSA) through its interviews and dialogue with the applicant group and a review of the school's Charter Application Proposal. As the school is not replicating an existing model, the primary evidence weighed by a reviewer relates to the strength and coherence of the charter application and an evaluation of the capacity of the applicant to effectively implement the program and govern the school.

A recommendation to approve a charter for a six-year period is based on a comprehensive review of the proposal, the applicant capacity interview, and follow-up discussion with applicants. It is guided by three essential questions:

1. Will the academic program be a success?
2. Will the school be an effective and accountable organization?
3. Will the school be fiscally sound?

**This report is structured around three sections: Academic, Organizational and Fiscal. Each section contains an overview of key findings based on a the totality of the evidence and concludes with the Authority’s determination on each of the three guiding questions.**

## Recommendation

### *Overall Recommendation*

***Recommendation: Deny. Reviewers rate the overall application as “Does Not Meet the Standard”.***

*The Agency determined that the Nevada Academy of Sciences and Arts (NASA) “Does Not Meet the Standard” in the majority of areas in the initial application process. Charter School success starts with three basic facets; an academic plan that challenges students and allows for their success; an organizational plan that grants teachers and staff of the school professional development and training opportunities building upon current skill sets allowing them to develop the tools necessary to serve the student population; a solid financial plan that takes into account current and future economic forecasts and minimizes risk.*

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### RATING STANDARDS

#### **Meets the Standard**

*The response reflects a thorough understanding of key issues. It addresses the topic with specific and accurate information that shows thorough preparation; presents a clear, realistic picture of how the school expects to operate; and inspires confidence in the applicant’s capacity to carry out the plan effectively in a way which will result in a 4 or 5 star school.*

#### **Approaches the Standard**

*The response meets the criteria in many respects, but lacks detail and/or requires additional information in one or more areas.*

#### **Does Not Meet the Standard**

*The response is undeveloped or incomplete; demonstrates lack of preparation; or otherwise raises substantial concerns about the viability of the plan or the applicant’s ability to carry it out.*

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## Summary of Application Section Ratings

*Rating options for each section are Meets the Standard; Approaches the Standard; Does not Meet the Standard*

## Executive Summary

- Does Not Meet the Standard

### *Areas of Strength:*

- The applicant includes detailed information about the school leaders and some partners. The applicant describes numerous academic outcomes. The applicant identifies a compelling mission and vision and specifically identifies the proposed academic model.
- Applicant lists key supporters, partners, or resources.

### *Areas for Improvement/Concerns/Questions:*

- The student proficiency goals seem unrealistically high and the applicant does not address the timeline for these goals. The academic goals and outcomes were not grounded in data reflective of the current Nevada Academic Content Standards, but instead referenced old testing trends; thus rendering the proposed program goals as unrealistic and an indicator that the applicant group does not have adequate education expertise.
- The petitioners did not describe an education program that was robust, and the program as described, would not qualify as an innovative STEAM model as touted. Most STEAM related content is provided outside of the school day, thereby rendering the concept an extracurricular theme as opposed to a well developed, rigorous, and integrated academic program.

## Meeting the Need

- Does Not Meet the Standard

### *Areas of Strength:*

- The applicant plans to focus on K-8 to support academic and social success at the elementary level in order to enhance success at the secondary level.

### *Areas for Improvement/Concerns/Questions:*

- The description of the target population lacks specificity related to the current academic performance and experience of the students they intend to recruit (“...mostly minority students coming from low-income families...first generation immigrant families with low English language skills.”)
- Despite naming English Language Learners (ELLs) as a target population, the only reference to meeting their needs was on p.6, in that these students would be provided “access to American culture.” There was no mention of language acquisition supports, or research based curriculum or instruction that has been proven effective with ELLs.
- There are inconsistencies in the target population to be served. The first page of the proposal cover sheet states that “...NASA will be at full capacity serving grades K-5,” but on p.6 the petitioners state that “We choose to educate students that are in grades K-8.” The petition is inconsistent in describing the grade spans throughout.

- The design team does not seem to have direct experience with academics in the targeted area, instead the members have expertise in supporting families outside of academic programming and education program design.
- Despite citing that “...parents of African American and Hispanic students are more reluctant in engaging with their children’s school,” the generic parent engagement opportunities listed by the applicant do not directly address this challenge. While the applicant states that surveys would be administered at events regarding parents’ “...expectations, hopes and fears...”, there is no mention of how this survey data will be used (i.e. feedback loop). The applicant fails to make the connection between soliciting feedback, failing to demonstrate a will to act on it, and resulting lower levels of family and community engagement.
- The discussion of the parent role in the design of the education program vaguely describes group and individual parent engagement; no number, frequency, or dates of meetings were provided. The petitioners’ take-away from these meetings was that parents wanted extra-curricular activities at the school.
- The letters of support provided as represent a set of form/stock letters of support signed by various business professionals in the community. None of the letters provided could be characterized as “...letters of commitment outlining the accountabilities of both parties and clear, measurable, time-specific deliverables from the partner which are clearly relevant to the needs of the target population.” Despite the list of partners cited above, it is unclear what, if any, return the school will gain from investing staff and board time and resources in such relationships.
- Content provided in this section is repetitive and fails to provide reviewers with confidence that the applicant has the capacity to effectively engage with parents and community in developing a school from scratch. For example, pages 8 and 9 are a cut and paste from the “Our Leadership Team” section on p. 3. Beyond one consultant, a proposed leadership team member that has special education experience, there is no stated relationship between the academic portion of the education program design and the founding group, partner agencies’ and leadership team members’ expertise.

### **Specific Subset Ratings in the Academic Section (For Reference)**

- Targeted Plan
  - Approaches the Standard
- Parent and Community Involvement
  - Does Not Meet the Standard

## Academic Plan

- Does Not Meet the Standard

### Summary

The applicant articulates a clear and compelling mission. The mission and purpose of the school is to provide Nevada students with an excellent S.T.E.A.M. education that will help them become productive 21st century citizens. The academic program described is insufficient to fulfill that mission.

### Areas of Strength:

- The applicant provides a description of the numerous approaches the school will take to prioritize, increase, and support student literacy. The school provides one example of how the school seeks tie together the Nevada Academic Content Standards and the proposed curriculum to deliver content to students. The narrative provides specific information about the implementation of art and wellness programs.
- The narrative provides an overview of a process for identifying at-risk students, including those with academic and behavioral needs and provides some delineation within the state-mandated Response to Intervention model. The applicant identifies some effective strategies the school will use to utilization students' Individualized Educational Plans and adequately addresses how school will accelerate the learning of gifted students. The narrative adequately describes how the school will protect the rights of students with disabilities in disciplinary actions through fidelity to the IEP, consulting the code of conduct, and providing extensive mentoring and counseling to students. The applicant describes some processes for identifying English Language Learners, including administration of placement assessments and communications to parents and teachers.
- The application adequately describes how the instructional programs will offer a continuum of services to students through a tiered system of interventions and remediation for students in need of additional support, including Small Group Instruction, SOLO Taxonomy, and SIOP Model. The applicant group clearly commits to ensuring full Nevada licensure for all special education teachers and coordinators, as required by law.
- The applicant provides some information on a process for utilizing data to support instruction and providing training to teachers and school leaders. The narrative includes a description of how the school will provide for a menu of professional development to teachers and staff, including some content to assist teachers in supporting and accelerating the learning of students with disabilities.

- The founding team adequately describes strategies to support a school climate that will allow for fulfillment of educational goals. The application presents specific approaches the school will use to reinforce positive student behavior, including the Positive Behavior Intervention Strategies (PIBS) system. There is a description of how the school will form a committee and staff and parents related to school climate and culture. The narrative describes a due process procedures for student suspension and expulsion, and identifies responsible staff. The applicant explains that students and parents who enter the school mid-year will have an orientation of norms and values.
- The requirements for matriculation are clearly defined and plans to inform stakeholders are mentioned.

### *Areas for Improvement/Concerns:*

- Applicant provides insufficient evidence that the planned curriculum will meet the needs of their specific student population; there is some evidence of the success of the approaches generally, but not specific to the high-needs students or English language learners who will likely be highly represented in the student body. Moreover, it is unclear that the proposed program, as designed or as delivered, will be effective in addressing the state's academic standards. The applicant provides insufficient evidence that the academic program is aligned with the Nevada Academic Content Standards either via data demonstrating how such programs have generated strong academic outcomes on NACS aligned assessments (outcome based evidence) or via a well-developed alignment of the school's academic program with the standards (input based evidence). For example, the applicant fails to address how the school's academic program is aligned to the Nevada Academic Content Standards for science (i.e. the Next Generation Science Standards. This is a serious deficiency for a school the purports to provide a science and technology-based academic program. While Core Knowledge is a well-respected program, it is also a program where schools and teachers have broad discretion in selecting content and in designing instructional activities and assessments. The applicant provides no evidence that its particular implementation of the Core Knowledge Sequence will be aligned with NACS. The applicant fails to addresses the ways in which the planned academic strategies well suited to the student population.
- Given the large scale failure of most professional development programs to result in improved teacher practice or student performance, it is unclear how the laundry list of professional development activities provided by the applicant will result in new professional opportunities for teachers. For example, it is unclear that there is sufficient alignment between the professional development plans developed in the NASA Teacher Academy and student achievement data.
- The school does not articulate measurable academic growth goals, focusing solely on proficiency. This is indicative of a lack of understanding of the Nevada School Performance Framework, the Authority Performance Framework, and the underlying principles of Nevada's compensatory and conjunctive triggers for school performance evaluation. Both the state and Authority models give weight to student growth as well as absolute performance on state and Authority assessments to ensure that the performance of high growth, low absolute attainment schools and low growth, high absolute attainment schools is reflected in the school ratings systems.
- The measures for success are not closely aligned with the mission, resulting in a lack of clarity around mission attainment. It is unclear how NASA will know that it has achieved its stated goal of

preparing students to be productive citizens in the 21st Century. The applicant's academic target goals do not clearly align to the current Nevada School Performance Framework and the Authority Performance Framework. For example, the applicant's internal and mission-specific framework goals do not meet the SMART standard. The goal of achieving 90% student proficiency with a student body that is predominantly disadvantaged appears to be unrealistic based on preliminary data on statewide testing performance and it is unclear how the school will be able to measure progress towards this goal. The internal goals are not ambitious and not relevant in that there are not performance goals for every grade and every year and hence do not provide actionable data which can be used to drive towards the 90 percent proficiency target that would merit a successful renewal based on the applicant's own proposed performance targets. While there are vague MAP assessment growth goals, there are no performance goals for grades by year. While the MAP and IA assessments will provide some data for internal evaluation of the education program, there is no evidence provided that the applicant understands how to ensure alignment of assessments and metrics with State Assessments or State Standards. The school appears to be contemplating an ambitious assessment program based on the number of tests contemplated. While the applicant demonstrates a clear understanding of the obligation to participate in the statewide and Authority systems of assessment and accountability, the increasing resistance to testing in schools and the lack of alignment between the many tests on the assessment menu raises concerns about the sustainability and appropriateness of the assessments. In particular, the lack of a clear plan for investing staff, parents, and students in full participation in all federal, state, Authority, and school-mandated assessments at all stages of the school's development is a significant deficiency.

- The assessment plan does not include a clear process for setting and monitoring ambitious academic goals year to year. For example, the internal goals do not allow for the evaluation of mission attainment – while the guiding purposes 1) state that the 90% of students will meet or exceed state standards as measured by current state assessments – this is not reflected in the assessment plan. There is not a clear process for setting, monitoring and/or revising internal leading indicator academic goals. There is not a clear delineation between assessments utilized for internal monitoring by the governing body, staff, and leadership and those which are sufficiently rigorous, valid, and reliable to be presented to the Authority, the state, parents, and the general public.
- There is no evidence provided that MAP and IA assessment results accurately predict student performance on standardized tests that are aligned with the NACS. As MAP is a comparative analysis rather than a flat measure of proficiency, there appears to be significant misalignment between this leading indicator of student performance and the eventual summative measurements that will determine school performance.
- The applicant does not demonstrate that the proposed team has a demonstrated track record of success serving a wide range of students with disabilities. While the applicant asserts that some proposed staff members have a track record of improving student achievement with students with disabilities, there is no evidence provided to support this claim. The processes for identifying students with disabilities do not meet the expectations set forth in state and federal law. It is unclear that the special education staffing complies with the student/teacher ratios outlined in Nevada statute and regulation. This has significant budgetary and programmatic implications due to Nevada's poor performance nationally related to serving students with disabilities. The applicant does not address essential elements in the scenario of serving a student with disabilities in a classroom with her nondisabled peers, including a plan for how to prepare student peers to learn



alongside such a student. It is unclear how the school culture will support and guide students in working alongside students with disabilities, particularly those with moderate to severe disabilities.

- The applicant does not articulate plans to exit ELL students who attain sufficient progress. The plan to include ELL parents in the school community is insufficient because much of it is based online, it's not clear whether the documents are translated into Spanish, and it assumes that parents will be willing to/wanting to come to the school to be engaged. It is unclear if there are sufficient translator resources to allow parents of ELL students to participate meaningfully in their children's education. The target communities are home to families that speak a broad range of languages. It is unclear from the program description, the business plan, or the budget that the applicant will have adequate staff or contract resources to effectively communicate in the native languages of the families whose students who will likely enroll in the school. There is no evidence in the narrative or the budget that key documents, such as the student/parent handbook, be translated into languages besides English. Given the large population of ELL students in the target area, this is a significant deficiency.
- The applicant does not provide a well-defined plan to support an ELL student in accordance with Federal and state law and regulation or the Federally mandated statewide ELL plan– the applicant states that the school staff will “formulate a plan” to meet the students’ needs, but does not specify how that plan will be carried out, and who will be responsible for the student’s learning. The applicant also does not demonstrate an understanding of student enrollment processes for such students. It is unclear what the applicant means with the statement that “we will adjust our schedule in a way minimizes the distraction for all other students” in its description of how the school will serve ELL students.
- It is unclear that the proposed STLS Coordinator Plan will align with federal and state law and regulation for students in transition (e.g. homeless students). The applicant does not clearly define a process for identifying homeless students, and does not describe communications to parents and teachers of homeless students. Schools in the target area often have very high levels of student turnover – it is unclear that the assumptions grounding the academic program or the business plan are based on realistic data regarding student mobility. For example, the applicant states that it will provide a peer mentor to every student who enrolls in the school mid-year, but this statement is not grounded in sufficient data to determine if such an approach is sustainable given that many schools in the target district have mobility rates of 40 percent or more per year.
- The applicant does not provide detail about the discipline policies, instead stating that the policies will be outlined in the school’s Discipline Code. The application does not cite specific research-based or age-appropriate strategies that the school will use to support students’ socioemotional needs. There are no goals for student behavior that are clear and measurable. It is unclear how the applicant set a 97% goal for student attendance. This does not appear to be a realistic goal based on data from schools serving similar student populations in Clark County given the lack of program or processes to intervene effectively in cases of truancy or other attendance challenges. It is unclear how this goal will be monitored and performance managed to ensure that the school reaches such an ambitious target.

### Specific Subset Ratings in the Academic Section (For Reference)

- Mission and Vision  
- Approaches the Standard

- Transformational Change
  - Does Not Meet the Standard
- Curriculum & Instructional Design
  - Approaches the Standard
- Distance Education Requirements
  - N/A
- Pre-K Requirements
  - N/A
- High School Graduation Requirements
  - N/A
- Driving for Results
  - Does Not Meet the Standard
- At Risk Students and Special Populations
  - Does Not Meet the Standard
- School Structure (Culture)
  - Approaches the Standard
- School Structure (Student Discipline)
  - Approaches the Standard
- School Structure (Calendar and Schedule)
  - Meets the Standard
- A Day in the Life & Scenarios
  - Does Not Meet the Standard

## Operations Plan

- Does Not Meet the Standard

### *Summary:*

The applicant provided a limited overview of an operational plan but the detail provided was insufficient to give the reviewers sufficient confidence that the proposed school would be a successful organization.

### *Areas of Strength:*

- The leadership structure demonstrates effective assignment of management roles and distribution of responsibilities because provides details about which of the three members of the leadership team will be responsible for all of the following: instructional leadership, curriculum, personnel, budgeting, financial management, management of state categorical revenue streams, special education and ELL programming, legal compliance, state reporting, and external relations.
- The applicant has identified qualifications and competencies of the lead person that align with the school's mission and program and demonstrate capacity to successfully manage the school in the Leadership Team Resumes. The resumes provided for the school leadership team demonstrate a range of experience in schools, including charter schools.
- The board articulates a clear, ambitious, data-driven set of standards and criteria that the school leader must satisfy in order to keep the school on track to achieve its vision in the "Performance Standards for School Leaders". There is an expectation that school leadership will receive coaching and support by the school board.

### *Areas for Improvement/Concerns/Questions:*

- The applicant does not demonstrate that the identified leaders meet the necessary qualifications and competencies articulated by the applicant. There is insufficient evidence that the identified leaders have a previous track record of significant student achievement gains with target demographics because the Leadership Team Resumes provide limited or unclear information or data about how the leaders impacted student performance in their previous positions. For example, the assessment data provided for the proposed principal is unclear, as the applicant fails to provide sufficient context or analysis to determine the applicability of assessment results to the Nevada context.

- The board does not provide logical evidence that the school will achieve its target student outcomes if the school leader satisfies the standards set forth by the board because the “Performance Standards for School Leaders” do not include measurable goals and standards for student academic growth and performance. The organizational charts do not clearly delineate board roles. There is little evidence that proposed board members have built relationships with one or more stakeholder(s) who contribute(s) in a material, strategic way to ensuring that the school opens and stays open. The applicant does not provide performance goals for the board.
- It is unclear that the proposed board has the required level of commitment, experience, or transferrable knowledge and skills to adequately oversee a school. For example, only one of the proposed members of the board was available to participate in the capacity interview. The application lists five proposed board members and states the intent to add two more, but it is unclear what skills and experience those new members will provide. None of the proposed members demonstrate experience serving on boards. The application does not identify any board members with skills in areas such as education, construction or real estate, law or legal affairs, technology (essential to a STEM school), or general management operations of schools. There is not a clear structure or process that enables the Board to collect the information it needs, irrespective of the information the principal will provide.
- The applicant does not provide information on how high-performing teachers will be promoted or otherwise rewarded. There is a lack of clarity regarding the consequences of poor performance of teachers or school leaders. The application does not provide any assurance that the school will meet the student-teacher ratios required in statute for full-day kindergarten and students with severe disabilities. This information cannot be determined from the narrative. The hiring process described is insufficient to ensure that teachers will be effective in serving the likely student population.
- It is unclear why the applicant is proposing to purchase a duplicative Student Information System nor is there evidence that the applicant has researched how it might be able leverage similar functionality from the state-mandated SIS, Infinite Campus. There is limited information provided regarding the arrangements with the student information vendor, including around key costs such as training. There are no metrics and processes for evaluating effectiveness of services for this duplicative out-of-state vendor. The application does not indicate sufficient thought has been put into the administration of such a complex system. There is no mention of critical considerations such as user access control policies, limitation of access rights and procedures for removing access from departing employees; policies for data stored on personal and portable devices aimed at minimizing inadvertent disclosing of information, such as theft or misplaced equipment; strategy for information backups and disaster recovery; intruder prevention strategies, including physical and electronic intrusion; or malware and malicious software prevention and removal strategy.
- The application does not provide details about the timeline / schedule to identify and secure facilities. The team presented does not demonstrate knowledge of the costs of renovating an educational facility. The narrative inadequately describes anticipated facility needs given the anticipated heavy use of technology in the school and the facilities preparation and

accommodations that will entail. There is no evidence provided to indicate that the facilities-related budget assumptions are realistic based on anticipated location, size, etc. There is no consideration of how the applicant will ensure that a proposed location will be in compliance with applicable building codes, health and safety laws, and with the requirements of the American with Disabilities Act (ADA). The applicant does not clearly demonstrate that the safety and security plans it will develop are likely to ensure a safe environment for people and property because the applicant only states that it will develop a safety and security plan, and provides limited details about what will be included in the plan or the process to create the plan. There is no evidence that the applicant has researched the requirements of Nevada law in this area.

### **Specific Subset Ratings in the Operations Section (For Reference)**

- Leadership Team
  - Does Not Meet the Standard
  
- Leadership for Expansion (Experienced Operators Only)
  - N/A
  
- Staffing
  - Does Not Meet the Standard
  
- Human Resources
  - Approaches the Standard
  
- Scale Strategy (Experienced Operators Only)
  - N/A
  
- Student Recruitment and Enrollment
  - Approaches the Standard
  
- Board Governance
  - Does Not Meet the Standard
  
- Incubation Year Development
  - Does Not Meet the Standard
  
- EMO Relationships and School Management Contracts (If Applicable)
  - N/A
  
- Services
  - Does Not Meet the Standard
  
- Facilities
  - Does Not Meet the Standard
  
- Ongoing Operations
  - Approaches the Standard

## Financial Plan

- Does Not Meet the Standard

### Summary

The applicant lays out a basic financial plan but there are numerous questions as to how the plan will operate and the processes and procedures necessary to ensure that the financial plan will be successful.

### Areas of Strength:

- Applicant projections are based on the accurate assumption of receiving about \$6500 in DSA funding per student.
- Applicant's budget priorities are aligned with school plan, including educational program, student enrollment, and staffing.
- Applicant provides sufficient detail and specificity of assumptions for ALL budget line items to allow for the assessment of fiscal viability.
- Applicant's projected debt-to-asset ratio is less than 0.9.
- Applicant does not list any essential services that are funded at amounts that would preclude the applicant group from implementing their plan.

### Areas for Improvement:

- Applicant does not provide evidence of the projected personal loan of \$250,000 that the Governing Body will take out for the first year.
- Applicant assumes that paying into the State retirement plan will cost about 14% of the total salaries – this percentage is unrealistically low.
- Applicant does not provide strong financial contingency plans – applicant states that the board members are well-connected and can secure grants, but there is no clear contingency plan and no evidence to support the assertion that the school can be sustained philanthropically, e.g. a sophisticated development plan, concrete donor commitments, etc.
- The facilities budget and associated narrative does not address potential costs of school / building renovation to meet technology needs for STEAM curriculum, including wiring, bandwidth, electrical infrastructure, etc.
- Applicant does not demonstrate sufficient cash reserves for required 30 day minimum in year one.
- Applicant does not identify financial control systems that will ensure that only allowable expenses will be made and that all expenses will be coded properly.

- It is unclear where the \$80,000 in projected revenue for Year Zero is derived from as there is no guaranteed source of public funds during startup.
- There is insufficient information on the provision of financial management or the segregation of the financial duties among school leadership.
- As the Committee to Form considers the programmatic and structural recommendations noted elsewhere in this report, it will be necessary to revisit some key budget assumptions. The applicant is encouraged to review its budgets and cash flow statements to determine what impacts any programmatic or structural adjustments may have on the financial plan.

## **Performance Record**

Although several member of the proposed Leadership Team have a background in charter schools, this application does not seem to be a replication of an existing, currently structured Charter School. Consequently, no Performance Record is available.



## Evidence of Capacity

### *Summary*

The Committee to Form the School consists of five members with notable qualifications.

### *Analysis*

The Committee to Form the school are accomplished professionals with backgrounds in key areas such as tax, finance, health, business and media. A review of the Committee to Form's questionnaires reveals no specific conflicts of interest.

Only one member of the proposed governing body was available to participate in the Capacity Interview. That individual deferred almost all questions to the proposed leadership team and consultants. There is insufficient evidence of capacity to merit a recommendation for approval.

STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY

SUPPORTING DOCUMENT

**S U B J E C T: Consideration and possible action of the Nevada State High School Meadowood charter application**

- /  /   Public Workshop
- /  /   Public Hearing
- /  /   Consent Agenda
- /  /   Regulation Adoption
- /  /   Approval
- /  /   Appointments
- /  x/   Information
- /  x/   Action

MEETING DATE: July 29, 2016  
AGENDA ITEM: 7  
NUMBER OF ENCLOSURE(S): 1

**PRESENTER(S): Patrick Gavin, Executive Director, SPCSA**

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

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**BUDGET ACCOUNT (FOR PRINTING CHARGES ONLY):**

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**LENGTH OF TIME EXPECTED FOR PRESENTATION (IN MINUTES): 30 Mins**

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**SUBMITTED BY:** \_\_\_\_\_

# ***Nevada State High School Meadowood***

***Charter School Application Recommendation Report***

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**Winter Cycle Charter Applications - 2016**

## Proposal Overview

### *School Name*

Nevada State High School - Meadowood

### *Mission (Application Item A.1.2)*

The model school, Nevada State High School (NSHS), has a mission and vision that has been meeting the needs of families for over eleven years. The school's mission is to support students in a college environment with personal, academic, and social skills to promote college success. This is done through the school's model of dual-enrollment, distribution of resources, curriculum design and system of student supports.

### *Proposed Location (from Charter Application Cover Sheet)*

Washoe County

### *Enrollment Projections (from Charter Application Cover Sheet)*

Opening Year	School Type	Opening Grade(s)	Projected Enrollment
Year 1 (2017-2018)	High School	11-12	80
Year 2 (2018-2019)	High School	11-12	100
At capacity	High School	11-12	135

## Overview

The Recommendation Report for Nevada State High School - Meadowood is a summary of the evidence collected by the State Public Charter School Authority (SPCSA) through its interviews and dialogue with the applicant group, review of the school's Charter Application Proposal along with an analysis of performance data for other charter schools implementing the same academic model.

A recommendation to approve a charter for a six-year period is based on a comprehensive review of the proposal, performance data for replicated schools, the applicant capacity interview, follow-up discussion with applicants, and - where possible - site visits, guided by three essential questions:

1. Will the academic program be a success?
2. Will the school be an effective and accountable organization?
3. Will the school be fiscally sound?

**This report is structured around three sections: Academic, Organizational and Fiscal. Each section contains an overview of key findings based on a the totality of the evidence and concludes with the Authority’s determination on each of the three guiding questions.**

## Recommendation

### *Overall Recommendation*

***Recommendation: Approve. The reviewers rate the overall application at “Approaches the Standard”. NSHS has a strong track record as a “high performing” charter School in Nevada. As such, if the applicants are willing to work with the SPCSA and fill in the gaps left from lack of details in the application, the recommendation is to move forward.***

The Agency found Nevada State High School - Meadowood “Met the Standard” or “Approached the Standard” in the majority of areas in the initial application process. Charter school success starts with three basic facets; an academic plan that challenges students and allows for their success; an organizational plan that grants teachers and staff of the school professional development and training opportunities building upon current skill sets allowing them to develop the tools necessary to serve the student population; a solid financial plan that takes into account current and future economic forecasts and minimizes risk. This Charter School Recommendation Application Report is designed to review perceived deficiencies in the application and allow for corrective action in a manner that does not fundamentally alter the school’s proposed program.

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### RATING STANDARDS

#### **Meets the Standard**

*The response reflects a thorough understanding of key issues. It addresses the topic with specific and accurate information that shows thorough preparation; presents a clear, realistic picture of how the school expects to operate; and inspires confidence in the applicant’s capacity to carry out the plan effectively in a way which will result in a 4 or 5 star school.*

#### **Approaches the Standard**

*The response meets the criteria in many respects, but lacks detail and/or requires additional information in one or more areas.*

#### **Does Not Meet the Standard**

*The response is undeveloped or incomplete; demonstrates lack of preparation; or otherwise raises substantial concerns about the viability of the plan or the applicant’s ability to carry it out.*

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## Summary of Application Section Ratings

*Rating options for each section are Meets the Standard; Approaches the Standard; Does not Meet the Standard*

### Executive Summary

- Meets the Standard

The new school will respond to a need that was identified by students in its targeted community having to sustain a long commute so they can attend one of its existing campuses. The academic results, as presented, meet/exceed the state requirements. The proposal indicates that the new school will follow the successful practices of its predecessors.

### Meeting the Need

- Meets the Standard

- Targeted Plan  
- Meets the Standard
- Parent and Community Involvement  
- Meets the Standard

### Areas of Strength:

- The applicant summarizes the mission for the school and the key components of the academic model. In particular, on Page 7 of the application, the applicant cites that the mission of the school is to “support students in a college environment with personal, academic, and social skills to promote college success”. Moreover, the applicant argues that the academic model that leads to the successful achievement of this mission is based upon “dual enrollment, distribution of resources, curriculum design, and systems of student supports.”
- The applicant provides the track record of success that demonstrates that efficacy of the applicant group and the academic model in achieving the stated mission. On page 7, the applicant cites that the original flagship school Nevada State High School (NSHS) has been “an exemplary or 5 star school for nine out of the eleven years it has been in existence.” In addition, the applicant states, on Page 8, that the school has been identified as one of the top performing schools by the NV DOE, SPSCA; and has been recognized by Nevada Policy Research Institute, Nevada Taxpayers Association, and US News and World Report.
- The applicant clearly articulates the core values of the organization and connects those to its success. In particular, the applicant argues that the success of the flagship school, and thus, the proposed school will be the continuing focus on the school’s mission and core values. In particular, the applicant identifies the core values as “responsibility, integrity, and motivation”. Moreover, the applicant cites the accomplishments listed in the bullet above as evidence of efficacy of a focus on the mission and these core values, on page 8, the applicant states that “These accomplishments were not because of a leader or a leadership team, these were because the staff stayed focused on the mission, and students and families believed in it.

- NSHS has been in operation for 11 years, and has been rated “exemplary” or 5 star for nine years. They currently operate 3 sites.
- In the interview, the applicant was able to articulate how the school supports students in selecting the optimal schedule of college courses depending on what they intend to do after completing the NSHS plan (e.g. they were able to explain why there is not a default push to have all students graduate NSHS with a high school diploma and an Associate’s Degree).

### *Areas for Improvement/Concerns:*

- The applicant has not clearly demonstrated that there is a need within the larger school community nor that there is demand for the school. The applicant provides no quantifiable evidence or data (including student populations, dual credit access data for existing schools, performance of existing schools etc.) to suggest that there is a need for the proposed school, nor that demand exists.
- The applicant does not provide a quantifiable goal that is meaningfully connected to the school’s mission or, in lieu of such a goal, a commitment to meet NSPF and Authority Performance Framework goals. On page 7, the applicant indicates that the goal is to “provide local community...access to NSHS’s quality dual enrollment program and the supports they need to be successful.” Further clarity is not provided, and the applicant then provides a generic description of the data that it plans to track without providing quantitative goals that speak to whether the school will have been successful in achieving its mission or how those goals align to state targets. For example, again on Page 7, the applicant states that: Implementation across all campuses will include, but not be limited to the following: scorecard and student data tracking, student interventions, classroom observation logs ensuring standardized implementation of curriculum, performance incentives, and accountability for students, parents and staff.”
- The applicant fails to specifically identify key partners and stakeholders. The applicant only provides a generic reference to the partners and stakeholders that it will engage to help achieve its mission. For example, on page 8, the applicant will “continue collaboration with stakeholders and develop stronger partnerships with others to ensure the successful transition of the underserved population.” In addition, later on Page 8, the applicant only provides a vague description of how it will engage parents and local colleges “school tuition is on the parents’ dime, so it may pay the parent to know if the investment is well spent. NSHS works with families to learn how to track college progress and maintain an appropriate level of college involvement. NSHS will also continue to work with the local colleges on its registration and payment processes to dual- enroll students.

## Academic Plan

- Approaches the Standard

### Summary

The Applicant has articulated a vision where all students will be prepared for higher education. The school's vision is to ensure every student is college ready targets ALL students, not just high performing students.

### Areas of Strength:

- Replication of the previous highly successful school format.
- The dual credit model allows students to graduate with between 12 and 20 completed college courses, if they pass all the courses they take.
- The parent education component, if successfully implemented, is likely to provide students with additional support at home.
- In the interview, the applicants stated that “we are like the parents of 300 kids, we are supporting them to fully integrate in the college environment,” and focused on articulating their focus on non-academic skills that allow students to succeed in college. They referenced supports such as working with students on financial aid applications, designing resumes, etc.

### Areas for Improvement/Concerns/Questions:

- Dual credit models are highly vulnerable to the programming, staffing, and policies of partner institutes of higher education. The lack of direct control over areas such as curriculum makes evaluation of a dual-credit model significantly more challenging. There may be a need to develop a separate evaluation process for schools for applicants which propose to use dual enrollment as a primary or exclusive mechanism for providing educational services.
- Recognizing the lack of direct control over some key areas of content and program delivery, the applicant should develop clearer systems to document the performance of partner institutions, specific programs, and key college personnel in key performance areas identified in the application both as a means to identify the most effective and aligned partners, programs, and staff and as a means to inform policymakers regarding challenges and opportunities in dual enrollment strategies. As the school expands, the need to develop a more systemic strategy and approach to managing the NSHE partnership will become necessary. For example, since the students are taught by the partner colleges' faculty, there appears to be limited room for curriculum development or realignment at the present time. However, as Nevada and NSHE continue to push for greater investment in dual learning, it is likely that there will be greater opportunity for conflict and misalignment. The development of such systems will move the applicant from “Approaches the Standard” to “Meets the Standard” in key areas of the application, including curriculum, driving for results, at risk students and special populations, and transformational change.



### Specific Subset Ratings in the Academic Section (For Reference)

- Mission and Vision
  - Approaches the Standard
- Transformational Change
  - Approaches the Standard
- Curriculum & Instructional Design
  - Approaches the Standard
- Distance Education Requirements
  - N/A
- Pre-K Requirements
  - N/A
- High School Graduation Requirements
  - Meets the Standard
- Driving for Results
  - Approaches the Standard
- At Risk Students and Special Populations
  - Approaches the Standard
- School Structure (Culture)
  - Approaches the Standard
- School Structure (Student Discipline)
  - Approaches the Standard
- School Structure (Calendar and Schedule)
  - Approaches the Standard
- A Day in the Life & Scenarios
  - Meets the Standard

## Operations Plan

- Approaches the Standard

### *Summary:*

NSHS leaders maintain institutional knowledge of the school and broad range of knowledge nationally and in the state of Nevada regarding charter schools and dual-credit curriculum. The COO and CAO (Chief Operators) were founding staff members of the school 12 years ago and both served for four years collectively as Nevada's liaison to National Alliance for Public Charter School master class series. This year, the school has brought on Directors of Site Administration to help with succession planning and build more capacity in the school leadership. This provides some opportunity to allow the CAO and COO more time to explore the replication of a new site. The Chief Operators also increased capacity by meeting with individuals from Washoe County including: administrators from currently operating charter schools, active school administrators, retired school administrator, representatives from the areas community college, and former founding member of Northern Nevada State High School charter application.

### *Areas of Strength:*

- The COO and CAO from the original 2004 school guarantee continuity of the model.
- Consistency in staff growth and moderate increases in the school-based staff that reflect the unconventional school's model of primarily delivering its curriculum via partner institutions. The narrative makes consistent reference to learning from the operating of the previous sites as they grow.
- It appears that assumptions for growth align with the state and city population growth.
- Applicant recruitment strategies are typical charter grassroots practices that continue even at scale.
- Opening under the same (successful) board and expanding it later is a best practice and limits replication risk. The executive committee model of governance will allow for various levels of board members' involvement without board members' burnout. Board terms allow for diverse membership and "new" blood.
- Allowing fair incubation time is by itself a positive approach to expansion, particularly since the network will be also dealing with another new school and a new campus of the flagship school.
- The network model is a typical centralized one where all alike-functions are kept combined.
- The nature of the school model eliminates many of the day-to-day services and costs of a traditional school and shift much of that onto service delivery by the partner IHEs.
- They have included Insurance capabilities as required.

### *Areas for Improvement/Concerns:*

- The expansion plan is ambitious, given that the operator has maintained one school for many years and is looking to grow aggressively by one site per year to five sites by 2021. It is unclear if the network is ready to grow out of the “Founders Syndrome” and bring new perspectives into the school model. While leadership continuity is a positive, the demands of scale will increase the need for clearer succession planning and the emergence of clearer systems. The entrepreneurial, all hands on deck approach which has been successful as a small school will need to be revisited as the school transitions to a larger multi-site, multi-county network. “Nevada State High School operates a small school model where each employee holds a certain title, but serves many roles at the school. This kind of model allows for employees to display hidden talents and add value to the organization.” This statement is vague and does not clearly describe how the 4 campuses will maintain the same level of performance and excellence as the original 12-year old school. This will likely necessitate a transition to more defined roles. Under the current structure, there is a practice of shared accountability that works well in a small setting but may be less suitable to a more complex organization.. For example, it is currently unclear whether the Directors of Site Administration have primary responsibility for liaising with the particular colleges the students attend. This new role appears to be tailored to focus on specific school and community issues. It is unclear what input they have on the overall network strategy. Similarly, there is a lack of clarity regarding the roles & responsibilities of part-time consultants.
- There is insufficient information related to the operator’s “loose-tight” assumptions. What elements of the model are centrally prescribed and what elements are subject to site-based decision-making. As the network grows, it will be important to identify the autonomies of individual campuses and schools. Currently, it appears that all school/network activities are tightly managed and there is significant decentralization of content and instruction due to the independence of the partner IHEs. Under the current ad hoc relationship structure, it is unclear to what extent to which the COO and CAO can influence the quality of the colleges’ faculty to align with the school’s standards and general expectations in K-12 education. As the school grows, greater coordination with NSHE will need to be explored. Given the likely emphasis on higher education and P/K-16 alignment in the upcoming legislative session, there may be opportunities for the school to educate policymakers on the opportunities and challenges of dual enrollment.
- Some elements of performance evaluation will also need to be strengthened as the network expands. “Executives and site leaders look to identify performance of all staff during the first 90-days” – this is a long time to have an ineffective staff member, particularly one who provides direct services to students. The position matrices do not call for Teacher positions. This is consistent with the school model of having students taught by IHE faculty. However, there is an apparent inconsistency with this model in the discussion of compensation: “When hiring teachers, this allows flexibility to recruit the best teachers and not be bound by a salary scale. The school maintains a low, mid, and high range of salaries from \$35,000 to \$85,000 per year.” It is unclear who these “teachers” are and what their role is versus those of the IHE faculty. Moreover, these salary ranges appear wide (\$35K to \$85K) particularly in a school with a small teaching staff. Assuming that these staff members all perform similar tasks and have similar caseloads, this level of disparity could lead to performance gaps. The lack of clarity in the narrative around background checks for such teachers may also present risk—the school must clarify how it provides for background checks for such individuals. The applicant should revise this area of the business plan to provide greater clarity regarding these HR policies and processes.

- It appears that the facility will be primarily to house after college hours tutoring or culture-building exercises. Some reviewers expressed concern with the concept of having one 30'x30' = 900 sf room, as described, may not be conducive for all types of tutoring (English & Reading require a different setting than Math & Science). For example, a room of this size could house 45-50 students (at approx. 20 sf per student, which is an average educational space allocation). In contrast, some students with disabilities (e.g. visual or auditory) may require spaces with specific sound and lighting accommodations that cannot be satisfied in one large room for the kinds of supports necessary to ensure academic issues. Similarly, students with attention issues may struggle in a single room venue. These realities may require modifications to the facility plan or other compensatory strategies (staffing, specialized equipment, etc.) or other contingencies. There is no discussion of office spaces for private conversations or student consultations or information on where the replication site-specific staff will be housed. Why is there no safety & security staff at the new school's facility – although not a typical school space, it still serves HS students, who (by virtue of their age and size) may require a different level of de-escalation. There is insufficient discussion of how the school will ensure that the number of bathrooms per gender (and plumbing fixture count) meet the mandates of federal and local codes. It is also unclear how the applicant will ensure that leased space is fully ADA accessible and compliant.
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### **Specific Subset Ratings in the Operations Section (For Reference)**

- Leadership Team
  - Approaches the Standard
- Leadership for Expansion (Experienced Operators Only)
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  - Meets the Standard
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  - Meets the Standard
- EMO Relationships and School Management Contracts (If Applicable)
  - Meets the Standards

- Services
  - Meets the Standard
  
- Facilities
  - Approaches the Standard
  
- Ongoing Operations
  - Meets the Standard

## Financial Plan

- Approaches the Standard

### Summary

The replication school expects to contract for specific services in the areas that include, but are not limited to the following: accounting, legal, technology, counseling, nursing, psychologists, guest presenters, and auditing. The CAO and COO will work on behalf of the board to draft a professional service contract narrative that identifies the following minimum parts for discussion including: selection of the contractor, plan of action, and expected results and deliverables. The board will use the CAO and COO to monitor and evaluate the level of service and deliverables against the expected results of the contract prior to approving any payment for service.

### Areas of Strength:

- The proposed school budget aligns to the proposed school model: In particular, the staffing model at the Central Office and School level, enrollment counts, and partnering college fees align with the proposed school model and the application in general.
- The proposed school budget projects the fiscal viability of the organization as whole through the proposed expansion schools.
- Budget assumptions appear reasonable and are conservative.

### Areas for Improvement:

- It is unclear if there is an assumption that operating losses during startup at one charter school may be covered by surpluses at another. As these are legally separate entities with separate academic, organizational, and financial accountabilities, operating losses cannot be addressed in this manner. The budgets will need to be revised to address losses through other means, including reduction of site-based or shared expenses.
- The application is for Site 4, however the financials reflect the overall expansion plan to scale (5 schools). As the applicant chose to submit separate charter applications to maximize access to federal funds and to provide for greater academic and organizational transparency and accountability, the financial assumptions should reflect the existing network as well as the school proposed in the individual application.
- It is unclear how school accounts for cash flow based on the timing of receiving state funding vs. meeting ongoing obligations (payroll, leases, utilities, etc.).
- The budgets reflect per-pupil funds being received during the incubation year as revenue. This appears to be an error.

- The school did not report any fundraising or other philanthropic donations in the 12 years of the school's operation. Given its successful track record and its intention to scale its operations, it may be appropriate to craft a development plan.
- As the Committee to Form considers the programmatic and structural recommendations noted elsewhere in this report, it may be necessary to revisit some key budget assumptions. The applicant is encouraged to review its budgets and cash flow statements to determine what impacts any programmatic or structural adjustments may have on the financial plan.

***Should the Authority Board approve the application on the condition that the areas of improvement identified by addressed to the satisfaction of staff, those non-material revisions will move each element of the application to Meets the Standard.***

## **Performance Record**

NSHS has a strong track record in Nevada as a high quality charter school. The school has operated as a 5 Star school since the inception of the NSPF and was ranked as Exceeds in 2013 and Exceptional in 2014 on the SPCSA Academic Framework. The Authority has previously approved its request to replicate additional sites under its existing charter contract based on its academic, organizational, and financial performance. The COO and CAO (Chief Operators) were founding members of the school 12 years ago and maintain an institutional knowledge of the school and a broad range of knowledge nationally and in the state of Nevada regarding charter schools and dual-credit curriculum.

## **Evidence of Capacity**

### *Summary*

Representatives of the governing body and leadership team of Nevada State High School participated in a capacity interview both to clarify issues raised in the review of the application and to discuss its plans to develop a larger network of schools.

### *Analysis*

The existing school is one of the highest rated in the state. The governing body and leadership team have demonstrated their commitment to expanding that impact. Staff recommends that the applicant explore expanding its governing body to include individuals with experience in multi-site operations and consider the possibility of a more formal advisory group relationship with key IHE leadership to enhance its existing capacity and position it for consistent execution across multiple sites, schools, and geographies.



## STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY

SUPPORTING DOCUMENT

**S U B J E C T: Consideration and possible action on the Nevada State High School Sunrise charter application**

<u>  /  /  </u>	Public Workshop
<u>  /  /  </u>	Public Hearing
<u>  /  /  </u>	Consent Agenda
<u>  /  /  </u>	Regulation Adoption
<u>  /  /  </u>	Approval
<u>  /  /  </u>	Appointments
<u>  /  x/  </u>	Information
<u>  /  x/  </u>	Action

MEETING DATE: July 29, 2016

AGENDA ITEM: 8

NUMBER OF ENCLOSURE(S): 1

**PRESENTER(S): Patrick Gavin, Executive Director, SPCSA**

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**FISCAL IMPACT:**

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**BUDGET ACCOUNT (FOR PRINTING CHARGES ONLY):**

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**LENGTH OF TIME EXPECTED FOR PRESENTATION (IN MINUTES): 30 Mins**

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**SUBMITTED BY:** \_\_\_\_\_

# ***Nevada State High School Sunrise***

***Charter School Application Recommendation Report***

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**Winter Cycle Charter Applications - 2016**

## Proposal Overview

### *School Name*

Nevada State High School - Sunrise

### *Mission (Application Item A.1.2)*

The model school, Nevada State High School (NSHS), has a mission and vision that has been meeting the needs of families for over eleven years. The school's mission is to support students in a college environment with personal, academic, and social skills to promote college success. This is done through the school's model of dual-enrollment, distribution of resources, curriculum design and system of student supports.

### *Proposed Location (from Charter Application Cover Sheet)*

Clark County

### *Enrollment Projections (from Charter Application Cover Sheet)*

Opening Year	School Type	Opening Grade(s)	Projected Enrollment
Year 1 (2017-2018)	High School	11-12	110
Year 2 (2018-2019)	High School	11-12	140
At capacity	High School	11-12	220

## Overview

The Recommendation Report for Nevada State High School - Sunrise is a summary of the evidence collected by the State Public Charter School Authority (SPCSA) through its interviews and dialogue with the applicant group, review of the school's Charter Application Proposal along with an analysis of performance data for other charter schools implementing the same academic model.

A recommendation to approve a charter for a six-year period is based on a comprehensive review of the proposal, performance data for replicated schools, the applicant capacity interview, follow-up discussion with applicants, and - where possible - site visits, guided by three essential questions:

1. Will the academic program be a success?
2. Will the school be an effective and accountable organization?
3. Will the school be fiscally sound?

**This report is structured around three sections: Academic, Organizational and Fiscal. Each section contains an overview of key findings based on a the totality of the evidence and concludes with the Authority’s determination on each of the three guiding questions.**

## Recommendation

### *Overall Recommendation*

***Recommendation: Approve. The reviewers rate the overall application at “Approaches the Standard”. NSHS has a strong track record as a “high performing” charter School in Nevada. As such, if the applicants are willing to work with the SPCSA and fill in the gaps left from lack of details in the application, the recommendation is to move forward.***

The Agency found Nevada State High School - Sunrise “Met the Standard” or “Approached the Standard” in the majority of areas in the initial application process. Charter school success starts with three basic facets; an academic plan that challenges students and allows for their success; an organizational plan that grants teachers and staff of the school professional development and training opportunities building upon current skill sets allowing them to develop the tools necessary to serve the student population; a solid financial plan that takes into account current and future economic forecasts and minimizes risk. This Charter School Recommendation Application Report is designed to review perceived deficiencies in the application and allow for corrective action in a manner that does not fundamentally alter the school’s proposed program.

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### RATING STANDARDS

#### **Meets the Standard**

*The response reflects a thorough understanding of key issues. It addresses the topic with specific and accurate information that shows thorough preparation; presents a clear, realistic picture of how the school expects to operate; and inspires confidence in the applicant’s capacity to carry out the plan effectively in a way which will result in a 4 or 5 star school.*

#### **Approaches the Standard**

*The response meets the criteria in many respects, but lacks detail and/or requires additional information in one or more areas.*

#### **Does Not Meet the Standard**

*The response is undeveloped or incomplete; demonstrates lack of preparation; or otherwise raises substantial concerns about the viability of the plan or the applicant’s ability to carry it out.*

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## Summary of Application Section Ratings

*Rating options for each section are Meets the Standard; Approaches the Standard; Does not Meet the Standard*

## Executive Summary

- Meets the Standard

The new school will respond to a need that was identified by students in its targeted community having to sustain a long commute so they can attend one of its existing campuses. The academic results, as presented, meet/exceed the state requirements. The proposal indicates that the new school will follow the successful practices of its predecessors.

## Meeting the Need

- Meets the Standard

- Targeted Plan
  - Meets the Standard
- Parent and Community Involvement
  - Meets the Standard

## Areas of Strength:

- The applicant summarizes the mission for the school and the key components of the academic model. In particular, on Page 7 of the application, the applicant cites that the mission of the school is to “support students in a college environment with personal, academic, and social skills to promote college success”. Moreover, the applicant argues that the academic model that leads to the successful achievement of this mission is based upon “dual enrollment, distribution of resources, curriculum design, and systems of student supports.”
- The applicant provides the track record of success that demonstrates that efficacy of the applicant group and the academic model in achieving the stated mission. On page 7, the applicant cites that the original flagship school Nevada State High School (NSHS) has been “an exemplary or 5 star school for nine out of the eleven years it has been in existence.” In addition, the applicant states, on Page 8, that the school has been identified as one of the top performing schools by the NV DOE, SPSCA; and has been recognized by Nevada Policy Research Institute, Nevada Taxpayers Association, and US News and World Report.
- The applicant clearly articulates the core values of the organization and connects those to its success. In particular, the applicant argues that the success of the flagship school, and thus, the proposed school will be the continuing focus on the school’s mission and core values. In particular, the applicant identifies the core values as “responsibility, integrity, and motivation”. Moreover, the applicant cites the accomplishments listed in the bullet above as evidence of efficacy of a focus on the mission and these core values, on page 8, the applicant states that “These accomplishments were not because of a leader or a leadership team, these were because the staff stayed focused on the mission, and students and families believed in it.
- NSHS has been in operation for 11 years, and has been rated “exemplary” or 5 star for nine years. They currently operate 3 sites.
- In the interview, the applicant was able to articulate how the school supports students in selecting the optimal schedule of college courses depending on what they intend to do after completing the

NSHS plan (e.g. they were able to explain why there is not a default push to have all students graduate NSHS with a high school diploma and an Associate's Degree).

### *Areas for Improvement/Concerns:*

- The applicant has not clearly demonstrated that there is a need within the larger school community nor that there is demand for the school. The applicant provides no quantifiable evidence or data (including student populations, dual credit access data for existing schools, performance of existing schools etc.) to suggest that there is a need for the proposed school, nor that demand exists.
- The applicant does not provide a quantifiable goal that is meaningfully connected to the school's mission or, in lieu of such a goal, a commitment to meet NSPF and Authority Performance Framework goals. On page 7, the applicant indicates that the goal is to "provide local community...access to NSHS's quality dual enrollment program and the supports they need to be successful." Further clarity is not provided, and the applicant then provides a generic description of the data that it plans to track without providing quantitative goals that speak to whether the school will have been successful in achieving its mission or how those goals align to state targets. For example, again on Page 7, the applicant states that: Implementation across all campuses will include, but not be limited to the following: scorecard and student data tracking, student interventions, classroom observation logs ensuring standardized implementation of curriculum, performance incentives, and accountability for students, parents and staff."
- The applicant fails to specifically identify key partners and stakeholders. The applicant only provides a generic reference to the partners and stakeholders that it will engage to help achieve its mission. For example, on page 8, the applicant will "continue collaboration with stakeholders and develop stronger partnerships with others to ensure the successful transition of the underserved population." In addition, later on Page 8, the applicant only provides a vague description of how it will engage parents and local colleges "school tuition is on the parents' dime, so it may pay the parent to know if the investment is well spent. NSHS works with families to learn how to track college progress and maintain an appropriate level of college involvement. NSHS will also continue to work with the local colleges on its registration and payment processes to dual- enroll students.

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- The applicant summarizes the mission for the school and the key components of the academic model. In particular, on Page 7 of the application, the applicant cites that the mission of the school is to "support students in a college environment with personal, academic, and social skills to promote college success". Moreover, the applicant argues that the academic model that leads to the successful achievement of this mission is based upon "dual enrollment, distribution of resources, curriculum design, and systems of student supports."
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## Academic Plan

- Approaches the Standard

### Summary

The Applicant has articulated a vision where all students will be prepared for higher education. The school's vision is to ensure every student is college ready targets ALL students, not just high performing students.

### Areas of Strength:

- Replication of the previous highly successful school format.
- The dual credit model allows students to graduate with between 12 and 20 completed college courses, if they pass all the courses they take.
- The parent education component, if successfully implemented, is likely to provide students with additional support at home.
- In the interview, the applicants stated that “we are like the parents of 300 kids, we are supporting them to fully integrate in the college environment,” and focused on articulating their focus on non-academic skills that allow students to succeed in college. They referenced supports such as working with students on financial aid applications, designing resumes, etc.

### Areas for Improvement/Concerns/Questions:

- Dual credit models are highly vulnerable to the programming, staffing, and policies of partner institutes of higher education. The lack of direct control over areas such as curriculum makes evaluation of a dual-credit model significantly more challenging. There may be a need to develop a separate evaluation process for schools for applicants which propose to use dual enrollment as a primary or exclusive mechanism for providing educational services.
- Recognizing the lack of direct control over some key areas of content and program delivery, the applicant should develop clearer systems to document the performance of partner institutions, specific programs, and key college personnel in key performance areas identified in the application both as a means to identify the most effective and aligned partners, programs, and staff and as a means to inform policymakers regarding challenges and opportunities in dual enrollment strategies. As the school expands, the need to develop a more systemic strategy and approach to managing the NSHE partnership will become necessary. For example, since the students are taught by the partner colleges' faculty, there appears to be limited room for curriculum development or realignment at the present time. However, as Nevada and NSHE continue to push for greater investment in dual learning, it is likely that there will be greater opportunity for conflict and misalignment. The development of such systems will move the applicant from “Approaches the Standard” to “Meets the Standard” in key areas of the application, including curriculum, driving for results, at risk students and special populations, and transformational change.



### Specific Subset Ratings in the Academic Section (For Reference)

- Mission and Vision
  - Approaches the Standard
- Transformational Change
  - Approaches the Standard
- Curriculum & Instructional Design
  - Approaches the Standard
- Distance Education Requirements
  - N/A
- Pre-K Requirements
  - N/A
- High School Graduation Requirements
  - Meets the Standard
- Driving for Results
  - Approaches the Standard
- At Risk Students and Special Populations
  - Approaches the Standard
- School Structure (Culture)
  - Approaches the Standard
- School Structure (Student Discipline)
  - Approaches the Standard
- School Structure (Calendar and Schedule)
  - Approaches the Standard
- A Day in the Life & Scenarios
  - Meets the Standard

## Operations Plan

- Approaches the Standard

### *Summary:*

NSHS leaders maintain institutional knowledge of the school and broad range of knowledge nationally and in the state of Nevada regarding charter schools and dual-credit curriculum. The COO and CAO (Chief Operators) were founding staff members of the school 12 years ago and both served for four years collectively as Nevada's liaison to National Alliance for Public Charter School master class series. This year, the school has brought on Directors of Site Administration to help with succession planning and build more capacity in the school leadership. This provides some opportunity to allow the CAO and COO more time to explore the replication of a new site. The Chief Operators also increased capacity by meeting with individuals from Washoe County including: administrators from currently operating charter schools, active school administrators, retired school administrator, representatives from the areas community college, and former founding member of Northern Nevada State High School charter application.

### *Areas of Strength:*

- The COO and CAO from the original 2004 school guarantee continuity of the model.
- Consistency in staff growth and moderate increases in the school-based staff that reflect the unconventional school's model of primarily delivering its curriculum via partner institutions. The narrative makes consistent reference to learning from the operating of the previous sites as they grow.
- It appears that assumptions for growth align with the state and city population growth.
- Applicant recruitment strategies are typical charter grassroots practices that continue even at scale.
- Opening under the same (successful) board and expanding it later is a best practice and limits replication risk. The executive committee model of governance will allow for various levels of board members' involvement without board members' burnout. Board terms allow for diverse membership and "new" blood.
- Allowing fair incubation time is by itself a positive approach to expansion, particularly since the network will be also dealing with another new school and a new campus of the flagship school.
- The network model is a typical centralized one where all alike-functions are kept combined.
- The nature of the school model eliminates many of the day-to-day services and costs of a traditional school and shift much of that onto service delivery by the partner IHEs.
- They have included Insurance capabilities as required.

### *Areas for Improvement/Concerns:*

- The expansion plan is ambitious, given that the operator has maintained one school for many years and is looking to grow aggressively by one site per year to five sites by 2021. It is unclear if the network is ready to grow out of the “Founders Syndrome” and bring new perspectives into the school model. While leadership continuity is a positive, the demands of scale will increase the need for clearer succession planning and the emergence of clearer systems. The entrepreneurial, all hands on deck approach which has been successful as a small school will need to be revisited as the school transitions to a larger multi-site, multi-county network. “Nevada State High School operates a small school model where each employee holds a certain title, but serves many roles at the school. This kind of model allows for employees to display hidden talents and add value to the organization.” This statement is vague and does not clearly describe how the 4 campuses will maintain the same level of performance and excellence as the original 12-year old school. This will likely necessitate a transition to more defined roles. Under the current structure, there is a practice of shared accountability that works well in a small setting but may be less suitable to a more complex organization.. For example, it is currently unclear whether the Directors of Site Administration have primary responsibility for liaising with the particular colleges the students attend. This new role appears to be tailored to focus on specific school and community issues. It is unclear what input they have on the overall network strategy. Similarly, there is a lack of clarity regarding the roles & responsibilities of part-time consultants.
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- Meets the Standards

- Services
  - Meets the Standard
  
- Facilities
  - Approaches the Standard
  
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  - Meets the Standard

## Financial Plan

- Approaches the Standard

### Summary

The replication school expects to contract for specific services in the areas that include, but are not limited to the following: accounting, legal, technology, counseling, nursing, psychologists, guest presenters, and auditing. The CAO and COO will work on behalf of the board to draft a professional service contract narrative that identifies the following minimum parts for discussion including: selection of the contractor, plan of action, and expected results and deliverables. The board will use the CAO and COO to monitor and evaluate the level of service and deliverables against the expected results of the contract prior to approving any payment for service.

### Areas of Strength:

- The proposed school budget aligns to the proposed school model: In particular, the staffing model at the Central Office and School level, enrollment counts, and partnering college fees align with the proposed school model and the application in general.
- The proposed school budget projects the fiscal viability of the organization as whole through the proposed expansion schools.
- Budget assumptions appear reasonable and are conservative.

### Areas for Improvement:

- It is unclear if there is an assumption that operating losses during startup at one charter school may be covered by surpluses at another. As these are legally separate entities with separate academic, organizational, and financial accountabilities, operating losses cannot be addressed in this manner. The budgets will need to be revised to address losses through other means, including reduction of site-based or shared expenses.
- The application is for Site 4, however the financials reflect the overall expansion plan to scale (5 schools). As the applicant chose to submit separate charter applications to maximize access to federal funds and to provide for greater academic and organizational transparency and accountability, the financial assumptions should reflect the existing network as well as the school proposed in the individual application.
- It is unclear how school accounts for cash flow based on the timing of receiving state funding vs. meeting ongoing obligations (payroll, leases, utilities, etc.).
- The budgets reflect per-pupil funds being received during the incubation year as revenue. This appears to be an error.

- The school did not report any fundraising or other philanthropic donations in the 12 years of the school's operation. Given its successful track record and its intention to scale its operations, it may be appropriate to craft a development plan.
- As the Committee to Form considers the programmatic and structural recommendations noted elsewhere in this report, it may be necessary to revisit some key budget assumptions. The applicant is encouraged to review its budgets and cash flow statements to determine what impacts any programmatic or structural adjustments may have on the financial plan.

***Should the Authority Board approve the application on the condition that the areas of improvement identified by addressed to the satisfaction of staff, those non-material revisions will move each element of the application to Meets the Standard.***

## **Performance Record**

NSHS has a strong track record in Nevada as a high quality charter school. The school has operated as a 5 Star school since the inception of the NSPF and was ranked as Exceeds in 2013 and Exceptional in 2014 on the SPCSA Academic Framework. The Authority has previously approved its request to replicate additional sites under its existing charter contract based on its academic, organizational, and financial performance. The COO and CAO (Chief Operators) were founding members of the school 12 years ago and maintain an institutional knowledge of the school and a broad range of knowledge nationally and in the state of Nevada regarding charter schools and dual-credit curriculum.

## **Evidence of Capacity**

### *Summary*

Representatives of the governing body and leadership team of Nevada State High School participated in a capacity interview both to clarify issues raised in the review of the application and to discuss its plans to develop a larger network of schools.

### *Analysis*

The existing school is one of the highest rated in the state. The governing body and leadership team have demonstrated their commitment to expanding that impact. Staff recommends that the applicant explore expanding its governing body to include individuals with experience in multi-site operations and consider the possibility of a more formal advisory group relationship with key IHE leadership to enhance its existing capacity and position it for consistent execution across multiple sites, schools, and geographies.



## STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY

SUPPORTING DOCUMENT

**S U B J E C T: Consideration and possible  
action on Coral Academy of Science Expansion**

**Amendment application**

<u>  /  /  </u>	Public Workshop
<u>  /  /  </u>	Public Hearing
<u>  /  /  </u>	Consent Agenda
<u>  /  /  </u>	Regulation Adoption
<u>  /  /  </u>	Approval
<u>  /  /  </u>	Appointments
<u>  /  x/  </u>	Information
<u>  /  x/  </u>	Action

MEETING DATE: July 29, 2016

AGENDA ITEM: 9

NUMBER OF ENCLOSURE(S): 1

**PRESENTER(S): Brian Scroggins, Deputy Director, SPCSA**

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**FISCAL IMPACT:**

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**BUDGET ACCOUNT (FOR PRINTING CHARGES ONLY):**

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**LENGTH OF TIME EXPECTED FOR PRESENTATION (IN MINUTES): 30 Mins**

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**SUBMITTED BY: \_\_\_\_\_**

**BRIAN SANDOVAL**  
Governor

**STATE OF NEVADA**

**PATRICK GAVIN**  
Executive Director



## STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY

1749 North Stewart Street Suite 40  
Carson City, Nevada 89706-2543  
(775) 687 - 9174 • Fax: (775) 687 - 9113

### BRIEFING MEMORANDUM

**TO:** SPCSA Board

**FROM:** Patrick Gavin, Executive Director  
Brian Scroggins, Deputy Director

**SUBJECT:** Coral Academy of Science – Las Vegas amendment request pursuant to NAC 386.3265

**DATE:** 7/20/2016

#### **Legal Context:**

[NRS 388A.279](#) provides that the Authority may hold a public hearing concerning any request from a charter to amend a charter contract, including:

- Increasing the total enrollment of a charter school or the enrollment of pupils in a particular grade level in the charter school for a school year to more than 120 percent of the enrollment prescribed in the written charter or charter contract for that school year.
- Seeking to acquire an additional facility in any county of this State to expand the enrollment of the charter school.

The specific requirements for amending a charter contract to acquire and occupy a new or additional facility can be found in [NAC 386.3265](#) et seq.

#### **Summary of Request:**

Coral Academy of Science Las Vegas (CASLV) is a STEM-focused, college-prep public charter school that gives students in grades K-12 an opportunity to achieve their full potentials. The mission of CASLV is to provide a safe, rigorous college preparatory environment that promotes social responsibility and a culturally diverse community dedicated to becoming lifelong learners bound for success. CASLV currently serves 1,551 (as of Validation Day - October 1<sup>st</sup>) students across the valley, with more than 4,000 students on its waitlist.

Over the next three years, CASLV seeks to increase its enrollment of Henderson and Henderson-adjacent area students in the K-12th grades and provide additional placements for incoming students (750 in 2017-2018, 850 in 2018-2019, 925 in 2019-2020 and 1,000 in 2021-2022).















**Proposed Expanded Enrollment:**

Grade Level	CASLV VI - Number of Students					
	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Pre-K	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
K	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
4	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
5	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
6	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
7	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
8	200	200	200	200	200	200
9	175	200	200	200	200	200
10	150	175	200	200	200	200
11	125	150	175	200	200	200
12	100	125	150	175	200	200
<b>Total</b>	<b>750</b>	<b>850</b>	<b>925</b>	<b>975</b>	<b>1,000</b>	<b>1,000</b>

**Full Enrollment if Approved:**

If the SPCSA approves this amendment request, Coral Academy of Science Las Vegas (CASLV) will expand from five to six campuses and will grow from an approved maximum enrollment of 2,680 students (at full build-out) to 3,430 students in 2017-18, 3,655 students in 2020-21 and 3,680 students in 2022-23.

Grade Level	All Campuses - Number of Students					
	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Pre-K	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
K	360	360	360	360	360	360
1	360	360	360	360	360	360
2	360	360	360	360	360	360
3	400	400	400	400	400	400
4	400	400	400	400	400	400
5	400	400	400	400	400	400
6	200	200	200	200	200	200
7	200	200	200	200	200	200
8	200	200	200	200	200	200
9	175	200	200	200	200	200
10	150	175	200	200	200	200
11	125	150	175	200	200	200
12	100	125	150	175	200	200
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,430</b>	<b>3,530</b>	<b>3,605</b>	<b>3,655</b>	<b>3,680</b>	<b>3,680</b>

**Background:**

## Coral Academy of Science Las Vegas (CASLV) Academic Performance

<b>School Year</b>	<b>Performance</b>
2010-2011	Adequate
2011-2012	High Achieving / 5-Star & Quality School
2012-2013	4-Star
2013-2014	5-Star & Reward School
2014-2015	5-Star & Reward School

## School Demographic Change since 2011

<b>Year</b>	<b>Enrollment</b>	<b>AI/AN</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>PI</b>	<b>2/MR</b>	<b>IEP</b>	<b>ELL</b>	<b>FRL</b>
2011-2012	1,112	-	28.24%	14.57%	7.55%	48.11%	-	-	3.96%	-	1.9%
2012-2013	1,275	-	29.41%	13.25%	6.51%	46.75%	1.57%	1.96%	0	0	0
2013-2014	1,379	-	28.93%	12.84%	7.98%	46.99%	2.39%	-	-	1.09%	3.8%
2014-2015	1,488	1.28%	23.39%	12.37%	6.32%	50.81%	1.68%	4.17%	4.37%	0	5.8%
2015-2016	1,551	0.97%	23.98%	14.51%	5.35%	43.68%	1.55%	8.96%	3.48%	2.77%	5.7%

AI/AN – American Indian/Alaskan Native

A – Asian

H – Hispanic

B – Black

W - White

PI – Pacific Islander

2/MR – Two or more races

IEP – Individualized Education Plan –A student with a disability/special education student

ELL – English Language Learner

FRL – A student who qualifies for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

Coral was approved by the State Board of Education in 2007. It was renewed by the Authority in 2013 and currently operates under a charter contract. It has previously received approval to operate a total of five facilities. The school has not received any notices of concern or breach related to its academic, financial, or organizational performance. The school currently operates a 5 star level across its elementary, middle, and high school programs.

### **Recommendation: *Approve with Conditions***

CASLV has been a 4-5 Star School since 2011. The school meets the current criteria for approval for a new campus pursuant to the most recent revisions to NAC and has participated thoughtfully in the new amendment request process in a manner which demonstrates the capacity to effectively govern and operate multiple new campuses. The school's enrollment diversification strategies align to the criteria and activities articulated by the SPCSA and show promise to increase the proportions of students with disabilities, English Language Learners, and students who qualify for free or reduced lunch to levels similar to those of Coral's sending schools. Consistent with the board's actions

related to other schools in the portfolio, staff requests that the board set an enrollment cap based on the school's enrollment as laid out in the amendment request and incorporating all other standard language from the charter contract most recently developed by counsel based on guidance from the Board. Staff further requests delegated authority to grant additional technical amendments and approvals upon receipt of documentation and other items required under NAC to occupy the building over the course of the next several years. This approval is consistent with the mechanism the Authority Board uses to permit the incorporation of pre-opening requirements for new schools into the charter contract without the delay and complexity attendant to additional board review.

## STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY

SUPPORTING DOCUMENT

**S U B J E C T: Consideration and possible  
action on the Somerset Academy amendment  
request**

<u>  /  /  </u>	Public Workshop
<u>  /  /  </u>	Public Hearing
<u>  /  /  </u>	Consent Agenda
<u>  /  /  </u>	Regulation Adoption
<u>  /  /  </u>	Approval
<u>  /  /  </u>	Appointments
<u>  /  x/  </u>	Information
<u>  /  x/  </u>	Action

MEETING DATE: July 29, 2016

AGENDA ITEM: 10

NUMBER OF ENCLOSURE(S): 1

**PRESENTER(S): Brian Scroggins, Deputy Director, SPCSA**

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**FISCAL IMPACT:**

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**BUDGET ACCOUNT (FOR PRINTING CHARGES ONLY):**

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**LENGTH OF TIME EXPECTED FOR PRESENTATION (IN MINUTES): 30 Mins**

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**SUBMITTED BY:** \_\_\_\_\_

**BRIAN SANDOVAL**  
Governor

**STATE OF NEVADA**

**PATRICK GAVIN**  
Executive Director



**STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY**

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**BRIEFING MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** SPCSA Board

**FROM:** Patrick Gavin, Executive Director  
Brian Scroggins, Deputy Director

**SUBJECT:** Agenda Item 10: Somerset Academy of Las Vegas amendment request pursuant to NAC 386.3265 et seq.

**DATE:** 7/20/2016

**Legal Context:**

[NRS 388A.279](#) provides that the Authority may hold a public hearing concerning any request from a charter school to amend a written charter or a charter contract, including:

- Increasing the total enrollment of a charter school or the enrollment of pupils in a particular grade level in the charter school for a school year to more than 120 percent of the enrollment prescribed in the written charter or charter contract for that school year.
- Seeking to acquire an additional facility in any county of this State to expand the enrollment of the charter school.

The specific requirements for amending a written charter or a charter contract to acquire and occupy a new or additional facility can be found in [NAC 386.3265](#) et seq.

**Summary of Request:**

Somerset Academy of Las Vegas is seeking to expand its high-performing school network by increasing the school's capacity to serve students in the Northwest Las Vegas, North Las Vegas and the Henderson areas of Southern Nevada. The school's academic programs are in high demand, as thousands of students are on waitlists. Specifically, this expansion application hopes to create opportunities to not only reduce these waitlists, but also to give all students the opportunity to attend throughout their entire K-12 experience by creating feeder systems as follows: 1) K-8 site opening 2017 located in Northwest Las Vegas with the specific location specified in the application. 2) K-8 site opening 2018 located in North Las Vegas with an exact location yet to be determined. 3) K-12 Campus opening 2019 located in Henderson with an exact location yet to be determined. 4) K-8 Campus opening 2020 located in Henderson with an exact location yet to be determined. This



**Somerset III (Losee Campus K-12)**

Grade Level	Number of Students					
	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Pre-K	0					
K	125	125	125	125	125	125
1	125	125	125	125	125	125
2	125	125	125	125	125	125
3	125	125	125	125	125	125
4	125	125	125	125	125	125
5	125	125	125	125	125	125
6	192	150	150	150	150	150
7	192	192	150	150	150	150
8	192	192	192	150	150	150
9	160	240	300	300	300	300
10	124	160	240	300	300	300
11	60	124	160	240	300	300
12	-	60	124	160	240	300
<b>Total</b>	<b>1670</b>	<b>1868</b>	<b>2066</b>	<b>2200</b>	<b>2340</b>	<b>2400</b>

**Somerset IV (Sky Pointe Campus K-12)**

Grade Level	Number of Students					
	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Pre-K	0					
K	125	125	125	125	125	125
1	125	125	125	125	125	125
2	125	125	125	125	125	125
3	125	125	125	125	125	125
4	125	125	125	125	125	125
5	125	125	125	125	125	125
6	192	150	150	150	150	150
7	192	192	150	150	150	150
8	250	192	192	150	150	150
9	224	300	300	300	300	300
10	155	224	300	300	300	300
11	124	155	224	300	300	300
12	60	124	155	224	300	300
<b>Total</b>	<b>1947</b>	<b>2087</b>	<b>2221</b>	<b>2324</b>	<b>2400</b>	<b>2400</b>



**Somerset V (Lone Mountain Campus K-8)**

Grade Level	Number of Students					
	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Pre-K	0					
K	100	100	100	100	100	100
1	100	100	100	100	100	100
2	100	100	100	100	100	100
3	100	100	100	100	100	100
4	100	100	100	100	100	100
5	100	100	100	100	100	100
6	124	120	120	120	120	120
7	124	124	120	120	120	120
8	62	124	124	120	120	120
9	-	-	-	-	-	-
10	-	-	-	-	-	-
11	-	-	-	-	-	-
12	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>910</b>	<b>968</b>	<b>964</b>	<b>960</b>	<b>960</b>	<b>960</b>

**Total Enrollment Across All Existing Campuses**

Grade Level	Number of Students					
	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Pre-K						
K	575	575	575	575	575	575
1	575	575	575	575	575	575
2	575	575	575	575	575	575
3	575	575	575	575	575	575
4	600	575	575	575	575	575
5	600	600	575	575	575	575
6	787	695	695	695	695	695
7	753	787	695	695	695	695
8	709	691	725	695	695	695
9	384	540	600	600	600	600
10	279	384	540	600	600	600
11	184	279	384	540	600	600
12	60	184	279	384	540	600
<b>Total</b>	<b>6656</b>	<b>7035</b>	<b>7368</b>	<b>7659</b>	<b>7875</b>	<b>7935</b>

**Proposed Expanded Enrollment:****Somerset VI (Sky Canyon Campus K-8)**

Grade Level	Number of Students					
	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Pre-K						
K	100	100	100	100	100	100
1	100	100	100	100	100	100
2	100	100	100	100	100	100
3	100	100	100	100	100	100
4	100	100	100	100	100	100
5	100	100	100	100	100	100
6	120	120	120	120	120	120
7	60	120	120	120	120	120
8	-	60	120	120	120	120
9	-	-	-	-	-	-
10	-	-	-	-	-	-
11	-	-	-	-	-	-
12	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	780	900	960	960	960	960

**Somerset VII (Campus in the North Las Vegas Area K-8)**

Grade Level	Number of Students					
	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Pre-K						
K	-	100	100	100	100	100
1	-	100	100	100	100	100
2	-	100	100	100	100	100
3	-	100	100	100	100	100
4	-	100	100	100	100	100
5	-	100	100	100	100	100
6	-	120	120	120	120	120
7	-	60	120	120	120	120
8	-	-	60	120	120	120
9	-	-	-	-	-	-
10	-	-	-	-	-	-
11	-	-	-	-	-	-
12	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	0	780	900	960	960	960

**Somerset VIII (Campus in the Henderson Area K-12)**

Grade Level	Number of Students					
	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Pre-K						
K	-	-	125	125	125	125
1	-	-	125	125	125	125
2	-	-	125	125	125	125
3	-	-	125	125	125	125
4	-	-	125	125	125	125
5	-	-	125	125	125	125
6	-	-	150	150	150	150
7	-	-	90	150	150	150
8	-	-	60	90	150	150
9	-	-	60	120	210	270
10	-	-	-	60	120	210
11	-	-	-	-	60	120
12	-	-	-	-	-	60
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1110</b>	<b>1320</b>	<b>1590</b>	<b>1860</b>

**Somerset IX (Campus in the Henderson Area K-8)**

Grade Level	Number of Students					
	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Pre-K						
K	-	-	-	100	100	100
1	-	-	-	100	100	100
2	-	-	-	100	100	100
3	-	-	-	100	100	100
4	-	-	-	100	100	100
5	-	-	-	100	100	100
6	-	-	-	120	120	120
7	-	-	-	60	120	120
8	-	-	-	-	60	120
9	-	-	-	-	-	-
10	-	-	-	-	-	-
11	-	-	-	-	-	-
12	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>780</b>	<b>900</b>	<b>960</b>

**Total Enrollment Across All Proposed Campuses**

Grade Level	Number of Students					
	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Pre-K						
K	-	100	200	325	425	425
1	-	100	200	325	425	425
2	-	100	200	325	425	425
3	-	100	200	325	425	425
4	-	100	200	325	425	425
5	-	100	200	325	425	425
6	-	120	240	390	510	510
7	-	60	180	330	450	510
8	-	-	60	240	330	450
9	-	-	-	60	120	210
10	-	-	-	-	60	120
11	-	-	-	-	-	60
12	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>780</b>	<b>1680</b>	<b>2970</b>	<b>4020</b>	<b>4410</b>

**Full Enrollment if Approved:**

If the SPCSA approves this amendment request, Somerset Academy of Las Vegas will expand from five to nine campuses and will grow from 5,778 students in 2015-16 to 11,895 students in 2020-21 and 12,345 students in 2022-23.

**Total Amount Across All Existing and Approved Campuses**

Grade Level	Number of Students					
	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Pre-K						
K	575	675	775	900	1,000	1,000
1	575	675	775	900	1,000	1,000
2	575	675	775	900	1,000	1,000
3	575	675	775	900	1,000	1,000
4	600	675	775	900	1,000	1,000
5	600	700	775	900	1,000	1,000
6	787	815	935	1,085	1,205	1,205
7	753	847	875	1,025	1,145	1,205
8	709	691	785	935	1,025	1,145
9	384	540	600	660	720	810
10	279	384	540	600	660	720
11	184	279	384	540	600	660
12	60	184	279	384	540	600
Total	6656	7815	9048	10629	11895	12345

**Background:**

Table of academic performance since 2011

**Somerset Academy of Las Vegas (SOM)**

<b><u>School Year</u></b>	<b><u>Performance (ES)</u></b>
2011-2012	5-Star
2012-2013	4-Star
2013-2014	5-Star
2014-2015	5-Star

<b><u>School Year</u></b>	<b><u>Performance (MS)</u></b>
2011-2012	5-Star
2012-2013	4-Star
2013-2014	5-Star
2014-2015	5-Star

**Table of school demographic change since 2011**

Year	Enrollment	AI/AN	A	H	B	W	PI	2/MR	IEP	ELL	FRL
2011-2012	1,056	-	1.52%	13.92%	3.88%	78.60%	1.42%	-	4.36%	-	3.8%
2012-2013	1,784	1.79%	3.98%	9.87%	7.51%	74.05%	2.47%	-	2.86%	1.07%	1.7%
2013-2014	3,012	1.49%	3.78%	15.97%	7.70%	67.23%	2.36%	1.46%	6.87%	3.75%	15.0%
2014-2015	4,523	0.27%	2.79%	23.46%	8.73%	54.79%	1.66%	8.31%	9.18%	3.78%	5.4%
2015-2016	5,778	0.24%	3.27%	26.01%	9.73%	51.73%	1.47%	7.55%	8.93%	4.66%	0.6%

AI/AN – American Indian/Alaskan Native

A – Asian

H – Hispanic

B – Black

W - White

PI – Pacific Islander

2/MR – Two or more races

IEP – Individualized Education Plan –A student with a disability/special education student

ELL – English Language Learner

FRL – A student who qualifies for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

Somerset was approved by the State Board of Education in 2011 and opened in the fall of 2011. It currently operates under a written charter and will be up for renewal in 2016-17. It has previously received approval to operate four additional sites and to expand from a K-8 school to a K-12 school. The school has not received any notices of concern or breach related to its academic, financial, or organizational performance. The school currently operates a 5 star elementary school program and a 5 star middle school program. As the school did not operate a high school program at the time of the most recent CRT administration, it is not possible to generate a rating for the school’s high school programs. Additionally, as Somerset serves the same grades on multiple campuses and the Department has not yet issued separate school codes for individual charter campuses, there is currently no mechanism to disaggregate academic performance on high stakes state assessments by campus.

**Recommendation: Approve with Conditions**

Somerset Academy of Las Vegas has been a 4-5 Star School since 2011. The school meets the current criteria for approval for a new campus pursuant to the most recent revisions to NAC and has participated thoughtfully in the new amendment request process in a manner which demonstrates the capacity to effectively govern and operate multiple new campuses. The school’s enrollment diversification strategies align to the criteria and activities articulated by the SPCSA.

A review of the school’s current status with the Authority reveals that it was approved in 2011 prior to the adoption of [AB205](#) and the new [charter contract](#) provisions of the charter school law. The school is still under a written charter instead of a charter contract. [NRS 388A.276](#) specifically permits a sponsor to require a holder of a written charter or charter contract that requests an amendment to agree to an amended and restated charter contract as a condition of approving such amendment requests.

Additionally, the school is up for renewal this academic year. Consistent with existing law and past practice, the Authority can invite schools with exemplary academic, organizational, and financial

performance records to petition for early and/or expedited renewal. To ensure that the school is in a position to secure financing as expeditiously as possible, staff recommends that the Board encourage the school to submit an application for expedited renewal for the August 2016 Board meeting.

Consequently, staff recommends that the Board make approval of this amendment request contingent upon the school executing two contracts. The first would be an amended and restated charter contract which would be effective July 29, 2016 and would remain in effect until August 12, 2017—the end date of the current written agreement. Following a successful renewal, the school would then execute an identical charter contract for the upcoming charter period. Consistent with the board's actions related to other schools in the portfolio, staff requests that the board set an enrollment cap based on the school's enrollment as laid out in the amendment request and incorporating all other standard language from the charter contract most recently developed by counsel based on guidance from the Board.

Staff further requests delegated authority to grant additional technical amendments and approvals upon receipt of documentation and other items required under NAC to occupy the buildings over the course of the next several years. This approval is consistent with the mechanism the Authority Board uses to permit the incorporation of pre-opening requirements for new schools into the charter contract without the delay and complexity attendant to additional board review.

## STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY

SUPPORTING DOCUMENT

**S U B J E C T: Consideration and possible action of the Founders Academy charter contract amendment request to add one or more Educational Management Organizations**

<u>  /  /  </u>	Public Workshop
<u>  /  /  </u>	Public Hearing
<u>  /  /  </u>	Consent Agenda
<u>  /  /  </u>	Regulation Adoption
<u>  /  /  </u>	Approval
<u>  /  /  </u>	Appointments
<u>  /  x/  </u>	Information
<u>  /  x/  </u>	Action

MEETING DATE: July 29, 2016

AGENDA ITEM: 11

NUMBER OF ENCLOSURE(S): 1

**PRESENTER(S): Patrick Gavin, Executive Director, SPCSA**

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

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**BUDGET ACCOUNT (FOR PRINTING CHARGES ONLY):**

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**LENGTH OF TIME EXPECTED FOR PRESENTATION (IN MINUTES): 30 Mins**

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**SUBMITTED BY:** \_\_\_\_\_



**BRIAN SANDOVAL**  
*Governor*

**STATE OF NEVADA**

**PATRICK GAVIN**  
*Executive Director*



**STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY**

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**BRIEFING MEMORANDUM**

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**TO:** SPCSA Board  
**FROM:** Patrick Gavin  
**SUBJECT:** Agenda Item 11—Founders Academy Amendment Request  
**DATE:** July 29, 2016

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**Background:**

[NRS 388A.030](#) defines an educational management organization as a for-profit corporation, business, organization or other entity that provides services relating to the operation and management of charter schools and achievement charter schools. Additionally, [NRS 388A.393 expands](#) on the definition to include several other kinds of entities and service providers who provide services to charter schools:

“...[C]ontractor” or “educational management organization” means a corporation, business, organization or other entity, whether or not conducted for profit, with whom a committee to form a charter school or the governing body of a charter school, as applicable, contracts to assist with the operation, management or provision and implementation of educational services and programs of the charter school or proposed charter school. The term includes a corporation, business, organization or other entity that directly employs and provides personnel to a charter school or proposed charter school.”

Based on guidance from counsel, a broad range of vendors may be considered as educational management organizations, including but not limited to LLCs formed by retired educators to contract with schools for the provision of administrative services, providers of back office financial management services, and non-profits affiliated with a school which provide services on either a fee or reimbursement basis.

[NAC 386.400 et seq.](#) outlines a number of requirements related to charter schools contracting with educational management organizations, including sponsor approval of such contracts and amendment of the written charter or charter contract.

Founders Academy has identified two contractual relationships which require review and approval by the Authority and the granting of amendments to their charter contract:

1. Contract with Charter School Management Corporation (CSMC): CSMC is a national provider of back office financial management services to charter schools. CSMC does not provide educational services such as curriculum or the leasing of instructional staff, but it does provide operational services in the form of financial management and reporting, payroll, and other back office functions. It also has employees assigned to provide allocated, part-time financial management services to the school. While the form of the contract and the structure of the organization may differ, CSMC's relationship to the school and the services it provides are similar to many non-educational service vendors, including service providers such as Academica Nevada LLC which currently contract with Authority authorized schools.
2. Founders Education Legacy Inc. (FEL): FEL is a 501c3 entity formed to serve as a fundraising arm for Founders Academy. At some point, the school began leasing retired public employees, including licensed educators, through FEL. This leasing of employees constitutes the provision of personnel to the charter school and results in FEL functioning as an EMO for Founders Academy.

From a national perspective, it is not unusual for a school to have multiple contractual relationships with service providers which merit sponsor approval. For example, DC law requires that charter schools obtain authorizer approval for any contract over 25,000. Many authorizers, including Central Michigan University, require schools to request charter contract amendments in order to enter into agreements with service providers for the provision of a broad range of services. These subcontracts are tracked separately by the sponsors and are incorporated into and subordinate to the charter contract with the sponsor.

The Agency is in receipt of a [letter](#) on school letterhead from Founders Board Chair, Richard Moreno requesting approval of contractual amendments to contract with these two organizations. Mr. Moreno has also furnished the Agency with a copy of the draft [board minutes](#) from the July 13, 2016 Founders Academy governing body meeting. Copies of the letter of transmission, the board minutes, and both the [CSMC contract](#) and the [FEL contract](#) are included in the board materials.

### **Recommendation:**

The Agency recommends approval of both contracts and the issuance of a charter contract amendment. It is important to note that Founders Academy and Founders Education Legacy formerly had overlapping board members. Approval is recommended to be contingent upon a legal review by staff and counsel that the contracts are compliant with the requirements of NRS 388A.393 and relevant NAC provisions. The school has agreed to eliminate these overlaps as a condition of approval of the contract based on feedback from Agency staff and in anticipation of the adoption of regulations with language similar to that proposed by the Department of Education in [Section 12 of R131-16L](#). Based on discussion with the school's Board Chair, Agency staff also recommends that approval be contingent upon the school amending its bylaws to forbid membership on the governing body of any officer, director, or employee of any contractor, including but not limited to a non-profit entity which enters into a contractual relationship with the school.

The Authority should be aware that both of these contractual relationships pre-date today's meeting. The Agency would note that Founders and CSMC identified this issue in conversations with staff and have worked proactively with Agency staff to address these issues and has sought guidance on how to come into compliance with the statute. This area of law and regulation has evolved rapidly since 2013 and Agency staff suspects that there may be other instances of non-compliance which schools will need to remedy. Agency staff request that the Authority not impose any consequence

or make any compliance finding related to this matter. Based on this experience, Agency staff intend to contact all Authority schools and request that they review their contracts and determine if any of them require sponsor approval and a written charter or charter contract amendment. Depending on the volume of possible approvals, it is likely that staff will develop a process and materials to assist schools in coming into compliance with the statute. In the event that the Authority members wish to authorize Agency staff to grant such amendments going forward pursuant to [NAC 386.326](#), staff will place an agenda item on the August board agenda to provide the Authority with the opportunity to make that determination.

## STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY

SUPPORTING DOCUMENT**S U B J E C T: Quest Academy and Silver State  
Charter School receiver update**

<u>  /  /  </u>	Public Workshop
<u>  /  /  </u>	Public Hearing
<u>  /  /  </u>	Consent Agenda
<u>  /  /  </u>	Regulation Adoption
<u>  /  /  </u>	Approval
<u>  /  /  </u>	Appointments
<u>  /  x/  </u>	Information
<u>  /  x/  </u>	Action

MEETING DATE: July 29, 2016

AGENDA ITEM: 12

NUMBER OF ENCLOSURE(S): 1

**PRESENTER(S): Josh Kern, The Ten Square Group****FISCAL IMPACT:**  

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**BUDGET ACCOUNT (FOR PRINTING CHARGES ONLY):**  

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**LENGTH OF TIME EXPECTED FOR PRESENTATION (IN MINUTES): 50 Mins**  

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**SUBMITTED BY:** \_\_\_\_\_

**BRIAN SANDOVAL**  
*Governor*

**STATE OF NEVADA**

**PATRICK GAVIN**  
*Executive Director*



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**BRIEFING MEMORANDUM**

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**TO:** SPCSA Board  
**FROM:** Patrick Gavin  
**SUBJECT:** Agenda Item 12—Silver State and Quest Receivership Update  
**DATE:** July 29, 2016

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**Background:**

In the fall of 2014, the Authority received multiple reports of financial mismanagement from governing body members at two charter schools, Quest Academy and Silver State Charter School. Based on those reports and issues with the timeliness and completeness of the 2014 independent audits of both schools, the Agency served both schools with Notices of Breach in December 2014.

During late 2014 and early 2015, the Agency contacted each of the big four accounting firms (PricewaterhouseCoopers, Ernst & Young, Deloitte, and KPMG). Based on restrictions on the Agency's ability to conduct the investigation under the auspices of counsel and limitations on the Agency's ability to indemnify a firm in any suit brought by a school as a result of an audit or investigation, the Agency was only able to agree to acceptable terms with Deloitte.

In early 2015, the Interim Finance Committee approved a Work Program transferring funds from the Agency's reserve category to Professional Services to fund the proposed contract with Deloitte.

On June 9, 2015, the Board of Examiners approved the Agency's contract with Deloitte to perform audits of Quest and Silver State.

Deloitte began their review of both schools in July 2015.

Deloitte prepared and submitted reports on their findings and supporting documentation related to Quest in September 2015. Those materials may be found at <http://goo.gl/6WBnyk>.

Deloitte prepared and submitted reports on their findings and supporting documentation related to Silver State in October 2015. Those materials may be found at <https://goo.gl/A84lfA>.

Based on the risk of imminent insolvency to Quest and ongoing governance deficiencies that led to the effective dissolution of the Quest governing body, the Authority intervened in October 2015 and voted to place the school in receivership. Joshua Kern was installed as receiver in November 2015. He has made multiple reports to the Authority regarding progress at Quest since his appointment.

Due to the systemic financial mismanagement at Silver State, the Authority initiated revocation proceedings in November 2015. The Authority initially voted to revoke Quest's written charter in January 2016. Due to litigation risk and concern regarding potential ongoing financial and academic issues, the Authority directed staff to enter into settlement negotiations in March 2016. After several months of negotiations, the Authority and Silver State agreed to a settlement that permitted ongoing operation and a renewal under the governance and oversight of a court-appointed receiver and the monitoring of a court-approved trustee to enforce the terms of the receivership appointment. The court appointed Joshua Kern the receiver of Quest effective July 1, 2016. This will be Mr. Kern's first report to the Authority related to Silver State.

## STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY

SUPPORTING DOCUMENT

**S U B J E C T:** Update and possible action regarding staff discussions with Nevada Connections Academy regarding school's plan for improvement. The Board will receive an update on and may discuss the status of discussions between SPCSA staff and School officials and attorneys regarding the school's efforts to develop a plan of improvement. The Board may register approval or disapproval of the plan or direct staff to take further action or require adjustments to the plan

<u>  /  /  </u>	Public Workshop
<u>  /  /  </u>	Public Hearing
<u>  /  /  </u>	Consent Agenda
<u>  /  /  </u>	Regulation Adoption
<u>  /  /  </u>	Approval
<u>  /  /  </u>	Appointments
<u>  /  x/  </u>	Information
<u>  /  x/  </u>	Action

MEETING DATE: July 29, 2016

AGENDA ITEM: 13

NUMBER OF ENCLOSURE(S): 1

**PRESENTER(S):** Patrick Gavin, Executive Director, SPCSA; Greg Ott, Deputy Attorney General

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**FISCAL IMPACT:**

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**BUDGET ACCOUNT (FOR PRINTING CHARGES ONLY):**

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**LENGTH OF TIME EXPECTED FOR PRESENTATION (IN MINUTES):** 60 Mins

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*Additional Documents will be provided at the meeting*

**SUBMITTED BY:** \_\_\_\_\_



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**BRIEFING MEMORANDUM**

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**TO:** SPCSA Board  
**FROM:** Patrick Gavin  
**SUBJECT:** Agenda Item 14—Nevada Connections Academy Graduation Rate Performance Improvement Plan  
**DATE:** July 29, 2016

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Pursuant to [NRS 388A.330](#), as amended by Section 27 of [SB509](#) of the 2015 Legislative Session, a graduation rate below 60 percent is grounds for termination of a charter, or the revocation of a written charter, or the reconstitution of the governing body of a charter school.

Nevada Connections Academy (NCA) was approved by the State Board of Education in 2007 and was renewed by the Authority in 2013. It currently operates pursuant to a written charter. The written charter expires in 2019.

For each of the past five years, NCA’s graduation rate<sup>1</sup> has been below 60 percent.

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
<b>Graduation Rate</b>	26.5%	36.08%	33.91%	37.19%	35.63%
<b>Rank in State</b>	99/106	98/110	100/111	110/117	110/117
<b>Position from Bottom</b>	8 <sup>th</sup> lowest in state	13 <sup>th</sup> lowest in the state	11 <sup>th</sup> lowest in the state	8 <sup>th</sup> lowest in the state	8 <sup>th</sup> lowest in the state
<b>Percentile Rank</b>	7 <sup>th</sup>	12 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup>

While NCA saw a significant increase between 2011 and 2012 in its performance relative to the rest of the state, moving from the 7<sup>th</sup> percentile to the 12<sup>th</sup>, the school declined back to the 7<sup>th</sup> percentile in both 2014 and 2015. Moreover, a review of the first extended cohort data for NCA, a 5<sup>th</sup> year

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<sup>11</sup> As calculated by the Department of Education based on data reported and validated by all districts and charter schools operating high schools



graduation rate<sup>2</sup> for the class which was scheduled to graduate in 2013, indicates that graduation rate of students who graduated within five years was somewhat higher than the 4 year rate: 38.04 percent. However, this graduation rate remains woefully short of the 60 percent threshold necessary for the school to meet the minimum allowable rates set forth in SB509.

Based on a review of [data](#) submitted to the Agency by the school, Nevada Connections Academy is ineligible for the alternative state performance framework authorized under [SB 460](#) of the 2015 Legislative Session, as it has a 23.02 percent unduplicated count of [eligible students](#) and may not have a mission specific to service one of the eligible groups of students.<sup>3</sup> That unduplicated count is well below the 75 percent minimum in such categories of students set forth in statute. Put simply, there is little difference in the observable characteristics—special education eligibility, over-age, under-credit status, adjudicated youth status, etc.—of students at NCA than at traditional public high schools across the state. Pursuant to statute, traditional public schools with graduation rates similar to NCA are eligible for inclusion in the Achievement School District. As a charter school, this graduation rate renders NCA eligible for authorizer intervention, including termination of its charter contract or reconstitution of its governing body.

Based on the school's history of poor graduation rates, the Authority directed Agency staff to engage in discussions with the school regarding its plan for improvement. The school has made multiple presentations to the Authority since February 2016, including an extensive dialogue with members in May of this year. While the school drafted a thoughtful [plan](#) which was well received by the Authority in May, there was significant concern around the lack of measurable annual performance targets. Consequently, the school was directed to propose targets for review by Agency staff. Member Conaboy echoed the sentiments of other members at the May meeting by stating, "I think it is incumbent upon the schools to suggest the benchmarks and for the staff to sign off on them, and let's have it in writing."

Since the May meeting, Agency staff have had several calls with NCA regarding its improvement plan, including a particularly productive call on July 5. Key takeaways from that call included a reiteration of the importance of proposing measurable annual targets and the strong suggestion that the school determine what, if any, material changes to the school's academic plan were required to support the improvement plan and submit requests for any necessary amendments to the written charter by December of 2016 to ensure that staff, students, parents, and other stakeholders would have sufficient time to seek out new schooling options, including other charter schools, if they disagree with any of the changes. At that time, the school indicated they were working on the requested changes and would be prepared to connect again with staff in the days leading up to the board meeting with their final document. The school scheduled a follow-up call for the afternoon of July 27. The next communication from the school came via [email](#) on July 19, when the school leader, Steve Werlein, outlined several contemplated means of tracking progress towards the 60 percent minimum target. Among other things, Mr. Werlein proposed that the measurable targets be based on language contained in the [Every Student Succeeds Act](#), the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) which was signed into law in December 2015. That law substantially revised the ESEA, making substantial changes to federal education law and accountability from the previous No Child Left Behind Act.

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<sup>2</sup> Extended cohort graduation rates require additional time and resources to validate and calculate. The Department of Education expects to release an official 5<sup>th</sup> year cohort graduation rate for those students who were scheduled to graduate in 2014 sometime in the fall of 2016.

<sup>3</sup> The Department of Education reviews the Mission Statements of all schools eligible for evaluation under the Alternative Performance Framework, but as NCA's population does not meet the threshold, NDE has not evaluated and approved or denied the school's mission statement.

As the Authority will recall, NCA raised concerns regarding potential conflicts between the state’s graduation rate and new ESSA provisions at the March Authority meeting. Several of these issues were addressed by State Superintendent Canavero in his presentation to the Authority at the April 2016 meeting when he strongly disputed the school’s contentions related to the inapplicability of the state’s current, federally approved method for calculating the graduation rate. “[T]he graduation rate that we have and that we are using is the graduation rate approved by USED. I can’t allow the record here to somehow suggest that the four-year cohort graduation rate that we are using, that has real consequences not only for your schools and for this school in particular, but for all of our high schools across the state, to somehow be discredited.”<sup>4</sup>

Agency staff requested a review by counsel of the provision cited by Mr. Werlein. Based on an initial review of the federal statute, staff contacted Mr. Werlein on Monday, July 25 and communicated our concerns regarding developing a calculation based on their interpretation of the new law. In a [memorandum](#) issued by Deputy Attorney General Greg Ott on Thursday, July 28, 2016, Mr. Ott concluded that there was no conflict between the Department’s current method for calculating the graduation rate and the provisions of ESSA.

Agency staff spoke with the school leader and counsel yesterday regarding these concerns and as of Thursday, July 28, 2016, the school has [proposed](#) targets to achieve the 60 percent target within three years:

Cohort Year	Measurement Date	Cohort Graduation %
<b>2015</b>	<b>December, 2015</b>	<b>37 %</b>
2016	December, 2016	45 %
2017	December, 2017	52 %
2018	December, 2018	60+%

Staff believes these targets are consistent with the guidance set forth by the Authority in May and believes they are SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound) goals which the Authority can use as an objective mechanism to evaluate student achievement and determine if the school should remain in the Authority portfolio.

Agency staff has concerns about the broad language that is included along with the proposed goals. The school proposes, for example, that there be an external validation of student academic record data and other characteristics to verify some of the contentions that the school has made regarding the unique characteristics of the student body. Staff concurs that external validation of information which is not tracked and reported by NDE is essential to ensuring that the Authority is receiving factual information. However, it is unclear how the Authority will be able to assess the relevance of such information as there is no ability to compare these data points at other schools and in other school systems. Consequently, staff urges the Authority to avoid committing to consideration of such data in making high stakes decisions regarding the school.

Staff recommends that the Board approve these goals contingent upon the school entering into a charter contract which contains terms identical to those agreed to by Beacon Academy in their recently amended [charter contract](#). The contract should also specifically identify the approved goals and provide that the school and the Authority will use the graduation rate calculated by the Department and that both parties agree to abide by any changes in the calculation rate approved by

<sup>4</sup> State Public Charter School Authority Meeting [Transcript](#), March 25, 2016, page 27-28.

the US Department of Education as determined by the Department. The contract should provide that accountability consequences shall be imposed if the school does not achieve a particular annual target. However, given the school's willingness to collaborate with the Authority in setting annual performance targets, Agency staff also recommends that the Authority agree that the consequences of the failure to meet any of the proposed graduation rate targets not include charter revocation, provided that the contract allow the Authority to require that the school enter receivership or have its governing body reconstituted if the school does not meet an annual performance target. The contract should also require that judicial review of any appeal of a reconstitution or receivership decision by the Authority would be limited solely to determining whether the school has or has not achieved the annual graduation rate target. This is critical in light of the concern raised above regarding additional data points. Staff recommends that the language related to school-reported and externally verified data provide that the Authority shall review such information only after it has notified the school of its intent to place the school into receivership or reconstitute the governing body due to failure to meet one of the annual graduation rate targets. The contract should also specify that while the Authority is required to review such information, it has the discretion of whether or not to consider such information in making the final decision to reconstitute or terminate the contract. Staff believes it is important that the Authority be able to access relevant and objectively verified information in making decisions related to the best interests of schools and students while ensuring that it retains the authority to consider such evidence and the discretion to make the decision it deems the most appropriate.



# Graduation Rate Improvement Plan

*Submitted to:*

State Public Charter School Authority

*By:*

Nevada Connections Academy  
Board of Directors<sup>1</sup>

**May 16, 2016**

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<sup>1</sup> The final version of this plan is on the NCA Board's agenda for review and possible approval on May 17, 2016. NCA will update the Authority with respect to the action the NCA Board takes on this version of the plan.

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Appendix A: History and Accomplishments

Appendix B: NCA’s Federal Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (2015) Calculated Under NCLB

Appendix C: NCA’s Anticipated Four-Year Adjusted Graduation Rate (2016)

Appendix D: Policy Recommendations – Application of Existing Law and Potential Regulatory Changes

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# 1. Executive Summary

The Board of Directors of Nevada Connections Academy (NCA) has taken steps to improve its cohort graduation rate. Specifically, the Board has put in place a set of policies, programs, and interventions (detailed in this plan) starting in the fall of 2015 to significantly improve the four-year cohort graduation rate for the 2015-16 cohort and beyond. The NCA Board also recognizes that graduation rate is one metric among many metrics that need to be examined in order to determine an accurate picture of school performance (See Appendix A).

The Nevada State Public Charter School Authority (the Authority) shared its concerns about NCA's graduation rate at the March 2016 Authority Board meeting and specifically expressed its desire that NCA would work with Authority Staff to develop a comprehensive plan to raise NCA's four-year cohort graduation rate.

In response to the direction received from the Authority during the March Authority meeting, the NCA Board, school leadership, and Authority Staff have held several meetings to discuss improving the NCA four-year cohort graduation rate while continuing to serve a significant population of credit-deficient high school students and helping all NCA students to academically succeed. For the 2015 graduation cohort (334 students), 143 (42.8%) were two or more credits behind when they enrolled; 56 (16.8%) were more than six credits behind when they enrolled. More information is provided in Appendix B. The plan detailed herein is the result of the collaboration between the NCA team and Authority Staff.

This plan builds on the school performance initiatives previously adopted by the NCA Board for implementation during the 2015-2016 school year. Based on current indicators, the NCA Board believes that the programs put in place during the 2015-16 school year will result in a measurable improvement in the graduation rate of the 2015-16 cohort, and thus will provide a solid base upon which to build the further improvements expected from this plan:

- The projected graduation rate for 2016 reflects a significant increase over the prior year.
- The percentage of anticipated graduates that entered behind in credits is 14.2% of the graduates compared to 10.1% for the 2015 graduates. This is an indication that NCA is doing a better job at helping students that enter credit deficient to graduate on-time for the 2015-16 school year.
- When comparing the 2016 anticipated cohort with the 2015 cohort, the percentage of students who enrolled two or more credits behind and the percentage that enrolled six or more credits behind were significantly higher in 2016. Despite having a slightly more challenging population of students this year, the projected graduation rate shows an increase, an indication that the steps taken to improve the graduation rate are showing results (See Appendix C for more details).

The NCA Board thanks the Authority Board and Staff for its collaboration in developing this plan and for its assistance in helping NCA address the four-year cohort graduation rate issue. The NCA Board believes that this plan demonstrates challenging yet achievable goals for improving the four-year cohort graduation rate.

## 2. 2015-16 School Year Improvements

NCA implemented significant changes during the 2015-16 school year to improve graduation rate. The changes started with a cohort analysis (described in Appendix B) that detailed every student in the 2015-16 four-year cohort with regards to their credit status. As proper academic placement and tracking within a robust, credit earning and recovery program is the foundation for success, credit deficient students were assigned programs, support, and interventions, depending on their credit status (on-track, two or fewer credits deficient, two to six credits deficient, etc), tailored to their individual needs to help them earn a high school diploma. The level of support and type of intervention is based on student need and changes as the student progresses through the program.

We have begun to see success in these improvements and implementations; for example, of all Credit Recovery courses attempted, approximately 80% were passed. Additionally, we anticipate that the 2016 four-year cohort graduation rate calculated under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) that will result from these efforts will increase at least 10% over the 2015 performance (details are included in Appendix C). The following section details the full scope of the supports and interventions implemented during the 2015-16 school year.

### 2.1 Internal & External Data Validation

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#### *Internal Data Validation Efforts*

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One of the benefits that NCA provides its students is a highly individualized approach to learning through targeted instruction, counseling, and the implementation and monitoring of individualized graduation plans. Each student in the 2015-16 graduation cohort has been individually reviewed and placed into one of three groups. Group 1 students are on track for graduation and based on performance and previous course completion and are anticipated to be counted as graduates in the 2016 cohort. Group 2 students are two to six semester-length courses behind and through remedial coursework can still potentially graduate on-time. Many of these students were credit deficient at the time of their enrollment in NCA, and through NCA's credit recovery program, they have caught up. Group 3 students are severely off cohort and are not likely to graduate on-time because they are more than six semester courses behind. Similar to Group 2 students, many of these students were credit deficient at the time of their enrollment in NCA. Students included in this group are unlikely to graduate as part of the 2016 cohort as it is not possible to graduate them and ensure that academic standards are being met. However, we are confident that with the right programming, support, and monitoring, they will graduate with a high school diploma in future years. Serving these students is an important part of NCA's mission. Because of the initiatives NCA has already implemented, progress is being made with this severely credit deficient population. One of NCA's strengths is its unique position to provide highly targeted and supportive programs which are data based and involve the participation of many school staff. Effectively harnessing that strength for the betterment of all students that NCA serves is a key focus of this plan. Appendix C provides a more detailed analysis and progress.

An important data point and influencing factor on the NCA cohort graduation rate is the high transiency of the NCA high school student population. According to the Nevada Department of Education, the transiency rate based on the 2014-2015 state report cards for NCA is 43.3% vs. the State's 26.5% and Clark County's 28.8% (see Appendix D for more details). NCA's transiency rate is significantly higher than the state and Clark County for a number of reasons. In general, virtual schools have a high transiency rate due to the various factors compelling a student to enroll in a virtual school. Many students chose NCA to solve a problem for a particular period of time such as bullying, medical issues, family situation, pregnancy, or other crisis situation or they join NCA as a "last resort" before dropping out of school. **Over 69% of the anticipated non-graduates for 2016 have been enrolled less than one year – meaning NCA has had very little time to influence their on-time graduation status and that their credit deficiencies do not reflect NCA's performance but the performance of their prior school(s).**

The Authority staff has identified as an objective for NCA to increase its efforts to identify these students and where they go after leaving NCA. As a result, the school has intensified its efforts to locate and confirm the whereabouts and programming of students who withdraw from NCA, even after being enrolled for only a short amount of time. These efforts are led by the school's reporting coordinator and use the state's reporting system, our internal Education Management System (EMS), and other sources of information as needed. A detailed, multi-step process for confirming student enrollment status and locating withdrawn students begins well before the official "validation" period in September. When needed, the school will use the services of carefully selected, experienced third party services to assist in locating students who have withdrawn and could adversely affect the cohort rate.

Ongoing communication is essential to the internal validation efforts and ultimate improvement of the NCA four-year cohort graduation rate. This includes regular tracking and research and increased internal communication about the status of each potential cohort member and his/her status upon exit and entry. Given the transiency rate of our population (referenced previously) this is particularly important. This communication also ensures that currently and newly enrolled students are not only progressing but are receiving pro-active instructional, counseling, and administrative support. We anticipate that additional tracking and data focused on these students during the 2015-16 school year will make a measureable difference in the four-year cohort graduation rate for the 2016 cohort. What is even more encouraging is that these increased data efforts are now occurring immediately after a student withdraws and will have long term impact on the graduation cohorts in future years.

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### ***External Data Validation Efforts***

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Based upon a recommendation by the Authority Executive Director, the NCA Board approved the identification and selection of an external evaluator at its April 2016 Board meeting. NCA seeks to engage an external evaluator by June 2016 to review both the 2015 graduation cohort and the 2016 graduation cohort. This organization (or individual) will look at not only data sources readily available through the Nevada Department of Education, but will also look at internal data to determine if it supports the conclusions regarding student body characteristics and progress that have been previously presented by the school. This resource will also be asked to address whether the graduation rate has been correctly attributed to NCA by the Nevada Department of Education, consistent with NEV. REV. STAT. ANN. § 385.347 (2016) which requires that the Authority prepare an annual report of accountability for each of the charter schools it sponsors and include information prescribed by regulation of the Nevada Department of Education including the graduation and drop out rate of pupils enrolled. NRS 385.347 mandates the dropout rate exclude pupils who provide proof of successful completion of the high school equivalency assessment, are enrolled in courses approved by the NDE as meeting the



requirements for an adult standard diploma, or withdraw from school to attend another school.<sup>2</sup> This review may identify students who were in the 2015 or perhaps in the 2016 cohort who were incorrectly categorized as dropouts in the 4-year cohort graduation rate being considered by the Authority.

The NCA Board and school leadership team anticipate many benefits of this external evaluation including verification of data, analysis of graduate and non-graduate trends, and recommendations for improvement. The specifics of selecting the third party, their timeline and deliverables, and the scope of their work are being discussed by and will be mutually agreed upon by NCA and the Authority. We are currently in the process of discussing the project's scope and deliverables with a reputable, national organization.

## 2.2 Credit Retrieval Courses for Credit Deficient Students

In an effort to bring credit deficient students to “on-track” status, NCA initiated a 2015-16 pilot using GradPoint™, a leading high quality credit recovery program used by more than 1,000 school districts in 45 states. In the pilot, the NCA Board purchased 100 licenses. In addition to increasing graduation rate for the 2016 cohort, this effort will provide high school students in other cohorts the opportunity to earn missing credits. During this school year, 150 students have benefitted from participating in credit recovery courses.

Currently, there is an 80% pass rate in the GradPoint Pilot program. This translates to over 200 semester credits being earned by students.

GradPoint offers 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:

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

NCA is pleased with these results and looks forward to an even greater number of credits being earned before the end of the school year. NCA plans to increase its usage of credit recovery programs during the summer of 2016 and extend it into the 2016-17 school year and beyond.

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<sup>2</sup> Also, NEV. ADMIN. CODE § 389.699(3) (2015) states, “A pupil who qualifies for a certificate of attendance must not be counted as a dropout.” A certificate of attendance is issued to a student who is over 17 and has completed the required credits to graduate, but has not passed the required proficiency exams.

## 2.3 Summer School

The four-year cohort graduation rate calculation includes students who complete their high school during the summer of their graduation year. 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. 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. Summer school staff are chosen based on their familiarity with effective instructional and motivational strategies. They are 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.<sup>3</sup>

The NCA Board is committed to a successful summer school program and efforts were underway earlier this year to leverage the GradPoint and Connections program during the summer months. The NCA Board has dedicated \$68,000 to implementing a summer school program for the summer of 2016 for coursework. In addition, the NCA Board has dedicated staff to support this initiative including supervision and instruction by certified teachers, administrators, and counselors.

Every student in the 2015-16 cohort who does not graduate in June will be encouraged and provided support to continue their school year into the summer, whether it is realistic for them to graduate by the end of summer or not. Summer school plans were underway earlier this year, finalized and approved by the NCA Board on April 12, 2016. It is anticipated that 150 students will be enrolled in the summer of 2016. The number of anticipated enrollments includes students from Group 2, Group 3, and future cohorts who will benefit from a summer program to put them back on track to graduate with their cohort. Students who are credit deficient will take GradPoint courses. Students in Group 2, as described in Section 2.1 of this plan, who complete their summer courses will most likely graduate with their cohort.

It is important to note that not only are we taking care of the current cohort, we are looking into the future and having future cohorts take classes as well to stay on cohort or “catch up” if they’re currently off-track. Summer courses will be offered to students who are behind in their freshman, sophomore, or junior years. This will significantly help accelerate those students in ensuring their on-track graduation plans.

Based upon an analysis of the 2015 non-graduates, we anticipate that the courses most likely to be taken by students for the summer of 2016 will be English, U.S. Government, and Math (specifically Geometry). These three areas were the biggest barriers to graduation and are listed in rank order.

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<sup>3</sup> Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement*. Routledge: New York, p. 72.

## 2.4 Earlier and Increased Intervention

NCA has implemented a systematic Response to Intervention (RTI) program to ensure all students are receiving timely and effective instructional support and that their performance is being actively monitored. As noted by RTI Action Network: A Program of the National Center for Learning Disabilities, RTI is the practice of providing quality instruction and intervention and using student learning in response to that instruction to make instructional and important educational decisions (Batsche et al., 2005)<sup>4</sup>. Research and reviews of the effectiveness of RTI found that it is an effective practice for both systemic (e.g., reductions in special education referrals) and student (e.g., increased reading scores) outcomes<sup>5</sup>.

At NCA, students who struggle with the core Math and English Language Arts curriculum are assigned appropriate instructional interventions targeted to their greatest area of need. Efforts were increased during the 2015-16 school year and are tracked on a weekly basis to ensure adequate support and monitoring is taking place. Many students require behavioral interventions to help motivate them to engage in their coursework. Part of the intervention process involves careful examination of a student's academic and behavioral record and identifying potential factors inhibiting their academic progress and perhaps influencing their decision to exit their last school. A slightly credit deficient student (or one who is on cohort) who shows weakness in math with no other risk factors will not begin with the same behavioral treatment plan that a severely credit deficient student with multiple academic or social/emotional risk factors will.

NCA has a variety of instructional resources to address academic intervention needs and uses synchronous sessions (both individual and small group) to address behavioral, social-emotional, and motivational concerns. Resources are easily accessible to students and individual plans based on student needs are created and monitored. Grade level Professional Learning Communities of teachers meet weekly and electronically communicate about student progress on a daily basis. The Student Support Team is also included when escalation is needed. Currently, approximately 70 high school students are receiving interventions in English Language Arts and 120 are receiving interventions in Math. These students require additional support and resources (described in the following sections) to ensure that they are successful in their online courses and are on-track for graduation. It is important to note that this is a fluid process as students receive interventions at the various tiers and may fluctuate between these interventions and in the regular program, depending upon their academic performance and individual student learning need.

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### **Response to Intervention (RTI)**

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With this multi-tiered approach to curriculum and instruction, which ensures individual students receive the support they need, data is used throughout the school year to implement, for all students, a Response to Intervention (RTI) model. Students who may not be successful in the standard program, Tier I, receive additional support via the supplemental and alternative programs in Tier II and Tier III as detailed in the following pages.

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<sup>4</sup> Batsche, G., Elliott, J., Graden, J. L., Grimes, J., Kovaleski, J. F., Prasse, D., et al. (2005). *Response to intervention policy considerations and implementation*. Reston, VA: National Association of State Directors of Special Education.

<sup>5</sup> Burns, M. K., Appleton, J. J., & Stehouwer, J. D. (2005). Meta-analysis of response-to-intervention research: Examining field-based and research-implemented models. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment*, 23, 381–394.

Students' responses to interventions are monitored, and adjustments to the type and intensity of support are made as needed. RTI efforts were increased during the 2015-16 school year to more quickly identify students who are struggling. The school began to utilize weekly PLC and Student Support Team meetings to look at student performance and behavioral data, and make programming decisions to support students who are struggling academically or are otherwise challenged. The individualized nature of NCA's program lends itself well to RTI. Through real time progress indicators, additional supports and interventions ranging from supplemental programming to targeted, synchronous instruction and even targeted counseling are assigned and monitored. Regular discussion of student progress is held between content area and specialized instructional staff, advisors, counselors, and administration. Modifications to programs are made and can be implemented quickly.

For example, NCA uses the Assessment Objective Performance Reports (AOPR), which helps teachers easily identify essential skills and standards by subject/grade level; identify how and where these essential skills and standards are assessed within the program; access and analyze real-time data to determine mastery/proficiency; incorporate data-driven decisions throughout instruction; maximize use of the instructional support programs, resources, and data; identify the need for tiered interventions for non-mastered/proficient skills and standards; and identify students' responses to the implemented interventions.

This process is further facilitated by other data from Connexus to help identify students' instructional needs that may require intervention. A teacher's Home Page shows an icon for each student indicating that interventions are needed and have been identified and provided. The teacher can use his or her professional judgment to override these indicators and log the decision and rationale within Connexus. Also, NCA has a Student Support Team (SST) and an on-going process of identifying student intervention needs; assigning those interventions; tracking their success; and escalating, if necessary, from Tier I to Tier II to ultimately Tier III (alternative placement, most of which involves the development of an IEP). Tier III interventions are provided concurrently with a special education evaluation. Data is collected as a part of the RTI process. NCA believes that the intensive focus on these Tier interventions for the 2015-16 school year will increase the graduation rate by providing students the one-on-one support that they need to be successful.

## Tier I

Tier I is the first level of a multi-tiered approach to a system of instructional and behavioral supports. Tier I includes Connections' research-based core reading and math curriculum aligned with the Nevada Academic Content Standards. In addition to core coursework, the core curriculum includes teachers' use of differentiated instruction that meets the needs of all students throughout the school year. Differentiation involves thoughtful planning for the following: instructional design used to deliver content to students; lesson content used to support and extend concepts and skills; instructional practice used to provide targeted instruction and actively engage students; assessment used to evaluate student learning; and instructional activities to meet the needs of individual and small groups of students. When Tier I differentiation strategies fail to produce adequate progress, Tier II intervention is considered.

## Tier II

Areas where more students struggle and require Tier II support typically include reading fluency, reading comprehension, math fluency, math computation and reasoning, and behavior. Decisions to place students into Tier II are based on formal and informal assessment data, academic progress, and behavioral observations (attendance at live lessons, work completion, etc.) The scope of Tier II interventions has been increased during the 2015-2016 school year to include a greater focus on targeted, synchronous instruction, and providing additional support to students whose behavioral concerns are impeding academic progress. Tier II increases the frequency of the interventions. NCA has implemented a Tier II instructional support program for these students and provides support two to three times a week for 20–30 minutes per session at a minimum. Tier II intervention is explicit, systematic, and targeted to the greatest area of student learning and behavioral needs. Supplemental programs provide teachers with reports for progress monitoring that can be uploaded to Connexus to ensure all student performance data is in one place.

## Tier III

NCA has implemented a Tier III intervention where students receive targeted instruction for 20–30 minutes four to five days a week in order to focus more intensively on skill deficits and areas of concern. Tier III includes the most intensive and frequent level of instructional support and is the next step in the multitiered approach for students who have not been successful in the previous interventions. Tier III interventions use direct instruction through the use of LiveLesson sessions and implements other instructional strategies and research-based programs that are explicit, systematic, and targeted to specific student learning needs. Much like the decision to place a student into Tier II, academic progress, assessment data, and behavioral observations which indicate a greater need for intervention guide the placement into Tier III. This is the most intensive level of intervention.

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## ***Mentoring Program***

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NCA also piloted a mentoring program in the 2015-16 school year based on John Hattie's analysis of the impact of student-teacher relationships on student performance. As Hattie identified in *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement*, there is a strong correlation between teacher-student relationships and student learning<sup>6</sup>. As a pilot effort, NCA students who had two or more failing grades were assigned 1:1 adult mentors, drawn from NCA faculty and staff. Of those in the pilot, 75% are now passing all of their courses. While the development of a relationship with a caring adult is not the only factor contributing to these students' success, NCA is pleased with the results and will be expanding it to include students with the most profound academic and social emotional needs.

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

## 2.5 2015-16 Curricular, Education Management System, and Actionable Feedback Revisions

The 2015-16 school year saw significant revisions in the Connections curriculum and in Connexus®, the school’s Education Management System (EMS), to address student tracking, feedback, and curricular needs for credit deficient students.

- Tracking Credit Accumulation:** Connections recognizes the importance of early identification of credit deficient students. There are fields in Connexus that help NCA staff to identify, track, and intervene with students behind in high school credits. In addition, a new field was added for the 2015-16 school year to the Credits and Final Grade Report Data View (example provided in Figure 1) to assist schools in identifying credit deficient students during the enrollment process. As a result, this data is now readily available to NCA counselors as they assign students their courses in Connexus, and also enables counselors to quickly identify credit deficient students so teachers can quickly design interventions. Interventions may include credit recovery courses, block scheduling of classes, additional support by teachers, and/or summer school planning.

**Figure 1. Credits and Final Grade Report Data View**

Final Grade 2015-2016: 11

Current grade Level: 11

Grade Level based on credits earned: 11

On track to graduate based on completed credits and cohort year? Graduate On Time

On track to graduate based on potential credits earned at end of year? Graduate On Time

Cohort Grade: 11

Cohort Graduation Year: 2017

Is the student credit deficient based on documentation received prior to enrollment?  Yes  No

If yes, in what area(s) is the student credit deficient?  Electives  English

- Math Focus:** Math can be a significant barrier for credit deficient students. In the 2015-16 school year, Connections released significant changes in the area of math. All Kindergarten through Algebra 2 math courses were enhanced for 2015–16 to reflect the targeted learning sciences principles of practice, feedback, and student engagement, as well as the analysis of Connections math performance improvement research and data analytics.

These enhancements included the following:

- Reflections engage students in assessing their comfort level with specific skills, rating their math confidence, and reflecting on their math practices and study skills.
- Updated project based portfolio assessments are aligned to math practices and provide hands-on learning opportunities that include flexibility and choice, real-world challenges, collaboration, and application of knowledge in authentic ways.
- Enhanced practice includes instructional support, refined assignments that target skills needing additional support for mastery, and encourage metacognitive questioning and engagement with next generation assessment type activities.

- **Actionable Feedback:** Teacher feedback is one of the most powerful influences on student learning and achievement (Hattie and Timperley, 2007).<sup>7</sup> However, as noted by Hattie and Timperley, the type of feedback and the way it is given can be differentially effective. Guided by these research findings, during the 2015-16 school year, NCA teachers increased their efforts to provide high quality, timely, and actionable feedback. The new process ensures that teachers provide this feedback and that students and Learning Coaches are aware of the feedback. At the start of the school year, students and Learning Coaches began receiving automatic WebMail notifications that feedback was provided by the teacher, indicating the specific assignments and assessments that contain the feedback. Through a technology-powered feedback loop in Connexus, students receive consistent, timely, tangible, and actionable feedback to guide and impact their learning. In a Connections Education survey conducted in March 2016 of student and Learning Coach response to the new feedback notification system, results indicated the following:
  - **98% indicated that they have received feedback notification messages**
  - **97% indicated that they found feedback notification helpful in keeping them informed about their student’s learning (82% very helpful; 15% somewhat helpful)**
  - **92% indicated that the feedback notification was helpful in keeping their student informed about their learning.**

It is expected that both the math enhancements and the actionable feedback will improve student engagement in their courses and increase the percentage of courses that students complete successfully resulting in increased credits earned and a reduction in the number of credit deficient students, as well as the severity of students’ deficiencies. In the first semester, the improvements are believed to have contributed to the 3% point improvement in successful high school Math course completion rates across Connections-supported schools.

Continued research and formative and summative data analysis will occur at the conclusion of the 2015-2016 school year and into the 2016-2017 school year to confirm these assertions and inform instructional and operational practices at NCA. We do anticipate that these curricular and technological revisions implemented in 2015-16 will make a positive difference in the second semester course completion rates and in NCA’s graduation rate.

## 2.6 2015-16 Professional Development

NCA has also focused its professional development efforts in 2015-16 on engaging faculty in discussions directly related to the learning science principles and ensuring student success. Our efforts include training on student engagement and mindset as part of a targeted focus on school culture and student perceptions related to learning. A learning environment that promotes student engagement is characterized by connectedness between students, their teachers, and the school community, as well as a growth mindset, personalization, relevance, and the provision of a physically and psychologically safe environment.

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<sup>7</sup> Hattie and Timperley, (2007). **The Power of Feedback:** Review of Educational Research. March: 77: 81-112



The professional development for 2015-16 focuses on student engagement. An engaged student is invested in his or her learning and—as a result—has a growth mindset, perseverance, and relations that support academic success. It's about seeing things in a new way. When people change to a growth mindset, they change from a judge-and-be-judged framework to a learn-and-help-learn framework. Their commitment is to grow, and growth takes time, effort, and mutual support. Focusing professional development efforts on student engagement, mindset, and culture will make a difference for credit deficient students who have had many years of failure in their previous educational environment.

Teacher professional development is critically important in ensuring that the staff is optimally effective at teaching in a virtual environment and addressing the Nevada Academic Content Standards in their daily instructional practice. Each teacher maintains an ePortfolio in Connexus that includes the dates they attended professional learning sessions and their reflection on the session. Professional Learning sessions delivered by the Connections Professional Development Team include a post-session activity that teachers complete and upload to their ePortfolio. This application activity requires teachers to describe how they will apply the information learned during the session to their work with students and to improve their instructional practices. The NCA school leadership team can access a teacher's ePortfolio, review what was submitted as evidence of their learning, and provide teachers with feedback. The review of teacher artifacts and reflective comments have shown an increase in understanding of key concepts such as “knowing your students”. This is supported by observed teacher instructional activities within synchronous instructional sessions and a focus on off-track students.

The *Core Standards for Facilitating Student Learning* are:

- Provide high quality instruction resulting in student learning,
- Personalize student programs,
- Monitor student performance and provide timely feedback and intervention,
- Monitor student participation,
- Communicate frequently,
- Document and review all interactions, and
- Collaborate and develop professionally.

NCA works with the Connections Professional Development team to coordinate, plan, deliver, and continuously support Professional Learning Community activities and other professional learning initiatives through a systematic and comprehensive multi-year professional development plan that is focused on NCA's needs.

Figure 2 lists the professional development programs and initiatives that NCA targeted during the 2015-16 school year that were directly aligned with its goals of increasing student success and graduation rate.



**Figure 2. Professional Development Topics in 2015-16**

Topic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students in Distress</li> <li>• Serving Special Education Students Online</li> <li>• Monitoring students with attendance, participation, and contacts</li> <li>• Response to Intervention: Using Intervention Indicators to review, identify, and implement interventions</li> <li>• Assessment Objective Performance Report (AOPR) – real-time data showing student mastery of essential skills and standards</li> <li>• Differentiating learning using resources from the Instructional Support database and Shared Content</li> <li>• Analyzing and making instructional decisions for personalizing instruction</li> <li>• Planning targeted instruction for groups of students</li> <li>• Assessing mastery and providing opportunities for practice</li> <li>• Motivating students to participate</li> <li>• Encouraging Learning Coach training and participation</li> <li>• Reviewing best practices for intervening with students in Approaching Alarm or Alarm status</li> <li>• Helping Students Develop Grit and Take Ownership of Their Learning</li> <li>• Practice &gt; Mastery &gt; Transfer – What Does It Mean?</li> <li>• Feedback vs. Feedforward Roundtable</li> </ul>

## 2.7 2015-16 Learning Coach Support

In addition to this increased focus on student engagement, NCA has recognized the need to provide increased support to Learning Coaches and to help increase their engagement and connectedness with other Learning Coaches.

New resources were provided in the 2015-16 school year to assist Learning Coaches in ensuring student success. As part of a commitment to the entire family and subsequent research, a three-part family support program was created to make the learning experience more engaging and rewarding for students, parents, and Learning Coaches. These Learning Coach Live Lesson sessions are announced in the Learning Coach Link, on Learning Coach Central, in the Monthly Newsletter, and on the Learning Coach Home Pages. The three-part family support program is described in the below sections: Get Started!, Get Coaching!, and Get Connected!

Additionally, NCA uses Facebook social media channels to connect with enrolled and interested families. Facebook is used to support a positive school community and may serve as an alternate, casual, method of communication. There are currently 2,264 people following the NCA Facebook page. The page sees interaction such as: 9 average fan likes per post, 11 average fan actions per post, and 769,962 potential friend impressions. Parents can also join the school’s closed Facebook groups, in Northern and Southern Nevada, to reach out to other families. As of April 2016, more than 200 Nevada families were counted as members.

Club ORANGE is a social club for parents of enrolled students and it provides another online “space” where families can connect. This is not a formal method of communication, but rather an opt-in group for parents to meet their peers and interact. Current membership in the Nevada Club ORANGE community is 172 families (up from 28 families when the club was first established in 2011).

### ***Get Started!***

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Our **Get Started!** program offers both assistance and reassurance by providing extensive information about online education. The program helps families prepare for a successful school year through the Prepare for Success website, teacher welcome calls, orientation courses for Learning Coaches, in-person orientation gatherings, and Learning Coach Success Series, a series of live webinar-style sessions that start before the beginning of each school year, and are led by currently-enrolled parents who help families prepare for their first days of school. In addition to open Q&A sessions each week, five different topics are addressed: Virtual School Basics, Roles and What to Expect, Schedules and Routines, Getting Acquainted with Connexus, and Tips and Tricks for Success. The website is provided at:

<http://www.connectionsacademy.com/learn-more/events/online-orientation>

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### ***Get Coaching!***

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The **Get Coaching!** program is dedicated to helping Learning Coaches understand their role, providing them with easy access to resources, and ensuring that they are equipped with the tools and strategies needed to motivate and assist their students. Also, Connections provides additional training and support for parents.

Learning Coaches will complete an online orientation designed to familiarize them with the important role they play in supporting their student as a learner. We also support Learning Coaches through:

- **Learning Coach Central** – A convenient one-stop-shop site with access to social networking opportunities, information, and multiple resources to assist Learning Coaches in their role and providing instructional support to their student.
- **Learning Coach Link** – An online monthly communication sent to Learning Coaches with articles on instructional best practices and topics relevant to their families, Connexus updates, tips and strategies supporting students, announcements and reminders. NCA reaches out to Learning Coaches through increased social media, increased communication via message boards, and student outreach activities at school events to share this information.
- **National Learning Coach Resource Sessions** – These online, LiveLesson sessions are designed to assist Learning Coaches with an understanding of their role and responsibilities, and provide strategies for working with and supporting their student. All Learning Coach sessions are recorded and available in the Virtual Library for Learning Coaches to view if they are not able to attend the session live. They are announced on LC Link, LC Central, and LC Home Pages. Topics of specific interest are also shared via direct communication to families from counselors and advisors.

A wide range of topics are offered. Examples of sessions that support Learning Coaches of high school students include:

- College Applications and Your Student: What to Expect and How to Help!
- Understanding Financial Aid and the Importance of Completing the FAFSA
- How You Can Help Your Student Become College and Career Ready!
- Embracing Struggle through a Growth Mindset
- The Adolescent Brain
- Nurturing Student Motivation

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## ***Get Connected!***

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The **Get Connected!** program was developed to assist students and parents who are interested in finding opportunities to connect with other school families. In addition to in-person field trips and online clubs and activities, this program offers socialization tips for online school families, increased opportunities for students to interact online with classmates and teachers, and in some areas, private Facebook groups where parents and Learning Coaches can “meet” to arrange study groups and other informal gatherings.

## **3. 2016-17 School Improvement Plan**

The plan for the 2016-17 school year will be based upon the changes implemented during the 2015-16 school year with increased efforts on the areas of improved graduation rate and academic success, and the results of these efforts. In addition, the following additional improvements will be implemented.

### **3.1 Internal & External Data Validation**

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#### ***Internal Data Validation Efforts***

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The school registrar, reporting coordinator, and administrative assistants will maintain accurate and complete records in Connexus and physical files of withdrawn high school students concerning information on their next school of attendance or other educational decision. The school has already taken a more pro-active approach to identifying challenging placements and will continue to dedicate the resources to doing so. NCA is taking an additional step to locate students who withdraw (formally or informally) and, therefore, can potentially negatively impact the school’s current and future four-year cohort rate. At the Authority Executive Director’s suggestion, the school will consider working with an independent, external contractor to attempt to confirm the subsequent educational settings in which students enrolled after withdrawing from NCA. Currently, there are over 200 students who have withdrawn from NCA sometime in the past four years that are not confirmed to have transferred to another public school, private school, or home school. We will actively target this group and focus efforts on locating their current school.

The school will also increase its scrutiny of students enrolled in the school who are truant and those who withdraw or stop attending without providing required evidence that they have withdrawn to another program. Specifically, Nevada provides schools with an avenue to penalize students for habitual truancy—either in the form of written citation issued to the habitually truant student, or suspension of the habitually truant student’s driver’s license. This administrative sanction is pursuant to NEV. REV. STAT. ANN. § 392.148 (2016). This has not been used in the past but plans are in place for the 2016-17 school year. Parents will be clearly notified upon enrollment that this will be pursued if students are habitually truant. This is a mechanism for keeping students engaged and for providing proper incentive to students not remaining engaged to promptly share with the school to what high school program they are transferring. This would minimize “lost” students being counted as dropouts; given the proper information, they could be counted as transfers out, therefore raising NCA’s graduation rate.

As referenced, the school will also carefully review all records to ensure, for example, that any student who qualified for a certificate of attendance or who transferred to an adult education program was not incorrectly coded as a dropout (pursuant to NEV. ADMIN. CODE § 389.699(3) (2015) – and to ensure the same for transfers out-of-state, to private schools, to homeschooling, etc. Data is provided in Appendix B.

Notification will be provided to families and parents when they enroll that this process will be followed – it will be on everyone’s home pages – so that they are fully informed on the consequences of not filling out the withdrawal form.

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### ***External Data Validation Efforts***

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NCA will conduct an external validation study for the Class of 2017 as it did for the Class of 2015 and the Class of 2016 if the Authority finds it necessary. If it does, NCA will pursue the same process for identifying and working with a third party.

## **3.2 Freshman Focus/Senior Success**

The use of a freshman specific initiative was piloted in other schools supported by Connections during the 2015-16 school year and resulted in a positive difference in 9<sup>th</sup> grade promotion rates between schools. As a result, Connections is building a universal course entitled Freshman Focus for the 2016-17 school year which will be implemented at NCA. The new 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 and career readiness.

Based on the initial positive results of the Freshman Focus Course, a course that addresses needs specific to seniors, Senior Success, will also be offered as a formal part of the program beginning in 2016-17. The NCA Board and school leadership team are very excited about the Freshman Focus course, and the upcoming Senior Success course, and anticipate that both of these approaches will help many students achieve success and graduate on-time.

## **3.3 Every Student Succeeds Academy Program and Plan**

In order to increase the school’s efforts to support off-cohort students, NCA is implementing an academy approach to address the needs of its off-cohort students. Highlights of this mandatory program, to be called the Every Student Succeeds Academy, include:

“Success” seminars for off-cohort students offered synchronously to highlight successful practices, habits, and to help students acclimate to the online environment. Additionally, participation in these sessions upon enrollment will set the foundation to encourage accountability and participation in other required instructional sessions.

- Regularly required attendance at virtual or face-to-face synchronous instructional sessions. The frequency, format, and content will be tailored to student needs and tied to academic outcomes. By requiring attendance, we are still providing the flexibility that a fully virtual model provides while still adding a level of accountability.
- Dedicated instructional, administrative, counseling and advisory staff. Staff that are involved in this program will be selected based on their prior success in engaging with this population and will focus all of their efforts on increasing these students' success under the watch of school administration.
- Lower staff/student ratios. This will further establish accountability, provide support, and ensure that students are in constant contact with the school. As students complete credit recovery courses, it is critical that they are then placed into additional courses to maintain progress towards exiting Group 2 or Group 3 and graduating on time.

To assist the school, an internal Data View field will be added to the Cohort Information Data View and a required timeline. Additionally, the proprietary Connections IssueAware system is used to monitor students, track staff accountability, and document progress. **For 100% of students who have a current final grade of 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> and are off-cohort (student does not have adequate credits to be in the grade they should be), NCA will outline a plan in their Cohort Information Data View that details efforts to rejoin their correct grade level or graduate on time within the first 45 of days of school or 30 days of enrollment for late enrollees. Overall progress will be tracked through a calculated field in Connexus that monitors whether a student is currently predicted to graduate on time, and students who are "off cohort" will have progress in their courses and other programming tracked weekly.** Another benefit of NCA's program is the ability to adapt programming quickly to match student needs and modifications to programming, supports, and interventions will be made as needed.

## 3.4 Curricular Changes

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### *GradPoint*

Based upon the success of the GradPoint Pilot in 2015-16, it will be expanded and all credit deficient students will be placed into the appropriate courses to recover needed credits and to move closer to an on-time graduation. The targeted, user-centered approach of GradPoint is especially beneficial for transient populations—many of whom have been out of school, are disengaged, and have been unsuccessful in their first attempt at assigned coursework.

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### *Additional Math Instructional Resources*

An additional resource in Math has been added into the intervention resource library for 2016-17. Think Through Math helps students develop higher order thinking and problem-solving skills, preparing them for success on state exams, as well as a smooth transition to college or a career. Think Through Math includes instructional support for students in Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II, along with foundational math skills, and allows teachers to create customized learning pathways for students based on their individual needs. This additional resource helps motivate students using contests, points, avatars, and games. A pilot was held in other schools supported by Connections and results were very positive and it is expected to result in similar positive outcomes for NCA in 2016-17.

### ***Automatic Feedback***

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The 2016 plan is to build on the success of the Automatic Feedback feature that was new in 2015. NCA is committed to ensuring that parents and students are fully informed of this feature and how to employ it for student success in the 2016-17 school year by including in webmail messages, welcome calls, and training to parents. This new feature provided an automatic alert that went to both students and Learning Coaches when a teacher left feedback for a student. To support this increased visibility of feedback, teachers ensure that feedback on student work is targeted, meaningful, and includes suggestions for improvement. Teachers received specific training on providing effective, actionable feedback to students (ex. Session 103: Why Do Students Need Feedback?; Session 205: Feedback vs. Feedforward Round Table; and Session 302: The Power of Feedback). A recent survey of Learning Coaches indicated that 97% of Learning Coaches found the notifications helpful in keeping them informed of their student's learning. For example, parents stated that:

- “The feedback helps my student immediately know what he needs to improve on and if he has time to correct his mistakes on assignments. It also gives a confidence boost on a job well done.”
- “We really appreciate the feedback notifications! There were times where my daughter wouldn't see her teacher's feedback requesting correction via webmail for quite some time, but now with the notification, she gets the feedback right away! Very useful upgrade. Thanks!”
- “I just want to take a moment to thank you. Your positive feedback on assessments and (our school's) multiple choice reflections really have made a difference for my child this year. He was having trouble with math last year. I am so thankful for (our school) in general, because it has helped my child take his time and become more confident in his abilities.”

### ***Increased Math Focus***

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Math is a continued focus at Connections. Targeted activities and discussions will focus on Math in student's day-to-day lives and a growth mindset toward Math, including increased Math awareness in the Connections Speaker Series, Fireside Chats, and Student Clubs and Activities experiences. New student experience opportunities included RobotC, in which students are able to program Lego® Mindstorms® robots virtually, and the James Webb Space Telescope Project, which provided students the opportunity to collaborate virtually and create a project which demonstrates understanding and information about the James Webb Space Telescope.

There are additional Math dedicated resources for Learning Coaches including resource sessions such as Born to Learn – Embracing Struggle through a Growth Mindset and What Was Broken with Math and Why Did They Need to Change It?; Learning Coach Link newsletter articles including math tips and guides; an article on math reflections; and a Learning Coach book study on the book Old Dogs, New Math by Rob Eastaway and Mike Askew.

### ***Course and Connexus Enhancements 2016–17***

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The curriculum offered to NCA students is updated and enhanced annually. In addition to the updates made to address Math performance, accessibility, and feedback and course ratings received through the StarTrack lesson rating and feedback system, course enhancements are also focused on school-based requests for course unit reranking. Unit reranking requests are in response to a school’s review of the content and sequence of a course. While the content is appropriately aligned to state standards, the sequence of the units may be better aligned to the school’s school year and timing of state assessments. The enhancements for 2016-2017 include the following:

- **Unit Reranking** – Throughout all Connections schools there were 106 school-based requests for unit reranking to optimize alignment of course content and instruction order and pacing to the requirements of state testing. NCA requested four additional reranked courses for 2016-17 and will then have a total of 14 reranked courses in the 2016-17 course catalog. A course that has units reranked enables NCA to cover critical content before state testing dates.
- **Interventions from Prior Year** – Beginning with 2016-2017 school year, teachers will have immediate access to returning student data that indicates whether they were receiving intervention support during the prior school year. This access to historical tier code data, within Connexus, will allow teachers to quickly identify an appropriate intervention for students and provide the student with the type of targeted support that he/she needs at the start of the school year.
- **Math Performance** – Course enhancements focused on Math discourse and students’ oral and written communication of math thinking, reasoning, and problem solving. These efforts will be evidenced in the reflection, discussion, and portfolio activities, and in the new Time to Talk lesson component.
- **Accessibility** – Enhancement efforts continue to focus on replacing or enhancing legacy content and instructional resources to meet the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 standards. This work is primarily focused at the middle and high school level for 2016–17.

All of these curricular changes are focused on improving student learning, retention, and graduation rates. These curricular changes are based upon research and efforts from the 2015-16 school year and will make a measurable difference in learning in 2016-17.

## **3.5 Professional Development**

NCA is in the midst of defining its 2016-17 Training and Professional Development Plan, which will be as substantive and robust as the 2015-16 one described previously. An additional focus on standardizing teacher course expectations and grading practices, as well as implementing “relearning” policies to support student academic engagement and success, will be implemented through the training, professional learning sessions, and related Professional Learning Community work. It will also focus on ensuring the success of the Every Students Succeeds Academy designed for off-cohort students and a school-wide focus on graduation rate and tracking students.

Professional learning sessions facilitated by the Connections Professional Development team during the 2016-2017 school year will focus on specific learning themes throughout the year. Whether teachers are participating in the 100 (1<sup>st</sup> year teachers), 200 (2<sup>nd</sup> year teachers), or 300 (3+ year teachers) series, the theme will be the same, while the session objectives will increase in level of rigor and application based on teacher experiences. Themes, based on learning science research, include: student reflection, making connections, ownership of learning, effective questioning, feedback, practice/reteaching, and improving student outcomes. This thematic approach will allow all teachers to focus, and build on, the same topics throughout the year and enable PLCs to delve deeper into how learnings from professional development sessions impact teaching practices and student learning.

In addition to the Professional Learning sessions described above, NCA school leadership can recommend or require teachers to participate in any of over 20 additional nationally facilitated professional development sessions that support NCA school goals and/or teacher development goals. School leadership monitors participation and portfolio completion at least monthly, and provides feedback on teacher artifacts. Additionally, observation of teacher instruction includes “look-fors” derived from topics covered within PD. NCA will ensure that active participation in internal professional development is carefully monitored and that topics are reinforced through regular inclusion in PLC meetings and staff meetings, and the rates of participation in professional development will increase from 2015-16 to 2016-17. Additional resources which specifically target working with this population have been identified and will also be included.

Teachers at NCA had the following to say about their experiences participating in professional learning sessions during the 2015-2016 school year, and how the session will help them to improve their instructional practices.

- *I found it extremely helpful to learn about all the different risk factors and to learn how easy they are to locate. I will definitely be taking note of these moving forward when interacting with my students.*
- *In this PD session, we learned about ways to increase the effectiveness of instructional practices. We learned about Gagne's 9 events of instructions and how to implement them in our virtual environment. I learned some new strategies and ways to really engage students in the LL room by using attention grabbing questions, recall, practice, feedback, and retention just to name a few. Using tools like the poll pods, screen shares, breakout rooms, and exit strategy ideas can help assist in pulling students into the instruction and helping them to become more active learners.*
- *I like this idea of grit and teaching students to appreciate improvement in their work when they have taken risks and maybe failed, but then got up and tried again. I can model that myself as I am in my second year teaching in an online environment. Even though there is still a lot I don't know, I have made tremendous progress since last year with the technology.*
- *I really want to focus on self-reflection of my own teaching practices and find my strengths and weaknesses. This will help me to improve as a teacher and also help my students with their own self-reflection process.*
- *I think this session was a good reminder for me that my high-end students need better feedback than what I am providing them. I do a good job of providing detailed feedback for my struggling-learners, but I think I rely on praise too much with the other end of the spectrum. I will spend more time challenging them and encouraging them to go beyond, dig deeper, etc. and provide that in my feedback to them.*



Efforts to assess the impact of professional development efforts are underway. There are several layers of such assessment: Design, Implementation, and Impact. Teacher responses on an annual employee satisfaction survey indicate progress in design and implementation – staff positive responses to 7 professional development related questions increased an average of 3.2% points, and teacher participation in PLCs increased to 100% from 97% last year. Assessment of impact is a work in progress.

### **3.6 Board Governance Training**

The NCA Board is committed to the success of the school. This is demonstrated in their high participation during regular and special Board meetings. The NCA Board meets regularly nine (9) times throughout the school year and calls additional meetings as needed. The Principal reviews performance data and trends with the Board during each meeting, which Board members discuss and make recommendations as appropriate. The Board is focused on strategic planning and increasing the graduation rate at NCA. An external consultant will be engaged to collaboratively work with the Board on strategic planning and implementation for the 2016-2017 school year and subsequent years. The Board will continue to work closely with the Authority to evaluate effectiveness of the improvement strategies and also seek input from external experts in this area.

The NCA Board routinely participates and is committed to Board governance training opportunities throughout the school year, including conferences provided by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA), Charter School Association of Nevada (CSAN), National School Boards Association (NSBA), International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL), National Alliance for Public Charter School (NAPCS) as well as a Board Academy provided by their Education Management Organization (EMO). In addition, materials from previous trainings are made available to all Board members within their online Virtual Library. Also within this Virtual Library, Board members have access to review all governance documents for the school including but not limited to, Bylaws, Charter Agreement and materials from all previous Board meetings. All core foundational documents are reviewed regularly and revised as necessary.

The Board will be actively monitoring the graduation rate and progress and effectiveness of the strategies outlined in this Plan through monthly reports from the school leader detailing the progress made with the strategies outlined in the plan. The Board will be provided detailed updated reports on the cohort to evaluate student growth under this Plan. The Board will continue active involvement in collaborating with the Authority to ensure the Plan is effective or make necessary adjustments as the Board and school leadership work to monitor the success of the strategies outlined.

### **3.7 Staff and Placement Decisions**

The students in the Every Student Succeeds Academy will be taught by a select group of staff who will serve as their teachers and “graduation coaches.” This approach is being piloted now with students in Groups 2 and Group 3 of the current year’s cohort, and it allows teachers the opportunity to work with a small group of students who they “own.” The number of students assigned to each staff member is purposely kept low (less than 10) so the appropriate amount of regular contact and support can be given.

The staff of the Every Student Succeeds Academy (ESSA) will be comprised of teachers who are passionate about and dedicated to working with the population of credit deficient students who often also are also faced with non-academic challenges which further impede their progress towards graduation. By combining high quality, targeted instruction delivered by experienced and caring educators with the appropriate social and emotional supports provided by counselors and advisors, NCA is confident that this will truly be a program in which every student will succeed.

The selection of staff members who understand and embrace the importance of this work is only one step in the overall process. Staff members will be evaluated regularly on outcomes related directly to student success and engagement, and will be held accountable by school administration through the use of tangible, relevant student data. The frequency and quality of contacts with students and the efficacy of instructional practices will be judged on student outcomes.

### **3.8 Face-to-Face Support**

NCA is committed to ensuring that students are successful by creating additional face-to-face opportunities in the 2016-17 school year dedicated to credit-deficient students. Currently, there are field trips and state testing opportunities for face-to-face interaction and many students take advantage of these opportunities. NCA knows that these opportunities provide valuable time for students and teachers to generate a relationship and discussion about coursework and school. It is also an opportunity to develop the success strategies needed to be successful in an online school.

NCA plans to increase these opportunities and pilot an additional series of face-to-face tutoring and intervention opportunities in Clark and Washoe Counties. NCA will use venues already selected for state testing, and will target additional opportunities based on student location, need, and scheduling preferences. Sessions will be focused on targeted academic support. Results will be carefully monitored and if it's determined that these pilots yield significant results, NCA will work to reprioritize its budget to expand this effort in future years with more sessions and a wider geographic reach.

### **3.9 2016-17 Learning Coach Support**

Learning Coach support and training was increased in the 2015-16 school year as outlined previously. However, it is also evident that many of our older high school students have challenging home situations with limited Learning Coach involvement. The school remains committed to increasing Learning Coach involvement through social media, face-to-face events, training, and other individualized supports. In an effort to improve awareness of these sessions to NCA families, including families with limited Learning Coach involvement, NCA is committed to promoting the availability of these support sessions to families for the 2016-17 school year. For example, notifications from the school will be sent by the school leader to invite and encourage participation by families. In addition, the 2016-17 plans include sending the links to recorded sessions to families via the School Counselor or other school leader when it is evident that additional support is needed from a Learning Coach and staff believes that additional training will help increase the expertise of the Learning Coach to more successfully monitor progress and provide support. Counselors also work with Learning Coaches and families to identify and utilize community-based resources to address the many unique situations and challenges presented by this population of students.

## 4. 2017- 18 and Beyond

Future plans will be developed during the Board's strategic planning session during the summer of 2016 and will be focused on achieving a cohort graduation rate of 60% and ultimately higher. Some ideas under consideration are 1) providing drop-in centers where students who need face-to-face interaction with a teacher in reading or mathematics could receive this support; 2) enhancing curriculum to provide teachers even more flexibility to personalize courses for students; 3) providing specific professional development for teachers and counselors to increase student engagement; and 4) being increasingly persistent with and continuing our deliberate and focused efforts working with credit deficient students.

NCA, in partnership with Connections, has begun the multi-year improvement effort to increase four-year cohort graduation rates, and recognizes that because 9<sup>th</sup> grade drop-outs have a significant impact on graduation rates four years later, the greatest effect of these multi-year efforts will be seen in the graduation rates for 2020 and beyond. Like the specifics of the plan presented in this document for the coming year, this multi-year improvement effort addresses a number of basic issues, but with steps that take longer to realize.

1. **Onboarding:** Work to ensure that the students who enroll in the high school program fully understand and are prepared to take full advantage of what it offers. The high school program is a rigorous college preparatory program and students often say they initially struggle to rise to the expectations of the curriculum. In addition, full-time online school, while tremendously advantageous for many students trying to adapt their high school experience to their personal needs, does require a level of commitment and discipline to learning a new approach. While NCA is a public school and cannot turn away students who apply, it will continue to make efforts to improve its outreach programs to ensure that students and Learning Coaches are prepared for the rigor and expectations of being a virtual school student.
2. **Connexus<sup>®</sup>, the Education Management System, Rebuild:** Connexus, the software and technology platform on which the program is served, is in the middle of significant improvement which is expected to be implemented in the 2018-19 school year. It is anticipated the new platform will allow students who are thinking about enrolling to more directly experience the program. We anticipate that students can be offered trial courses that will give them a better sense of what to expect, and perhaps a legislative or regulatory solution can be found to require successful completion of an orientation or trial course as an enrollment prerequisite. See additional policy recommendations in Appendix D.
3. **Support-Engage-Intervene-Escalate:** Work to ensure that students, once enrolled in the high school program, are fully engaged in the program. Students who experience success and gain momentum in their course of study (e.g., completing requirements in a timely and gratifying way) are more likely to engage, succeed, and graduate on time. Conversely, research shows that overage 9<sup>th</sup> graders, 9<sup>th</sup> graders who attend more than one school, and/or 9<sup>th</sup> graders not earning credits on a pace that would lead to on-time graduation are at highest risk for dropping out. NCA will make fuller use of this information and student-specific data related to it to design support, engagement, intervention, and escalation activities. While the school has made and continues to make substantial efforts in this area, future activities may include:
  - a. **More Robust Freshman Academy Approach:** Building on the Freshman Focus effort in 2016-17, efforts will be furthered to organize teachers across disciplines and around students to help ease the transition to high school and develop the behaviors and habits that will help them successfully complete high school.

- b. **More targeted information.** Again, building on 2015-16 and 2016-17 efforts, information made available to teachers and other school staff will be further refined to enhance their efforts to support, engage, intervene, and escalate. The new Connexus will provide additional improvements to the teacher dashboard, including more automated integration of information about student engagement and success with their curricular and instructional resources. Simple things like the system's ability to monitor when the student is typically active in the system and where the student seems to be getting stuck will help teachers better time and frame their efforts to reach out to support and intervene.
  - c. **Social Platform Integration:** Today's students communicate on social media platforms and Connections does not currently offer NCA a robust and secure platform for communicating with students that mimics the style and availability of social platforms. It is anticipated future improvements to Connections' education management system (Connexus) will support better use of such tools, as well as the potential to more easily automate messages that research has shown will help many students engage, such as automated reminders to complete an assignment or messages of encouragement. In an upcoming update to Connexus, Connections is intending to build a chat feature to enable students to collaborate with each other more organically. The updates will include blogs and wikis that students can create and write. Also, the updated system will allow for project based learning, which allows students and teachers to work collaboratively. Badges can be awarded for progress in the system by their teacher  
  
NCA's Connexus Education Management System provides an internal "closed" email system for students, parents and teachers to connect. The school community also leverages message boards to interact. Although this is not "social media" it does offer a closed online environment for communication. Future versions of Connexus are expected to include chat functionality in addition to email and message boards. Other enhancements to Connexus will be announced.
  - d. **Integration of Additional and External Supports:** Many students have non-academic challenges that interfere with their ability to be successful. It takes time to identify and make available physical-world supports for students and/or to build partnerships with programs that might help them be better prepared to be successful in school. NCA is piloting some efforts in 2016-17, and the results will inform its exploration of a range of options for future school years, including mandating face-to-face instructional time for particular behavioral or academic issues that have been shown to respond to that intervention, as well as deeper partnerships with social welfare related agencies to help students address family situations, chemical addiction, mental health concerns, and other issues that might be interfering with their ability to be successful in school.
4. **Increase Curricular and Instructional Offerings:** Continue to work to strengthen and broaden the curricular and instructional offerings of the high school program to better address the academic and non-academic needs and interests of its students. On a continuing basis, NCA will evaluate the effectiveness of its strategies identified to increase the graduation rate and adjust those strategies in collaboration with the Authority.

- a. While NCA continues to strengthen and increase the breadth and quality of its program (Career and Technical Education and GradPoint credit recovery offerings being recent examples), there is more to do. CTE courses that are offered are based on student interest and demand, and include courses that focus on the following general career areas: health and medicine, general business, and computer programming. Connections will continue to work to find and/or develop the best curricular resources to address the needs of students, and to improve the level of student engagement and the quality of accessibility and various pathways to success that are built into its existing curricular resources. This is a multi-year effort spanning hundreds of course offerings, but it is expected that the roll-out of the new Connexus platform in the 2018-19 school year will significantly accelerate the benefits to students and their learning.
  - b. While training, professional development, and teacher participation in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) have been underway for some time, the development of teacher beliefs and practices takes time. NCA will continue to develop and refine shared practices for basic practices like student grading to maximize academic integrity without unwittingly alienating or disengaging students. Experience in other schools supported by Connections has shown that full implementation of a relearning policy takes several years but can substantially improve the rate of successful course completion by students without undermining academic integrity.
5. **Increased Data Integrity:** Work to strengthen NCA's ability to track and properly record where students withdraw to when they leave without graduating. As previously noted, the ability of students to quickly and easily access NCA when they have a problem to solve (e.g., enroll because of an insurmountable transportation problem) also makes it easy for students to leave easily and without adequate notice. One student counted as a dropout in 2015 had been enrolled in the school for two weeks several years earlier, and was counted as a dropout largely because the school could not find out where the student went and report that back to Nevada. Similarly, 14 students who dropped out in 2015 were reported by the National Student Clearinghouse to be enrolled in two- or four-year colleges or universities in the fall of 2015. NCA and its board will continue to strengthen their database management to track withdrawals, and its ability to research the whereabouts of students who withdraw and do not adequately report their next steps. NCA will also work with regulators to try and strengthen definitions and technical capabilities around the effort to help ensure, for example, that students enrolled in a legitimate Adult Education option are not counted as non-graduates as they currently are, and that NCA has sufficient access to the data sources maintained by Nevada to "look for" students who have withdrawn without fully reporting their next steps.

## 5. Conclusion

A school's graduation rate is one of many important school performance measures. NCA wants every student who enrolls to graduate with a Nevada high school diploma. The NCA Board and school leadership team recognize that NCA's four-year graduation rate, using the federal cohort methodology, is not at the desired level. NCA is effectively serving a significant population of credit deficient students and understands that under the current method of calculation this has an adverse effect on its graduation rate, reflecting on the students' experience before enrolling in NCA. NCA is committed to re-engaging these students and graduating them career and college ready. We want higher achievement and as can be seen in the steps outlined in this plan are committed to making it a reality. There is some context around the graduation rate that we have explained in this plan that will also be backed up through the third party validation process. Ultimately, we recognize the concern about the current graduation rate and are working to improve it. Like any organization with a plan for improvement, we need time to faithfully implement improvements, evaluate their efficacy, address any implementation concerns, and address any unintended consequences. We are confident that students will be served well and the graduation rate will improve through an open and collaborative dialogue with the school and the Authority. We also are confident that the many factors that impact graduation will become apparent through this process.

# Appendix A

## History and Accomplishments

### A.1 Overview

There are many areas in which Nevada Connections Academy (NCA) has made great gains. This section will highlight these achievements.

Students benefit from a top-quality curriculum that meets all Nevada Academic Content Standards (Common Core State Standards). Each student has a Personalized Learning Plan and one or more highly qualified Nevada-credentialed teachers working with expert curriculum specialists to tailor the curriculum to meet that student's individual learning needs.

NCA is a virtual learning community that connects students, teachers, and families through unique technology tools as well as synchronous instruction and one-on-one interaction. Students and their families receive sophisticated support for their curriculum, technology, special education, and digital learning platform needs. Students and families use an educational management system that combines learning management, student information, and content management systems. This allows students and families to maintain a focus on achievement.

As a result of its effective and innovative educational approach, NCA is accredited by the Northwest Accreditation Commission (NWAC), an accrediting division of AdvancED.

One of the most significant benefits the school provides is being able to serve students who are underserved or not being served within the larger community. Students benefit from instruction that is individualized, personalized, and flexible. NCA is tailor-made for a diverse array of students who benefit from a quality alternative to the traditional brick-and-mortar classroom. These include:

- Students whose families seek direct involvement in their education,
- Students who are medically homebound due to illness or disability,
- Exceptional students who are far ahead of or far behind their peers in school,
- Students pursuing artistic or athletic careers,
- Students who require a flexible school schedule,
- Students in group homes or institutions,
- Students who have been bullied, and
- Students at risk of academic failure, who may particularly benefit from intensive, personalized instruction.

The Board of Directors partners with Connections Education, a leading virtual school provider for curriculum, technology, and school support services including:

- Curriculum,
- Curriculum support personnel,
- Connexus<sup>®</sup>, a comprehensive Educational Management System (EMS),
- Professional development,
- Student, parent, and teacher technical assistance, and
- Additional consulting and support.

In the 2015–2016 school year, Connections is supporting 30 virtual public schools in 26 states, serving over 65,000 students. Connections is accredited by AdvancED<sup>1</sup> and was re-accredited in June of 2015. With the overall scores exceeding AdvancEd’s average score for all of the schools and corporations they accredit, AdvancED reviewers noted that “Connections Education’s quality assurance processes and data-driven culture leads to systemic, systematic, and sustainable continuous improvement.”

The ultimate focus of this “high-tech, high-interaction” instructional model is student achievement. Students master the core subjects of reading/language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies through a challenging curriculum that meets Nevada Academic Content Standards (Common Core State Standards).

The developmentally appropriate curriculum increases its integration of technology as students advance through the grades. Each Connections course includes active learning elements, including online and/or offline activities that address diverse learning styles and preferences, ranging from textual, visual, auditory, and/or hands-on.

Connections’ courses include 1,800 Teachlet<sup>®</sup> proprietary instructional movies and more than 1,000 primary source and instructional videos. Integrated “i-text” electronic textbooks are licensed from a variety of leading publishers including Pearson<sup>®</sup>, Perfection Learning, and others, while non-proprietary technology-based content is licensed from “best-of-breed” providers such as Grolier Online<sup>™</sup>, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, and Discovery Education.<sup>®</sup> The instructional design includes interactive LiveLesson<sup>®</sup> sessions and threaded discussions.

The highly trained and experienced teachers are integral to student and school success. Highly qualified, Nevada-credentialed teachers are a key part of the program. Teachers are in regular contact with students via WebMail (Connections’ proprietary, closed-system email program), telephone, LiveLesson<sup>®</sup> sessions, discussion boards, message boards, and other channels. Teachers instruct, motivate, monitor and evaluate student progress, personalize the curriculum, intervene as needed to ensure student success, lead field trips, and clarify the curriculum for the students.

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<sup>1</sup> Accreditation agency serving 32,000 public and private schools and districts <http://www.advanc-ed.org/>



NCA provides integral tools to help teachers ensure students are successful including ongoing and comprehensive professional development in online learning pedagogy, curriculum with a focus on Common Core instructional shifts, data-driven instructional decisions, and Connections' own *Core Competencies for Facilitating Student Learning*. Additional Nevada- focused professional learning events are also offered throughout the year.

NCA integrates school, community, and home. A Learning Coach (a parent or guardian) may work with the student to ensure successful engagement in the program by providing motivation, collaboration, scheduling, and record keeping. Other links between home, school, and the community are created via both asynchronous and synchronous online activities. In addition, school staff members or Community Coordinators facilitate enriching in-person community activities and field trips to round out the comprehensive learning experience.

Students also have access to more than 25 clubs and activities that encourage students to explore interests beyond the classroom, develop leadership skills, and make friends within their school and with students from other schools supported by Connections. The school has also established chapters of the National Honor Society and National Junior Honor Society, providing students with additional opportunities for developing social, leadership, and community involvement skills.

## A.2 History

NCA was launched in the fall of 2007 to provide a complete virtual school program to Nevada public school students. NCA has worked hard to fulfill its mission and original charter goals. NCA has experienced significant growth during the term of the charter, which speaks to the demand for this option, and also to NCA's overall success in fulfilling the mission and vision described in the charter.

The school was originally chartered by the Nevada State Board of Education. The charter was renewed unanimously in 2013 by the State Public Charter School Authority. It was supported for renewal by then SPCSA Director Dr. Steve Canaverro. In Dr. Canaverro's words, at the charter renewal hearing in 2013, the school was a success. It appears that at that time the Authority recognized the school was effectively serving its students, perhaps giving careful consideration to the challenges faced in serving a mobile population. There have been minor amendments over the years such as charter facility relocation, grades offered, and Governing Board by-laws. Overall the school is still focused on its mission: *to help each student maximize his or her potential and meet the highest performance standards through a uniquely individualized learning program.*

The last official communication from the State Public Charter School Authority stated that Nevada Connections Academy was in "Good Standing" for its performance in 2013-14.

## Enrollment and Demographics

Since opening, the school has drawn students from throughout Nevada. NCA has experienced a steady increase in enrollment almost every year. NCA now serves slightly over 3200 students in grades K-12. Figure 1 demonstrates the growth trends since its inception.

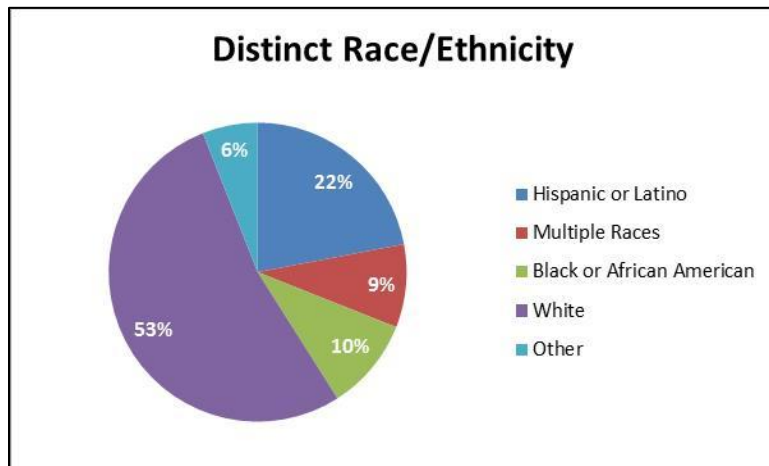
**Figure 1. Enrollment Growth**

School Year	Count Day Enrollment
2015-16	2,702*
2014-15	2,593
2013-14	1,945
2012-13	1,599
2011-12	1,715
2010-11	1,563
2009-10	1,322
2008-09	873
2007-08	420

\* As of the 2015-16 school year, enrollment is not reported as a Count Day. The number reported is the enrollment as of September 30, 2015 and will be reported four times throughout the year. At the time of this report, NCA is serving over 3,000 students.

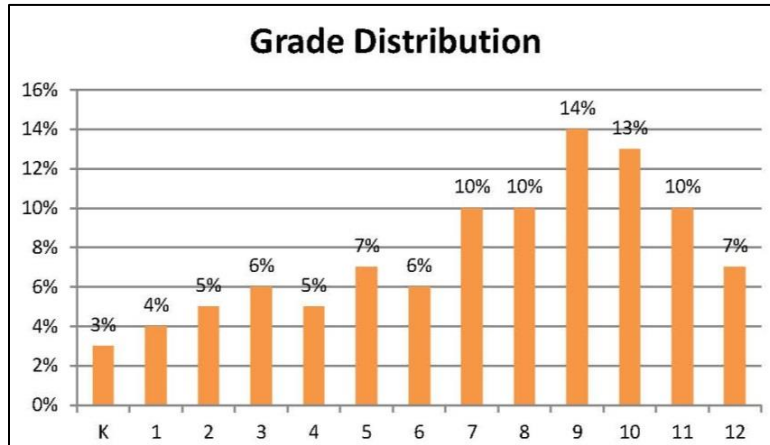
NCA serves a diverse population. Figure 2 provides information on the composition of the student body in January 2016.

**Figure 2. Student Body Composition of NCA –January 2016**



The students are currently 46% male and 54% female. Figure 3 illustrates the grade distribution as of January 2016. Students in 9th and 10th grades represent the largest percentage of students.

Figure 3. Grade Distribution as of January 2016



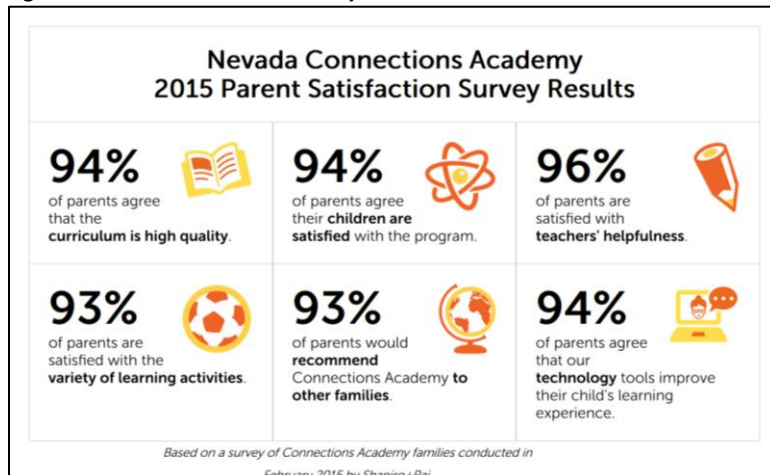
As of January 2016, **approximately 41% of the students served are socioeconomically disadvantaged**, measured by family income eligibility meeting federal guidelines for free or reduced lunch.

NCA also serves special populations through Individual Educational Plans (IEP), Section 504 plans, and gifted programs. The Special Education/504 population is approximately 12% of the total student population. The Gifted population is approximately 3% of the total student population.

### Parent Satisfaction

NCA has consistently received high ratings on annual parent surveys. Parents are surveyed annually; the results are compiled by an independent third-party research firm, and presented to the school staff and Governing Board. Parent surveys provide quantifiable data by which the school leadership can work towards improving various aspects of the school. Over the past several years, the percent of parents who have responded to the survey has varied from 35% to 50%. Therefore, these results are considered reflective of the overall experience of the NCA families. More detailed results from parent surveys are included in annual reports to the Governing Board and are always available upon request.

Figure 4. Parent Satisfaction Survey Results for NCA for 2014-2015



The following testimonials are from NCA students and their parents. The testimonials were unsolicited and represent a sample of the kudos that the teachers and school receive on an ongoing basis.

- *My son LOVES you! We love NCA and will be moving our other child here because NCA "has it together!" We love NCA because of the teacher interactions.*
- *I am very happy with Melissa Pugh. She has really helped my daughter and she has brought her grades up. I would like to say Thank You.<sup>2</sup>*
- *Our family is new to NCA but so far we are having a positive experience. I find all of my questions and concerns are addressed in a timely and thorough fashion. We are very excited to start in a few days!*
- *Tiffany Grant has done great work with my son. Thank you.*
- *Thank you very much Ms. Lapidus. I'm so grateful. I have been working hard on this for at least three days.*
- *Fantastic. Way better than traditional institutions for numerous reasons. Love the brand new UPS'd textbooks, too!!!! Yet another plus! Thanks for accommodating to 2015!*
- *Over all this is a great school. Love the set up and everything.*
- *Ms. Murphy, You are our favorite teacher and the best thing about NCA. You are always in contact and it is so appreciated.*

## A.3 Accomplishments

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### *Academic and Educational Achievements*

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- In 2014-2015, NCA's composite ACT and SAT score averages were higher than both the state and national average scores.
- The class of 2015 valedictorian was awarded a prestigious U.S. Army pre-med/medical school combined program scholarship.
- The 119 graduates in the class of 2015 earned a total of \$562,065 in scholarship money.
- Two 8<sup>th</sup> grade students both won 1st place at the Western Nevada Regional Science Fair.
- Students who graduated from NCA in 2015 were accepted at colleges such as:
  - Antioch University McGregor
  - Arizona State University
  - Arkansas State University
  - Art Institute of Las Vegas
  - Art Institute of Portland
  - Berea College
  - Biola University
  - Brigham Young University-Idaho
  - California Institute of the Arts
  - Central Bible College
  - Seattle Pacific University
  - Southern Oregon University
  - St. Mary's College of California
  - Suffolk University
  - University of Hawaii at Manoa
  - University of Idaho
  - University of Mobile
  - University of Nevada: Las Vegas
  - University of Nevada: Reno
  - University of North Texas

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<sup>2</sup> Melissa Pugh is an NCA graduate who went onto graduate from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

- Chapman University
- Colorado Christian University
- Corban University
- Dominican University
- Drake University
- George Fox University
- Gonzaga University
- Lake Forest College
- Nevada State College
- Northern Arizona University
- Oregon State University
- Saint Peter's College
- Santa Clara University
- University of Oregon
- University of Portland
- University of San Diego
- University of Southern Mississippi
- University of the Pacific
- University of Utah
- Utah State University
- Utah Valley University
- Westmont College
- Whitworth University
- Willamette University
- William Jewell College

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### **Other Achievements**

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- NCA is accredited by the Northwest Accreditation Commission (NWAC), an accrediting division of AdvancED.
- In 2015, an NCA High School Student was national Runner-up for the national Prudential Community Spirit Award.
- NCA has ongoing community service programs with the Foodbank of Northern Nevada and other regionally recognized agencies.
- A 9<sup>th</sup> grade student was recently chosen to serve on the global Pearson Student Council and will have the opportunity to represent his school and interact with peers from around the world.
- Our school counseling program presented some of its successes at the recent Nevada Association of School Counselors conference.
- Principal Steve Werlein participated in a business leaders' roundtable with the presidents of three state universities and other educational leaders in 2014.
- NCA recently hosted a "Read for the Record" event which included participation from US Congresswoman Dina Titus (virtually from Washington, DC) and Reno's Chief of Police. Approximately 900 people attended "live" at one of the in-person venues or virtually.
- NCA hosts career and college fairs in both southern and northern Nevada. This year's events included participation from a variety of public safety, post-secondary, and vocational agencies and had record numbers of attendees.

## **A.4 Academic Accountability**

It is important to note that scores may fluctuate from year to year. Student mobility and growth rate are important factors in analyzing academic performance. Many students and families choose a virtual school program to serve a unique need for a particular period of time, i.e. medical reasons, sports or performing arts/acting, family move, bullying, and so forth. Their intent is to solve a family issue and enroll in a virtual school for a limited time. As a result, virtual schools experience student turnover both during the year as well as from year to year. As such NCA is particularly susceptible to enrollment fluctuations and the subsequent impact on academic performance data.

Student academic achievement is the highest priority for NCA. Over the last year, NCA has put in place several significant interventions and enhancements to ensure that student performance exceeds the growth targets, especially among the subgroup populations. These include:

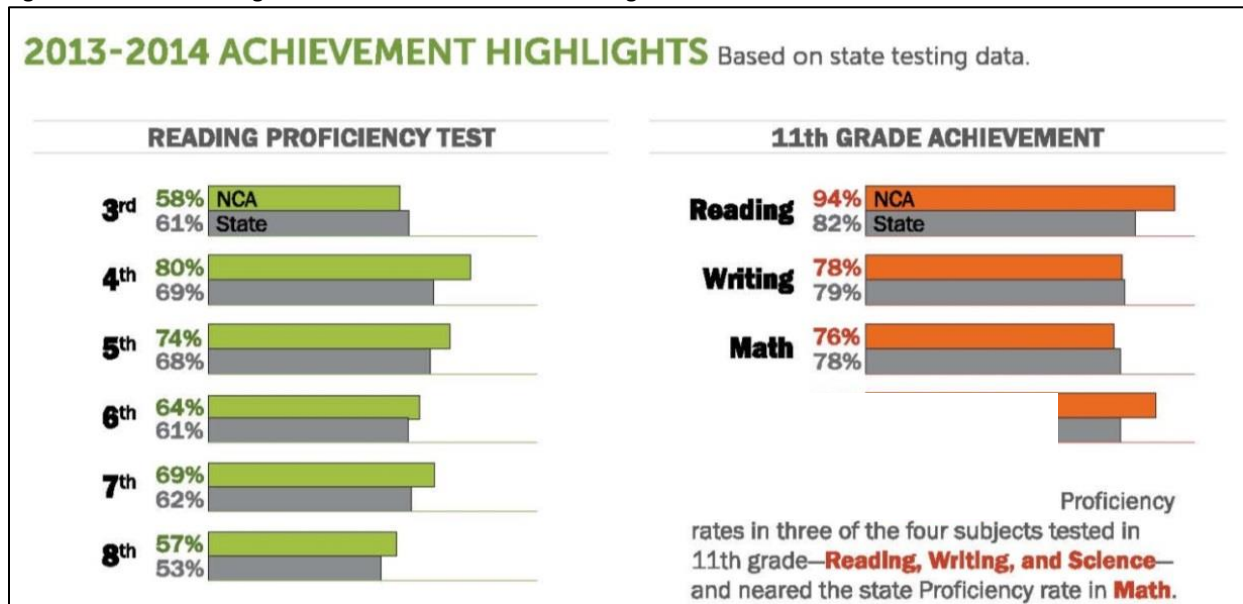
- Ongoing in-depth assessment and performance data on individual students, which is available to teachers and administration in “real time” and used to modify and individualize programming;
- Targeted , individualized remedial courses for students who are underperforming, and a wide selection of Gifted, Honors, and Advanced Placement (AP) courses for advanced students;
- Addition of staff who specialize in working with at-risk, credit deficient students in core areas, and a literacy specialist dedicated to providing intervention type instruction;
- Addition of highly qualified and trained teaching staff to teach AP courses;
- Expansion of existing counseling and support programs to address the diverse and often profound social emotional needs of our students;
- Expansion of teacher-led Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) that establish goals, meet regularly, and focus on student data to guide their actions. These are tracked and monitored by school leadership;
- Additional internal and external targeted professional development for teachers in critical areas such as mathematics instruction and student engagement;
- Identification and targeted use of supplemental resources and strategies to support struggling students in the areas of literacy, mathematics, and study skills.

The regular evaluation of the academic performance of students, the use of student performance data to drive changes and improvements to the school program, the increasing use of PLC’s, and the development of annual goals and plans to increase student academic achievement all demonstrate a dedication and focus on student performance.

The following represents NCA’s most recent performance on state assessments in 2013-14 as the 2014-15 data was not publicly reported. NCA is proud of its performance on the 11<sup>th</sup> grade proficiency test. NCA significantly exceeded the state performance in Reading and Science and was within 1-2% points from the state proficiency average in math and writing. There is still room to improve but NCA’s performance on the state proficiency test demonstrates that it is successfully teaching students in the key content areas. Figure 5 provides more detailed information on NCA’s performance on state assessments.

NCA receives separate ratings on the School Performance Report for elementary, middle school, and high school. Nevada did not compute new ratings for 2014-15, but instead carried over the 2013-14 ratings. NCA’s middle school rating was 4 out of 5 stars for both 2013-14 and 2012-13, while the elementary and high school received a rating of 2 stars in 2013-14. Both the elementary and high school fell two points short of receiving a 3 star rating, which both had achieved in 2012-13.

Figure 5. 2013-14 Reading and Math Scores versus State Average



For the elementary school, the strongest ratings were for English Language Arts (ELA) for proficiency and even stronger performance in growth, receiving 80% of the possible points for ELA growth. The middle school had solid performance with all indicators, but also excelled in ELA proficiency and growth, earning 80% of the possible points for both measurements. **The high school performance was strongest in closing achievement gaps, earning 90% of the possible points in this area.** All grade spans met the minimum testing participation rates and also had very strong performance on Average Daily Attendance.

## A.5 NCA Board of Directors

### *Governing Board*

The Governing Board is a knowledgeable, well-educated, and active Board. The Board has been successful in maintaining a prominent role in the direction of the school via policy and oversight. The Board receives regular reports at Board meetings from the school leadership on all aspects of the school’s operations, including budgets, funding, staffing, enrollment, and growth. In addition, the Board is apprised of school-wide state test and other assessment results, and the results of the annual parent and staff surveys. The Board is therefore able to engage in ongoing evaluation of the school’s effectiveness and able to participate in the review and refinement of the school's vision, purpose, and goals. School leadership works with school staff and stakeholders to develop specific annual goals. These goals are then presented to the Board for final approval prior to implementation. School-specific goals align with the Board goals outlined in the charter and mission/vision for the school. The Board has been actively engaged in efforts to improve the graduation rate, cognizant of the challenges given the high mobility of students and significant credit deficient population. The Board has shown a commitment to both continuous improvement in the high school program and working with the State on policy to ensure schools are incentivized —not punished— for serving the most at-risk students who come to NCA as a last resort before dropping out.

The Board successfully provides oversight by reviewing and approving the school's policies and procedures. All Board members are invited to provide feedback on new programs, such as webinars with curriculum experts and designers, and content that will be provided to students including providing a designee to participate in an in-depth study of the curriculum to be offered by the school. Board members have attended several trainings and conferences to fully understand their roles as Board members and maintain their knowledge of charter school governance best practices and trends. These trainings include a Connections-hosted all-Board member training in Nevada, as well as the annual Board Academy offered by Connections. Board members have also been able to attend conferences such as the iNACOL conference, the National Charter School conference, and other training opportunities and conferences held by the Nevada Department of Education. The Board has consistently maintained all required regulatory parameters of the governing body's membership. The following members currently serve on the Board:

- **Dr. Jafeth Sanchez, Board President**

Dr. Jafeth Sanchez earned a Ph.D. from the University of Nevada, Reno's College of Education in Educational Leadership, with an emphasis on Higher Education Administration. She is an assistant professor and focuses on developing high quality school leaders in K12 education. Her research agenda is on educational leadership practices, organizational change efforts, diversity initiatives, outreach, student resiliency, P16 alignment, and GEAR UP outcomes. She has actively managed and attained grant funding as a principal investigator or co-investigator for approximately \$1.6 million since the fall of 2012. She also serves as a cost-share match for the Nevada State GEAR UP project, which has approximately 5,500 students and has served 36 middle and high schools in Nevada; GEAR UP is a competitive U.S. Department of Education grant program that increases the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education by providing states and local community-education partnerships with six- to seven-year grants to offer support services to high-poverty, middle and high schools. Sanchez previously taught mathematics and was awarded Northern Nevada Math Teacher of the Year 2012 by the Northern Nevada Math Council. She was also a Bill and Melinda Gates Millennium Scholar and serves as a mentor for its current scholars throughout the country. Her passion for educational improvement and access to higher education are embedded in all aspects of her work in teaching, research, and service.

She has been a part of NCA since 2011 and currently serves as President of the Board.

- **Dr. Scott Harrington, Board Vice President**

Dr. Scott Harrington is currently the Clinical Supervisor for Mosaic Rehabilitation-Blueprints Division. He has been working with people with disabilities since 1990, when he earned his Bachelor's degree in Psychology at CSU Long Beach. He earned his Master's degree in Psychology (Behavior Analysis) at the University of the Pacific in Stockton, California, and his Doctorate, also in Psychology (Behavior Analysis), at the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR). Dr. Harrington has written and directed multiple projects to help individuals with disabilities live more independent lives. He is a founder of the first elementary charter school in Nevada, Sierra Nevada Academy, and a former middle school mathematics teacher. He has presented over 40 papers on data-based interventions to assist persons with disabilities, has several publications across multiple areas, and currently teaches at UNR. His research interests include inclusion, integrated employment, transition, intrinsic motivation, attitudes about disabilities, and interagency collaboration. Dr. Harrington is a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA-D), a member of the Association for Behavior Analysis (ABA), and on several advisory boards.

He has been a Board member since 2010 and currently serves as Vice President of the Board.



- **Kelly McGlynn, Board Treasurer**

Kelly McGlynn graduated from the University of Nevada, Reno, in 1998, with a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration. She is a Certified Public Accountant with more than 14 years of experience in public accounting. Ms. McGlynn is currently president of her own company specializing in tax preparation and bookkeeping services. She is a member of the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants and a member of the Nevada Society of Certified Public Accountants. Ms. McGlynn became involved with Connections in 2011 while searching for an alternative to public school for her then eight-year-old daughter. She feels that education is extremely important but that all children learn in different ways. She is happy to serve on a Board that provides children alternatives to brick-and-mortar schools.

McGlynn has been on the Board since 2013 and currently serves as Board Treasurer.

- **Marisa Delgado, Board Secretary**

Marisa Delgado earned her Master's degree in Educational Leadership from the University of Cincinnati, and currently holds her administrative certification with the state of Nevada. She is currently the Math Department Chair at Bishop Gorman High School. Ms. Delgado has spearheaded the new 1:1 iPad program at Bishop Gorman High School. Integrating technology into the classroom and having students use technology for higher levels of thinking is one of her goals. She also runs the senior internship program where she places around 20 high school seniors each year with different companies around the Las Vegas Valley, allowing them to get real life work experience prior to leaving for college. Ms. Delgado co-chaired the teacher mentor program for new and transitioning teachers into Bishop Gorman High School, to assure an easy transition focusing on teacher retention. Ms. Delgado is currently the chair of the Teaching and Learning Leadership committee for accreditation through WCEA. Ms. Delgado is involved in the student leadership program on her campus running the Link Crew freshman orientation where students are greeted by upperclassman that she has trained to run small group activities that will prepare students for life in high school. Continual education and building a better future for children today motivates her to remain engaged in providing new opportunities for children.

Ms. Delgado has been a part of NCA since 2013 and currently serves as Board Secretary.

- **Mindi Dagerman, PE, Board Member**

Mindi Dagerman, PE, earned her Master's in Business Administration from the University of Nevada Reno. She also holds her Professional Engineering License in Mechanical Engineering in Nevada. Ms. Dagerman is the Engineering Supervisor/Design at Southwest Gas for the Northern Nevada Division. Her department manages new business, replacement, system improvement, and meter set projects for natural gas distribution to customers throughout the division.

Ms. Dagerman is passionate about all children having access to high quality education. She loves to see more school choice available for parents and wants to see students find a school program that supports their learning style.

Ms. Dagerman has been on the Board since 2008, and she currently serves as the business sector representative on the Board.

- **Tessa Rivera, Board Member**

Tessa Rivera earned her Master of Arts in Educational Counseling from San Jose State University following her Bachelor of Arts studies in Communication from San Diego State University. She was an AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) Program English teacher, Student Advisor, and varsity athletic coach in California from 2000 through 2010. Additionally, Mrs. Rivera enjoyed her work with San Jose State University as a mentor teacher collaborating with the school's teacher credential program while also employed as a GEAR UP and Upward Bound Pre-College programs counselor and test preparation instructor. Currently, Mrs. Rivera serves as the Dean of Students for the freshman class, moderator of the Dance Team, and Jewelry Club advisor at Bishop Gorman High School all the while diligently pursuing an Ed.D at Northcentral University engaged in researching the impact of organizational leadership on new teacher attrition rates throughout the United States. Mrs. Rivera's educational philosophy is dedicated to promoting life-long learning in addition to supporting and motivating all students to reach their full potential, specifically utilizing the elements of Bishop Gorman High School's Freshman PRIDE (Prepared for class, Respect for self and others, Integrity in Academics, Determination to do well, Effort in all pursuits) Program.

Mrs. Rivera has been on the Board since 2015.

- **Gene Stewart, Board Member**

Gene Stewart is a seasoned business professional and entrepreneur. He received his MSc in Comparative Pathology from the University of California, Davis in 1983. He has held positions in global marketing with SmithKline Beckman and others commercializing new technologies in bioinstrumentation. In 1996, Mr. Stewart launched Knotty Bear Development building and selling luxury resort mountain homes. In 2005, he founded a new company, Biophoretics, Inc. focused on the research and development of a new automated technology for the discovery of biomarkers. In 2010, he commercialized Biophoretics for the global distribution, marketing, and sales of high value tools for life science research. He has also served on the Board for Center Street Mission helping the homeless regain their foothold in life. He believes in the triad of family, education and the desire to help every child reach for the sky.

Mr. Stewart has been on the Board since 2015.

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## ***School Leadership***

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- **Steve Werlein, Principal**

Steve Werlein's career as an educational leader has taken him not only across the geographic spectrum of the country, but across the diverse public and private educational landscape as well. Mr. Werlein has proven that when given a rigorous and relevant curriculum, high expectations, and caring, nurturing adults, all students can find success.

As a high school world language teacher, he created a home study program for non-native speakers of Spanish in Mexico, and an intensive Spanish course for native speakers. While teaching, he was also the leader of one of the first one-on-one technology initiatives in the state of Illinois. As a school administrator, Mr. Werlein has served as Assistant Principal of a large, urban middle school near Chicago where he and his team successfully rebuilt the school culture and created an inclusive, positive environment.

After leaving this role, Steve assumed his first principalship which entailed leading a vocational school for students with severe behavioral challenges. His efforts there led to the creation of a unique, blended curriculum which fused practical vocational skills with core academic content and led to many students entering skilled trades and other post-secondary options.

Next, Mr. Werlein was privileged to serve as the Director of Curriculum and Instruction and Principal at Henry Ford Academy in Chicago, which is housed in part of the original Sears Headquarters on the city's west side.

Mr. Werlein moved to suburban Austin, Texas where he started a charter high school with 35 students that has since grown to an exemplary rated, K–12 campus with 1,000 students.

Throughout his career, he has been passionate about finding creative, engaging ways to hold students to high standards and feel connected to their learning communities.

Education:

- Bachelor of Arts Degree in international political economy and Spanish from DePaul University
- Master of Education Degree in secondary teaching and curriculum from DePaul University
- Certificate of advanced study in school leadership from National Louis University
- Currently a doctoral candidate at the American College of Education

## **Appendix B**

### **NCA's Federal Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (2015) Calculated Under NCLB**

Nevada Connections Academy (NCA) is committed to the students it serves. At least weekly, we review and analyze data down to the individual student level and use the data to make informed decisions to maximize each student's chance of success. NCA's 2015 Cohort Graduation Rate identifies a percentage of students who did not graduate. NCA leadership is learning from these students and applying lessons learned to the graduation improvement plan. However, there are also lessons still to be learned about:

- How to identify students at risk to not graduate and how to best address risk factors.
- How schools with higher than average mobility rates are impacted by the current four-year cohort method of calculating graduation rate.
- Factors outside of the school's control which often lead to students being counted as non-graduates, even when they continue their education.

NCA is confident that through its ongoing analysis of data and implementation of targeted, individualized programming, its graduation rate will improve.

#### **B.1 Detailed Look at the 2015 Graduation Cohort**

In an effort to fully understand the challenges that NCA faces relative to the current NCLB four-year cohort calculation of the graduation rate and to gain insights on areas to target for improvement, an analysis was conducted of the 2015 graduation cohort. The final cohort consisted of 334 students – 119 graduates and 215 non-graduates - for a four-year cohort graduation rate under NCLB of 35.6%. For the entire cohort (334 students), 143 (42.8%) were two or more credits behind when they enrolled; 56 (16.8%) were more than 6 credits behind when they enrolled.

When looking at this cohort at the individual student level, some interesting patterns became apparent. For the non-graduates in the cohort (215 students), 137 of them (63.7%) were behind two or more credits when they enrolled. Figure 1 provides a breakdown of the grade level at which these non-graduating students enrolled and their level of credit deficiency.

**Figure 1. Non-Graduates Grade Level Upon Enrollment**

Credit Status	Non-Graduates' Grade Level upon Enrollment			
	9 <sup>th</sup> grade	10 <sup>th</sup> grade	11 <sup>th</sup> grade	12 <sup>th</sup> grade
0 – 2 Deficient	30	10	18	20
2 – 6 Deficient	1	20	24	36
> 6 Deficient	0	2	22	32

As the data shows, non-graduates were likely to enroll later in their high school career, thus providing a shorter period for NCA to catch them up to graduate in their cohort: 152 or 70.7% of the 215 non-graduates enrolled in the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> year of high school, and 114 or 75% of these students were two or more credits behind when they enrolled.

Of the students who graduated on time in the 2015 cohort, a much different picture emerges, as illustrated in Figure 2. Graduating students tended to enroll earlier and with significantly less credit deficiency.

**Figure 2. Graduates Grade level Age Upon Enrollment**

Credit Status	Graduates' Grade Level Age upon Enrollment			
	9 <sup>th</sup> grade	10 <sup>th</sup> grade	11 <sup>th</sup> grade	12 <sup>th</sup> grade
0 -2 Deficient	30	17	26	40
2 – 6 Deficient	0	2	2	2
> 6 Deficient	0	0	0	0

Of the students who graduated, 59% enrolled in the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> grade, and 6% of them were two or more credits behind when they enrolled.

Another important consideration is the group of students enrolled in an institution of higher education but were not counted as graduates for NCA. In this cohort, seven students enrolled in 12<sup>th</sup> grade, were not counted as graduates from NCA, but have enrolled in college. Additionally, eight students enrolled as seniors who were expected to graduate on-time with their class but did not graduate. The story behind each of the students warrants further analysis. The overall graduation rate improvement plan also focuses on maintaining the progress of our students who enroll in the school and should graduate on-time with their class.

## B.2 Concentration of Credit Deficient Students

It is also interesting to view the data for the concentration of students in the graduation cohort that arrived at NCA credit deficient. In Figure 3, Credit Deficient is defined as having fewer credits than expected at the time of enrollment. For example, a student enrolling at the beginning of 10<sup>th</sup> grade would be expected to have earned 5.0 credits during the student's freshman year. If a student enrolled with less than 5.0 credits, the student would be considered credit deficient. Figure 3 provides this information about students enrolling as 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders at NCA.

Figure 3. Percentage of Students Enrolling Credit Deficient

Grade Upon Enrollment	# of Students in Cohort	# Credit Deficient	NCA % Credit Deficient
10 <sup>th</sup> grade	51	28	54.9%
11 <sup>th</sup> grade	92	58	63.0%
12 <sup>th</sup> grade	130	79	60.8%

Clearly, the percentage of credit deficient students enrolling at NCA is significant. This includes 60% of the students enrolling as 12<sup>th</sup> graders when NCA only has one year or less to catch the student up for on-time graduation. NCA is fulfilling a unique niche in serving students who are struggling.

### B.3 Where Did the Non-Graduates Go?

When hearing the term “non-graduate” it is easy to assume that these students are no longer in school. However, that isn’t the case for many of the non-graduates included in the NCLB calculation of the NCA 2015 cohort. Of the 215 students in the 2015 cohort who are included in the calculation as “non-graduates” , 146 of them either enrolled for a 5<sup>th</sup> year of high school or continued their education after withdrawing from high school:

- 63 transferred to an adult education program (and, therefore, would have been excluded from the State’s calculation of drop-outs for annual accountability reporting but are still considered non-graduates)
- 59 re-enrolled for a 5<sup>th</sup> year at NCA. Based on current achievement, it is likely that between 20 and 25 will graduate by July of 2016, in addition to the 8 already who have graduated.
- 24 transferred to a GED program (and, therefore, would have been excluded from the State’s calculation of drop-outs for annual accountability reporting but are still considered non-graduates)

Unfortunately these students while still enrolled in school are counted as non-graduates according to the NCLB four-year cohort calculation currently being considered by the Authority. Appendix D provides policy recommendations to address this issue, and NCA is seeking further evaluation of this calculation in light of Nevada statutory requirements for annual accountability reports to exclude some of these students from the drop-out rate. If a student is not considered in the drop-out rate calculation, they should not be considered a non-graduate in the four-year cohort calculation. **NCA estimates that if the students who entered a GED program and transferred to an adult education program were not counted as drop-outs in NCA’s 2015 four-year cohort graduation rate, that rate would be 48.18%.**

**If students who enrolled for a 5<sup>th</sup> year, go into Adult Ed, or entered a GED program are removed from the cohort, then the graduation rate for NCA would be 63.3% for 2015.**

## B.4 Lessons from the Data

Although NCA is not officially designated as a credit recovery/alternative school, many students enroll in the school after falling behind in credits during their prior schooling. Discussions of NCA's graduation rate and NCA's performance should consider that NCA is not responsible for the student's experience prior to enrolling in NCA and that NCA often times helps students who have struggled in other schools re-engage and find a path to graduation. NCA has shown that it helps some students recover credits (10.1% of the students who graduated in 2015 were credit deficient when they enrolled), but the school continues to diligently strive to improve its efforts and bring more urgency in the task of credit recovery for credit deficient students, while continuing to provide a rigorous academic program.

Conversely, for those students who enroll in their 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> grade and are severely behind in credits, it is simply not realistic to expect that many of them will catch up by the end of their 12<sup>th</sup> grade year. In the 2015 cohort, 54 students entered in the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> grade more than six credits behind. NCA welcomes these students even though it is highly unlikely they will graduate on cohort. NCA's job is not done with these students after their cohort graduates; it works hard to encourage them to continue their schooling. NCA's success with these students is not reflected in the four-year cohort calculation of the graduation rate under NCLB but clearly it is in the student's, the State's and the school's best interest to continuing enrolling and effectively serving these students.

Short of turning away these students (which NCA has no desire to do, and is not statutorily allowed) serving these students in the 2015 cohort created a **16 percentage point handicap for NCA**. That is, regardless of how effective NCA is with every other student including these students who enrolled two to six credits behind, the school's graduation rate for those students will still be reduced by **16 percentage points**.

In the 2015 cohort, more than two-thirds of NCA's non-graduating students continued to pursue an educational certificate of some kind. The state should consider monitoring these students' progress through robust data systems to see how many completed their certificate, whether it is a GED, diploma, or an adult education certificate, because such certificates are important demonstrations of college and career readiness. This is consistent with existing State law which excludes students who continue on to adult education or receive a GED from calculation of the drop-out rate for the State's annual accountability reporting requirements. Given the State's recognition that these students should not be considered dropouts, the State data systems may want to consider adjusting accounting for these stories as success versus failure to graduate. **As stated earlier, the graduation rate for NCA would be 63.3% for 2015 which exceeds the threshold of the State Public Charter Authority if students who enrolled in a 5<sup>th</sup> year, go into Adult Ed or entered a GED program are removed from the cohort.**

## Appendix C

### NCA's Anticipated Four-Year Adjusted Graduation Rate (2016)

NCA is actively monitoring the progress of the students who are anticipated to be part of the federal four-year adjust cohort for the class of 2016. Students from the anticipated cohort have been placed in one of five categories:

- **Group 1:** Those students that are currently enrolled at NCA and on-track for an on-time graduation.
- **Group 2:** Those students that are currently enrolled at NCA and with additional support and completion of credit recovery courses are anticipated to graduate either at the end of the school year or after a summer term and counted as an on-time graduate.
- **Group 3:** Those students that are currently enrolled at NCA but are not anticipated to graduate on-time. Students are typically placed in this category because they are significantly credit deficient. However, there are other possibilities such as a student that enrolled as a second-semester Senior that while on-track credit-wise, still is unable to graduate on-time because accreditation standards require a student to earn at least five credits from NCA.
- **Early Graduates:** Students that have already graduated from NCA, either after three years of high school or after the first semester of their Senior year.
- **Withdrawn Students:** Students that have withdrawn from NCA and have not yet been verified to have transferred to another school or meet other criteria that would remove these students from the cohort.

#### C.1 Detailed Look at the Anticipated 2016 Graduation Cohort

When analyzing the data about the anticipated 2016 graduation cohort, there are many similarities to the 2015 graduation cohort. The anticipated cohort size is larger (518 compared to 334), but the percentage of students that were two or more credits behind at the time of enrollment is very similar (43.1% compared to 42.8%) and the percentage of students that were more than six credits behind at the time of enrollment is slightly larger (20.3% compared to 16.8%).

Figure 1 shows a breakdown of the anticipated graduates and non-graduates as far as credit status upon initial enrollment, based on the grade level at the time of enrollment.



**Figure 1. Anticipated Non-Graduates Credit Status by Grade Level Upon Enrollment**

Credit Status	Anticipated Non-Graduates' Grade Level upon Enrollment			
	9 <sup>th</sup> grade	10 <sup>th</sup> grade	11 <sup>th</sup> grade	12 <sup>th</sup> grade
0 – 2 Deficient	27	20	27	19
2 – 6 Deficient	6	23	43	37
> 6 Deficient	0	0	65	40

Similar to the 2015 graduation cohort, where 70.7% of the non-graduates enrolled in the last two years of high school, 75.2% of the anticipated 2016 non-graduates enrolled in the last two years, as well, thus providing a shorter period for NCA to catch them up to graduate. Of these students, 80% were two or more credits behind when they enrolled (compared to 75% for the 2015 non-graduates). This is a significant increase in the percentage of students who are two or more credits behind and creates questions about why this is the case. Are more students not meeting Nevada’s standards and are looking for additional options? Are students being referred to NCA because of its open enrollment policy?

Of the students who are anticipated to graduate on time for the 2016 cohort, the data is also similar to the graduates from the 2015 cohort which again shows a stark difference from the anticipated non-graduates. Slightly over one-third of these students enrolled in 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> grade, and just 5% of the students arriving in the last two years were two or more credits deficient when they enrolled (2015 comparison is 41% enrolled in 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> grade and 6% of the students that enrolled in the last two years were two or more credits deficient upon enrollment.)

**Figure 2. Anticipated Graduates Grade level Age Upon Enrollment**

Credit Status	Anticipated Graduates' Grade Level Age upon Enrollment			
	9 <sup>th</sup> grade	10 <sup>th</sup> grade	11 <sup>th</sup> grade	12 <sup>th</sup> grade
0 -2 Deficient	34	37	62	69
2 – 6 Deficient	0	2	5	2
> 6 Deficient	0	0	0	0

## C.2 Additional Information Regarding Withdrawn Students

The students who have already withdrawn make up the largest segment (44.6%) of the projected 2016 cohort. Of the 231 students in this category, 141 (61%) of them withdrew prior to the current school year. Thus one of the largest impacts on the eventual final graduation rate had already been determined prior to when the efforts began in 2015-16 to improve graduation rate. However, increased data reporting efforts instituted during the 2015-16 school year will have long term positive effects in ensuring that increasing immediate efforts are made to identify where students transferred.

It is possible that some of these withdrawn students will be documented as having transferred to another school and thus removed from the final cohort. However, the majority of these students appear to have transferred either to an adult education program (39.4% of the current withdrawals) or a GED program (13.4% of the current withdrawals). Thus the fate of 122 students as “non-graduates” appears to already be determined according to the cohort graduation rate calculation even though these students are persisting in school and receiving other academic credentials that better meet their needs. Under current Nevada law, these students must not be counted as drop-outs for purposes of annual accountability reporting and, therefore, should not be included in the calculation of the graduation rate for the school relative to the Authority’s consideration of potential closure under SB 509. *See NRS 385.347.*

## C.3 Improvements Made This Year

There are positive signs that the school is on the right track:

- The projected graduation rate reflects a significant increase over the prior year.
- The percentage of anticipated graduates that entered behind in credits is 14.2% of the graduates compared to 10.1% for the 2015 graduates. This is an indication that NCA is doing a better job at helping students that enter credit deficient to graduate on-time.
- When comparing the 2016 anticipated cohort with the 2015 cohort, the percentage of students who enrolled two or more credits behind and the percentage that enrolled six or more credits behind were significantly higher in 2016. Despite having a slightly more challenging population of students this year, the projected graduation rate shows an increase, an indication that the steps taken to improve the graduation rate are showing results.

The initial indications are that the school is headed in the correct direction. With the additional actions outlined in this plan, we are confident that the improvement in graduation rate will accelerate.

## Appendix D

# Policy Considerations – Application of Existing Law and Potential Regulatory Changes

The federal four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate was created to provide a consistent way for the graduation rate to be calculated across all schools and states. A cohort includes the students that start in the school in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, plus all that transfer into the school in later years, minus the students who leave for another school (unless confirming documentation of where the students went is unavailable, in which case the students remain in the cohort under the current method of calculation as discussed in Appendix C). After four years, the number of graduating students from the cohort is divided by the total number remaining in the cohort to get the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate.

In practice, consistency has not been achieved, due to differences among states in the way they gather, code, and validate the data provided by schools. But more importantly, the cohort graduation rate calculation was designed with traditional schools in mind – schools with low mobility and a fairly consistent student population. This way of calculating the graduation cohort is not a very accurate measure of the performance of a school that has a high percentage of students who were credit deficient when they enrolled in the school or of a school with high student mobility.

To understand why this is so, consider the following example:

*Imagine a school in which half the students enrolled as 11<sup>th</sup> graders and were severely credit deficient when they enrolled. Assume that from the date they enrolled, every single student in the school accumulated credits at a normal on-track pace of three to four credits per semester. Would anyone say this school is a failure? Of course not – every student in the school is accumulating credits on pace.*

*But its four-year cohort graduation rate could not be higher than 50%.*

For most high schools, a significant majority of students remain enrolled during all four years, and so the four-year cohort graduation rate is a more accurate measure of these schools' performance.

But for high schools that are characterized by high mobility rates and a high percentage of students who are deficient in credits when they enroll, the four-year cohort graduation rate is heavily reflective of these students' prior high school experience where they became credit deficient, and not reflective of the performance of the school into which they transferred.

This is true for any school that has a high percentage of incoming students who are credit deficient – whether it is a virtual school, a brick-and-mortar charter school, an alternative school, or a traditional district school. For these schools, further analysis beyond the four-year cohort graduation rate, such as the actual credit accumulation rate of the students, is necessary to reveal how the school has performed.

This is the reason why alternative high schools are typically measured by different criteria. They have high percentage of credit deficient enrollees by design.

## D.1 Transiency Rate and Impact on Learning

According to the Nevada Department of Education, transiency is defined as “the percentage of students who do not finish the school year at the same school they started.”<sup>1</sup> Figure 1 represents transiency rates for the state, Clark County, Washoe, the State Charter Authority, and Nevada Connections Academy (NCA) from the Nevada Department of Education.

**Figure 1. Transiency Rates**

District/School <sup>2</sup>	Transiency Rate
State	26.5%
Clark County	28.8%
Nevada Connections Academy (NCA)	43.3%
State Public Charter School Authority	22.6%
Washoe County	22.0%

Virtual schools have a high mobility rate due to the various factors that lead students to choose to enroll in a virtual school. As is illustrated in Figure 1, NCA has a significantly higher mobility rate than the state average as well as the average of the State Public Charter School Authority – over 20 percentage points higher.

Many students choose NCA to solve a problem for a particular period of time such as bullying, medical issues, family situation, pregnancy, or other crisis situation.<sup>3</sup> According to a report by Nevada Kids Count Children on the Move (2005)<sup>4</sup>, transiency has an adverse effect on student learning and “student mobility decreased the chance of students completing high school.” They also reported that “students’ school performance declined when they moved during the later years of high school” and that “educators believe it takes children four to six months to adjust academically after a school change” (NAEHCY, 2002).

Arizona recognizes the effect of transiency on student learning and created a policy that values a “persistence” factor in calculating school performance for alternative and virtual schools. An academically persistent student is “any student who is eligible to re-enroll at the end of the previous fiscal year and re-enrolls in any Arizona public school by October 1 of the current fiscal year. Students in grades 6 through 12 are included in the persistence rate calculation.”<sup>5</sup> If students “persist” in learning, then schools receive points for student persistence in school. The Persistence Rate is equal to the

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.nevadareportcard.com/DI/Help/Glossary#PT>

<sup>2</sup> <http://nevadareportcard.com/PDF/2015/00.E.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [http://kidscount.unlv.edu/newsletters/Feb\\_2016KCNewsletter.pdf](http://kidscount.unlv.edu/newsletters/Feb_2016KCNewsletter.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <http://kidscount.unlv.edu/newsletters/childrenonthemove.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.azed.gov/accountability/files/2014/11/grad-do-persistence-rate-tech-manual-nov26.pdf>

number of students who re-enroll in the current year divided by the number of students eligible to re-enroll based on prior year. Nevada may want to consider a similar policy for recognizing that students who persist in their educational endeavors are important for the economic and long term future of Nevada.

NCA is committed to helping all students when they enter the school and to providing additional support and interventions when necessary. It is important to identify the issues facing enrolling students and examine the data. We know that many students enroll in NCA because of a temporary crisis or a family issue for which virtual schooling is the only solution, and when the situation is resolved, they return to their traditional school and graduate. The success that these students achieve during their time at NCA is not reflected in NCA's graduation rate calculation. In addition, many students in NCA enroll credit deficient especially in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Therefore, the four-year cohort model is not an accurate measure of school performance.

Mobility is a challenge for state data systems to accurately track student enrollment. Accurate data reporting is the foundation by which metrics like graduation rate are built and it is imperative that state reporting systems accurately identify and report this population of students. Nevada may want to consider ensuring more robust state reporting mechanisms and resources that not only track transiency but assist schools in locating and properly reporting this highly mobile and transient population.

## D.2 ESSA Changes to Four-Year Cohort Calculation

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) signed into law this past December changed how the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate is calculated. A withdrawn student must have been enrolled "at least a half year" in the school (states are free to make this minimum attendance period longer) in order to be counted in the school's four-year cohort. Students who withdraw from a school prior to meeting the minimum attendance period are assigned either to the cohort of the school where the student spent the majority of grades 9-12 or to that of the previous school attended.

This solved the common problem of students dropping out after spending only a short time at a school and being counted in that school's cohort. ESSA recognizes transiency as an important factor in attributing a student's cohort graduation statistic to the appropriate school.

Under the new ESSA calculation, NCA's four-year cohort graduation rate will improve because many students enroll for short periods of time. As mentioned, states can define the minimum attendance period for inclusion in a schools cohort to be longer than half a year.

If this provision had been in place for the NCA 2015 graduation cohort, the effect on NCA's measured four-year cohort grad rate at different minimum attendance period levels is as follows:

- **If minimum enrollment period was set to the lowest allowed, which is 50% of a year: 63 non-graduates would be removed from NCA's cohort and the graduation rate would increase 8 percentage points.**
- **If minimum enrollment period was set to 75% of a year: 86 non-graduates would be removed from NCA's cohort and the graduation rate would increase 12 percentage points.**

This illustrates how volatile a measurement like four-year cohort graduation rate is dependent on simple definitions and calculation methods.

## D.3 Pupil Accounting Policies

Under No Child Left Behind, states had some flexibility defining how pupils were to be accounted for in state accountability systems. Some states used this flexibility to lessen any disincentive to serve at-risk students. Under ESSA, states have even more flexibility to ensure schools are held accountable for student success while at the same time not penalizing those who serve challenging or at-risk populations.

North Carolina has for many years had a program for students with disabilities that led to a standard high school diploma. Nevada should consider adding such a pathway so these students will have every opportunity to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to be self-sustaining adults in their communities and earn a diploma which counts as a graduate for the cohort rate calculation.

In Nevada, the adult education program has three options, only one of which can be considered as a diploma. For purposes of calculating the four-year cohort graduation rate, students are automatically coded as dropouts when in fact all of them may not be, as they might have received a diploma. Nevada should consider a more accurate reporting method to properly account for these graduates. Nevada has an opportunity both to strengthen its adult education program to increase the percentage of students earning a diploma, and adjust the calculation to limit the number of students counted as dropouts and properly record students who earn a diploma.

## D.4 Full Academic Year Definition

Each state has the ability to define a full academic year (FAY) student for purposes of state accountability. Recent trends, possibly due to the expansion of educator evaluation systems that incorporate student performance measures, have included expanding the definition of FAY out of sense of fairness to education professionals and schools. This year Georgia passed legislation requiring a student to be enrolled 90% of the school year to be used in educator evaluations, which may become the standard for school accountability in that state under new provisions of ESSA. Vermont also uses a very simple definition: students must be continuously enrolled from the first day of school until the last day of the school year. Closer to Nevada, Utah established a standard of 160 days of continuous enrollment; Indiana uses 162 days that represents 90% of the school year. As Nevada considers its new flexibility under ESSA, it should revisit the definition of a FAY student to ensure fairness in the system and remove some of the effects of transient students in a fast-growing state and ensure the proper schools are held accountable for a particular student’s performance. The following represents a sample of policies in other states that define FAY in a way that properly allocates performance with the school who served the student for the majority of the school year.

**Figure 2.State Definitions of FAY**

State	Statutory Language
Georgia	Continuous enrollment from the fall FTE count through the spring testing window.
Vermont	Continuously enrolled from the first day of school to the last.
Utah	Continuous enrollment for no less than 160
Indiana	October 1, for 162 days

## D.5 Alternative School or Virtual School Classification

As the state considers policies for accountability, Nevada may also want to increase its efforts to develop a separate accountability system for alternative schools and/or virtual schools. Arizona, for example, created a separate virtual school accountability system in 2015 and also has an alternative school accountability system.

According to the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA), states should include “clear, measurable performance standards to judge the effectiveness of alternative schools, if applicable—requiring and appropriately weighting rigorous mission-specific performance measures and metrics that credibly demonstrate each school’s success in fulfilling its mission and serving its special population.” Alternative and virtual schools want to be held accountable for their performance but on metrics that recognize where students come from and their growth over time enrolled in the school.

Just like district schools establish alternative schools within a district, charter schools and authorizers may want to consider allowing charter schools that serve highly mobile and credit deficient students to establish an alternative school within, or separate from, an existing charter where students who meet identifiable criteria are placed. The 2015 Nevada Legislature adopted an alternative performance framework for schools that meet a minimum 75% student population requirement for serving at-risk students. NCA does not qualify for this alternative framework, in part, because it is not just a high school but a K-12 school. The intent of SB 509 in providing the Authority discretion in the “may” provision for closure was to ensure that this discretion was reasonably exercised and that compelling evidence, such as that discussed herein, would be considered relative to the graduation rate considered for a school’s performance. This allows a concerted effort and focus on a specific subset of a population, creates accountability metrics that accurately and fairly measure student performance, and creates a program targeted to student needs.

## D.6 Multiple Accountability Measures

Graduation rate is one metric among many metrics that determine a success of a school. State proficiency, student growth, and college and career readiness are some measures that states are using to determine school performance. ESSA allows for additional flexibility in determining school quality such as a qualitative measures including parent satisfaction. Policies should consider multiple measures of student performance when considering quality of schools.

According to the Association Supervision Curriculum and Development (ASCD) “any comprehensive determination of student proficiency, educator effectiveness, or school quality must be based on more than just standardized test scores and should use a variety of measures appropriate to the individual or entity being measured.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/siteASCD/publications/policypoints/Multiple-Measures-of-Accountability.pdf>

Nevada is currently in a transition period and has stated that multiple measures will be considered in a new accountability system including growth, science proficiency and other measures of student achievement. A circular from the Nevada Department of Education stated “A new school rating system is being developed and is expected to be in place after the 2016-2017 school year. Academic growth is an important factor when determining school ratings. Based on input from Nevada Stakeholders, growth will remain a measure in the next rating system. Other measures of student achievement from the current rating system are under review. Needed and exciting improvements are to come for Nevada’s school ratings and will include the addition of measuring science proficiency.”<sup>7</sup>

One recommendation presented to the Legislative Education Committee in April 2016 by an alternative school principal proposed that Nevada’s Graduation metric include two measures of accountability so schools could be compared. One measure would be the federal cohort calculation and the other would be a four year continuously enrolled measure that would capture the graduation rate of students who are enrolled in a school for all four years. **For example, 79% of the students graduate at NCA who entered in 9<sup>th</sup> grade and stayed all four years in the 2013 and 2014 graduation cohorts.** Since mobility and transiency are significantly above the state average for NCA, this is a more accurate measure that demonstrates the effectiveness of NCA. Nevada could consider a policy that reports both measurements. Consideration of this is critical and essential under any proceedings, considering the potential for closure under SB 509 and the exercise of discretion based solely on the school’s graduation rate. Additionally, the Authority held a regulation workshop in December 2015 and discussed drafting regulations to implement SB 509 relative to, among other things, closure proceedings and reconstitution. This regulation workshop should be completed to ensure the Authority has clear procedures and standards adopted in accordance with the Nevada Administrative Procedures Act, NRS Chapter 233B, and that all schools understood those procedures. In proper regulatory workshops and hearings, issues such as those raised herein could be considered.

Charter-authorizing best practices also value multiple measures in evaluating charter school performance. According to NACSA, “A quality authorizer designs and implements a transparent and rigorous process that uses comprehensive academic, financial, and operational performance data to make merit-based renewal decisions.”<sup>8</sup> NACSA defines the academic data, which should include: “state-mandated and other standardized assessments, student academic growth measures, internal assessments, qualitative reviews, and performance comparisons with other public schools in the district and state.” Ranking schools in the state based solely on the four-year cohort graduation rate, calculated under NCLB with no accounting for transient rates or mobility, penalizes schools such as NCA for a student’s experience in the system for years prior to entering. It can be viewed as an unreliable metric and should not be used as the sole reason to suggest that NCA should be considered for closure, despite all of its success in student growth rates and re-engagement of students who otherwise would dropout and never graduate. Multiple measurements should be considered to fully evaluate quality of a charter school which is a key best practice in charter school authorizing.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://nspf.doe.nv.gov/Content/PDF/six%20things.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.qualitycharters.org/for-authorizers/principles-and-standards/>





July 29, 2016

**Proposed Benchmarks-Graduation Rate Improvement Plan**

As stated in the Graduation Rate Improvement Plan which was submitted to the SPCSA Board of Directors on May 16, 2016, NCA and its Board has put into place a set of policies, programs, and interventions to “significantly improve the four-year cohort graduation rate for the 2015-2016 cohort and beyond” (Page 1, Executive Summary). Furthermore, we are hopeful that through continued collaboration that additional metrics which go beyond cohort graduation rate can be used to measure the success of our high school program.

The SPCSA board directed the school, in collaboration with SPCSA staff, to come up with measurable objectives which ultimately will lead to the school meeting or exceeding the 60% threshold for its cohort graduation rate. Based on direction from Authority staff, and using December of 2018 as a target date, we will use the numbers that follow to show significant progress in achieving this goal.

-Based on dialogue with Authority staff, it is understood that whichever definition of “cohort graduation rate” is being applied under Nevada law and the criteria used to calculate it will be applied when evaluating both the benchmarks and final goal. NCA appreciates the opportunity to continue working with the Authority and NDE on policies to ensure the data considered for accountability and performance issues is based on how NCA is serving students, including credit accumulation at NCA, and not penalizing NCA for the student’s prior school’s performance when students come to NCA severely credit deficient or for serving students who are enrolled less than 50% of the school year.

-Additionally, it is important to note that while we feel each intermediate goal is realistic based on information available today, there are factors beyond the control of the school which may impact, to some degree, the ability of the school to reach them. The primary concern is the high number of students who are profoundly credit deficient that enroll NCA in the latter part of their High School careers. Our Graduation Rate Improvement Plan details the interventions that the school uses to re-engage and provide supports to this population. Conversely, it is quite possible that intermediate goals will be exceeded. Utilizing the services of a 3<sup>rd</sup> party to conduct thorough data validation (as outlined in Sec. 3, p.14 in the Plan) is critical to ensuring that our characterization of our student population is accurate. We understand that with third party data validation the Authority is willing to consider such evidence in evaluating accountability and school performance in order to ensure schools are not penalized for serving this population.

Goals and Timeline:

Cohort Year	Measurement Date	Cohort Graduation %
<b>2015</b>	<b>December, 2015</b>	<b>37 %</b>
2016	December, 2016	45 %
2017	December, 2017	52 %
2018	December, 2018	60+%

Again, the school and its board have every hope that these targets will be exceeded and look forward to continued collaboration with Authority staff and further opportunities to share our successes with you along the way.

## STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY

SUPPORTING DOCUMENT

**S U B J E C T: Update and possible action regarding staff discussions with Beacon Academy regarding school's plan for improvement. The Board will receive an update on and may discuss the status of discussions between SPCSA staff and School officials and attorneys regarding the school's efforts to develop a plan of improvement. The Board may register approval or disapproval of the plan or require adjustments to the plan further action or require adjustments to the plan**

<u>  /  /  </u>	Public Workshop
<u>  /  /  </u>	Public Hearing
<u>  /  /  </u>	Consent Agenda
<u>  /  /  </u>	Regulation Adoption
<u>  /  /  </u>	Approval
<u>  /  /  </u>	Appointments
<u>  /  x/  </u>	Information
<u>  /  x/  </u>	Action

MEETING DATE: July 29, 2016

AGENDA ITEM: 14

NUMBER OF ENCLOSURE(S): 1

**PRESENTER(S): Patrick Gavin, Executive Director, SPCSA; Greg Ott, Deputy Attorney General**

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**FISCAL IMPACT:**

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**BUDGET ACCOUNT (FOR PRINTING CHARGES ONLY):**

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**LENGTH OF TIME EXPECTED FOR PRESENTATION (IN MINUTES): 60 Mins**

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**Additional Documents will be provided at the meeting**

**SUBMITTED BY: \_\_\_\_\_**



**STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY**

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**BRIEFING MEMORANDUM**

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**TO:** SPCSA Board  
**FROM:** Patrick Gavin  
**SUBJECT:** Agenda Item 14--Beacon Academy Graduation Rate Performance Improvement Plan  
**DATE:** July 29, 2016

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Pursuant to [NRS 388A.330](#), as amended by Section 27 of [SB509](#) of the 2015 Legislative Session, a graduation rate below 60 percent is grounds for termination of a charter, or the revocation of a written charter, or the reconstitution of the governing body of a charter school.

Beacon Academy of Nevada was approved by the State Board of Education in 2008 and was renewed by the Authority in 2014. It currently operates pursuant to a charter contract. The charter contract expires in 2020.

For each of the past five years, Beacon's graduation rate has been below 60 percent.

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
<b>Graduation Rate</b>	16.38%	14.30%	37.61%	56.52%	52.63%
<b>Rank in State</b>	104/106	108/110	100/111	104/117	104/117
<b>Position from Bottom</b>	3 <sup>rd</sup> lowest in state	3 <sup>rd</sup> lowest in the state	12 <sup>th</sup> lowest in the state	14 <sup>th</sup> lowest in the state	14 <sup>th</sup> lowest in the state
<b>Percentile Rank</b>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	11 <sup>th</sup>	12 <sup>th</sup>	12 <sup>th</sup>

While Beacon saw a significant increase between 2012 and 2013 in its performance relative to the rest of the state, the school has remained at the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> percentile since then. Moreover, a review of the first extended cohort data for Beacon, a 5<sup>th</sup> year graduation rate<sup>1</sup> for the class which was scheduled to graduate in 2013, indicates that graduation rate of students who graduated within five years was actually lower than 4 year rate: 32.97 percent. In contrast to the arguments made by

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<sup>1</sup> Extended cohort graduation rates require additional time and resources to validate and calculate. The Department of Education expects to release an official 5<sup>th</sup> year cohort graduation rate for those students who were scheduled to graduate in 2014 sometime in the fall of 2016.

many advocates for schools classified as underperforming, additional time does not appreciably alter the performance record of such schools. Indeed, in the case of Beacon, the school's performance actually declines to even less acceptable levels.

Based on a review of [data](#) submitted to the Agency by the school, Beacon is ineligible for the alternative state performance framework authorized under [SB460](#) of the 2015 Legislative Session, as it has a 48.48 percent unduplicated count of [eligible students](#). That unduplicated count is well below the 75 percent minimum in such categories of students set forth in statute. Put simply, there is little difference in the observable characteristics—special education eligibility, over-age, under-credit status, adjudicated youth status, etc.—of students at Beacon than at high need high schools across the state, including many in Clark County. Pursuant to statute, traditional public schools with graduation rates similar to Beacon are eligible for inclusion in the Achievement School District. As a charter school, this graduation rate renders Beacon eligible for authorizer intervention, including termination of its charter contract or reconstitution of its governing body.

Based on the school's history of poor graduation rates, the Authority directed staff to engage in discussions with the Agency regarding its plan for improvement. The school has made multiple presentations to the Authority since February 2016, including an extensive dialogue with members in June of this year. The attached plan, submitted to the Agency on July 24, 2016, incorporates the school's most recent proposal. While there are elements of the proposal which reflect a thoughtful approach to school improvement and we deeply appreciate the reflectiveness that school leadership has demonstrated throughout these discussions, Agency staff remains concerned that the proposed improvement plan does not incorporate annual performance targets despite repeated requests from Authority members and staff. Absent clear, measurable performance targets, there is no objective mechanism for the Authority to evaluate student achievement and determine if the school should remain in the Authority portfolio.



## **Beacon Academy of Nevada Plan for Increasing the Graduation Rate**

**Goal: To increase and maintain a 60% or greater graduation rate.**

BANV will continue to operate as a distance education school with optional tutoring services during the 2016-2017 school year, as plans are finalized to begin operations as a blended school for the 2017-18 school year. Although, the school is operating as a distance education school, many of the new program changes being implemented, in 2016-17, to improve student success are representative of a blended school model.

**Strategic Objective 1: 2016-2017:** Exceed the fall predicted graduation rate for cohort 2017. This predicted rate will be calculated using the number of credits earned at the start of the 2016-17 school year. Students included in the predicted graduation rate will require nine (9) or less credits to graduate. (Credits will be validated by an external source).

### **Action Steps**

- I. Increase student access to courses, services and opportunities in the school.**
  - a) Increase learning opportunities by increasing the number and types of courses available: grade-level remedial courses to coincide with math and English, grade-level regular and honors courses, and dual credit.
  - b) Utilize upgraded TRACKVIA system for weekly progress monitoring of attendance, behavior, progress towards course completion, and credit earned.
  - c) Ensure weekly two-way communication is provided to all students to provide immediate academic, social, and emotional interventions.
  - d) Improve and increase frequency of school communication with stakeholders utilizing the school website, Facebook, Twitter, and email.
  - e) Increase the number of school events to improve family engagement opportunities.
  - f) Measure the enrollment and rate of year end completion for re-engaged students effective 2016-2017 school year.
  - g) Enroll all new students in the Academic Explorations class, which requires students to attend tutoring twice per week.

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- i) Students & parents must sign an opt-out form if they choose not to participate (once school is blended, then this option is removed).
- ii) Early intervention in online learning techniques will contribute to early success and reduce the number of lost credits for new students.

**II. Increase students' vision of possibilities beyond high school.**

- a) Increase and require student participation in the Introduction and Advanced College and Career Readiness courses.
- b) Research and assist students in finding internships.
- c) Provide career exploration opportunities during school and evening hours.
- d) Increase the number of college and career events.
  - iii) Offer events in the evenings for improved family involvement.
  - iv) Offer events during school hours to increase the number of students in attendance.

**III. Address personal issues that affect student success in school, through community partnerships where appropriate.**

- a) Increase access to community services.
- b) Wrap-around Facilitator (new position in 16-17) oversees school wrap-around services and fosters community partnerships for increased student support.
- c) Comprehensive wrap-around services include providing support to students who: are parenting and pregnant; have mental health or substance abuse concerns; do not have basic needs met (clothing, food, and shelter); have a chaotic home life; have a history of truancy and school avoidance; are medically fragile; are credit deficient or past cohort for graduation.
- d) School social workers facilitate the student's support system, including family engagement, teachers, administration, and community partners as needed.
- e) Family Engagement Facilitator (new position 16-17) responsible to increase and streamline communication between family, school, student, and community.
- f) Resiliency surveys utilized quarterly, to identify students who may be in need of wrap-around services and/or identify students likely to drop-out.



#### **IV. Early intervention and effective instruction practices**

- a) Use transcript history and MAP scores to develop appropriate schedule, ensuring student success in core courses.
- b) Ensure students who fail same class twice are moved into remedial course or course at a lower level.
- c) Ensure no student is promoted to next class, without first achieving success at a lower level.
- d) Ensure students are earning two (2) credits each term.
  - i. Provide professional development specific to working with at-risk students and providing student accommodations and interventions in online/distance education programs.
  - ii. Provide professional development that supports strong relationships with students.
- e) Response to Intervention Facilitator (new 16-17) responsible for the oversight of the RTI program, implemented to increase student support, remediation, and oversight of the lowest 10% of student population.
- f) Reduce number of students not earning credit each term.
- g) Weekly, monthly, or term Student Success Plan meetings to discuss students' progress on four-year graduation plan, term success, credits earned, number of days on campus, and other factors that may be promoting or impeding student success

**Strategic Objective 2: 2017-2018:** Increase the graduation rate to a minimum of 60%, once Beacon Academy of Nevada is operating as a blended school.

#### **Action Steps:**

##### **V. Begin operations as a blended school 2017-2018.**

- h) Continuation of Action Steps I – IV.
- i) Provide professional development specific to teaching, learning, mentoring in a blended school.
- j) Increase enrollment for students in grades 9 – 10.
- k) Increase student awareness regarding the expectations for Student/Parents Expectations.
- l) Improved student attendance and participation

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## STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY

SUPPORTING DOCUMENT

**S U B J E C T: Update, discussion and possible action regarding the State Public Charter School Authority's Strategic Plan**

<u>  /  /  </u>	Public Workshop
<u>  /  /  </u>	Public Hearing
<u>  /  /  </u>	Consent Agenda
<u>  /  /  </u>	Regulation Adoption
<u>  /  /  </u>	Approval
<u>  /  /  </u>	Appointments
<u>  /  x/  </u>	Information
<u>  /  x/  </u>	Action

MEETING DATE: July 29, 2016

AGENDA ITEM: 15

NUMBER OF ENCLOSURE(S): 1

**PRESENTER(S): Patrick Gavin, Executive Director, SPCSA**

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**FISCAL IMPACT:**

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**BUDGET ACCOUNT (FOR PRINTING CHARGES ONLY):**

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**LENGTH OF TIME EXPECTED FOR PRESENTATION (IN MINUTES): 60 Mins**

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**SUBMITTED BY:** \_\_\_\_\_



**BRIAN SANDOVAL**  
*Governor*

**STATE OF NEVADA**

**PATRICK GAVIN**  
*Executive Director*



## **STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY**

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### **BRIEFING MEMORANDUM**

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**TO:** SPCSA Board  
**FROM:** Patrick Gavin  
**SUBJECT:** Agenda Item 15—SPCSA Strategic Plan  
**DATE:** July 29, 2016

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#### **Background:**

The Authority adopted its first [strategic plan](#) on March 23, 2013. Based on feedback from NACSA and WestEd in the fall of 2016, the Authority began revisions to its strategic plan in May 2016. At that time, the Authority identified two key objectives and four goals in the [draft document](#).

#### Objectives:

- 1) By 2020, increase the number of high quality seats in SPCSA-sponsored charter schools to 60,000.**
- 2) By 2020, enroll a statewide student population which is representative of our sending schools.**

#### Goals:

- 1) Open and sustain quality schools that reflect the demographics of their community**
  - a) Proactive Enrollment Practices
  - b) Equitable Funding
  - c) Focusing on local talent to open new schools
- 2) Unwavering Commitment to High Quality Schools—4 & 5 Star Schools**
  - a) Approve only the highest quality applicants
  - b) Reward High Quality Schools and Disseminate Best Practices
  - c) Sanction low performing schools
  - d) Align standards to assessments
  - e) Third party comprehensive assessment of the quality of the sector

### 3) **Fulfillment of Public School Obligations**

- a) Ensure equitable service to traditionally underserved populations
- b) Reward schools that equitably serve underserved populations
- c) Investigate and sanction schools that do not equitably serve underserved populations
- d) Recognize problems and encourage partnerships to facilitate solutions for children's environmental challenges

### 4) **Facilitate a Community of Practice Among Charter School Operators and Leaders to Build a Culture of Innovation and Collaboration**

- a) Leverage the Authority's LEA role to encourage the development and dissemination of best practices
- b) Collaborate with the Governor's Office, the Office of Economic Development, and other key stakeholders to encourage the formation of high quality schools that support the overarching workforce and economic development goals of the state.

Pursuant to a request from members of the Authority, staff have broken out the review of the proposed measures for consideration over the next several meetings. The draft metrics related to Goal 1 are:

- The percentage of open-enrollment charter schools with weighted lotteries
- The percentage of charter schools with mission-specific at-risk preferences
- The percentage and number of 4/5 star schools successfully incubating leaders for new charter schools

Each of these measurements represents new areas of focus for the Authority based on Board, community, and legislative concerns regarding the demographics of our portfolio, the need to ensure high quality, high achieving programs for at risk students, and the desire to ensure that the charter school movement in Nevada continues to attract and grow strong local talent even as it seeks to recruit proven high quality, high achieving programs into the state.

The first goal aligns with pending changes in Department regulation related to access and enrollment of pupils. Weighted lotteries permit governing bodies to provide an additional weight in their lotteries to certain underrepresented populations. The state's proposed adoption of weighted lotteries in regulation was a key selling point in the approval of the state's Federal Charter Schools Program grant. Currently, no schools implement weighted lotteries.

The second metric, related to mission-specific at-risk enrollment preferences, is aligned with the Authority's interest in promoting the establishment of schools in underrepresented communities. At present, only one school, Equipo Academy, has adopted a mission-specific enrollment preference.

The third metric aligns to a key component of the dissemination activities approved in the state's Federal Charter Schools Program grant and is aligned with discussions the Authority has had previously about increasing the diversity of public school options offered by a broad range of providers. This would provide high quality charter schools with the opportunity to amend their contracts to incubate new models and new leaders from our communities, including via the microschooling incubation model. Successful microschool programs could use the student achievement data from their initial implementations as proof of concept for future independent charter applications. Microschooling and other incubation strategies could also be negotiated conditions of future charter school expansions. At present, no schools have been awarded dissemination grants. As the microschooling concept is new to most schools, no schools have sought out such discussions with the Authority.

**Recommendation:**

Staff requests endorsement of the proposed metrics for Goal 1 and will place consideration of Goal 2's metrics on the August agenda.

## STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY

SUPPORTING DOCUMENT

**S U B J E C T: Authorization for the Agency to budget and charge up to 2 percent to support NACSA business findings and ongoing discussions regarding Agency budget request**

<u>  /  /  </u>	Public Workshop
<u>  /  /  </u>	Public Hearing
<u>  /  /  </u>	Consent Agenda
<u>  /  /  </u>	Regulation Adoption
<u>  /  /  </u>	Approval
<u>  /  /  </u>	Appointments
<u>  /  x/  </u>	Information
<u>  /  x/  </u>	Action

MEETING DATE: July 29, 2016

AGENDA ITEM: 16

NUMBER OF ENCLOSURE(S): 1

**PRESENTER(S): Patrick Gavin, Executive Director, SPCSA**

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**FISCAL IMPACT:**

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**BUDGET ACCOUNT (FOR PRINTING CHARGES ONLY):**

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**LENGTH OF TIME EXPECTED FOR PRESENTATION (IN MINUTES): 30 Mins**

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**SUBMITTED BY:** \_\_\_\_\_

**BRIAN SANDOVAL**  
*Governor*

**STATE OF NEVADA**

**PATRICK GAVIN**  
*Executive Director*



## STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY

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### BRIEFING MEMORANDUM

**TO:** SPCSA Board  
**FROM:** Patrick Gavin  
**SUBJECT:** Agenda Item 16—Agency Sponsorship Fees  
**DATE:** July 29, 2016

#### **Background:**

Historically, the Authority has directed staff to cap the total fee charged at 1.5 percent. This is significantly below the two percent amount permitted by law. Moreover, in most years the maximum amount expended by the agency from sponsorship revenue has amounted to less than 1 percent of overall per-pupil revenue. The remainder has been used over the course of the year to provide for adequate cash flow to permit the timely reimbursement of federal grants and to minimize that the periods of time when the agency's cash drops into the negative. The agency has historically refunded surplus amounts in excess of Authority mandated special education litigation reserves and a modest cash flow cushion to schools following the end of each fiscal year.

Existing law, [NRS 388A.414](#), provides that a charter school sponsor may assess a sponsorship fee of up to two percent of a school's per pupil revenues. Those payments are made quarterly by the Department of Education from the Distributive School Account at the same time that charter schools receive their revenues from NDE. Additionally, the provisions of [NRS 388A.381](#) permit a charter school to enter into an annual service agreement with the sponsor for services which are outside of the scope of a sponsor's authorizing duties. As noted in the NACSA report, a number of states provide that authorizers may charge sponsorship fees in excess of two percent and the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools has identified a three percent fee as "generally adequate." Moreover, our two most comparable statewide ICB authorizers—those who also function as the LEA—have higher sponsorship fees than our current 1.5 percent cap. ICB LEA authorizers are permitted to charge up to three percent in Colorado and two percent in South Carolina.

Based on recent guidance from the Governor's office and in light of the findings of the NACSA report, the Agency intends to appeal the denial of the agency budget enhancement requests. One concern that has been raised by Governor's office staff is that the current 1.5 percent cap results in insufficient revenue and free cash flow to support expanded agency operations.

**Recommendation:**

- 1) Authorize Agency staff to propose a sponsorship fee of up to two percent for the upcoming biennium to fund the additional investments necessary for the Authority to develop a strong authorizing infrastructure to complement the Agency's existing local education functions.
- 2) Authorize Agency staff to work with the Governor's Office of Finance to determine if any of the LEA services currently provided by the Agency could be outsourced to other entities either via direct contracts with schools or via agency contracts with third parties to reduce costs to the Agency and to sponsored schools.
- 3) "Authorize Agency staff to work with the Governor's Office of Finance to determine if any of the LEA services currently provided by the Agency should be switched to voluntary annual contract support services to minimize the impact on the Agency's fee revenue and provide schools with greater autonomy in the provision of technical support and other services.
- 4) Provide that the Agency continues to refund surpluses in excess of mandated reserves and appropriate levels of free cash at least annually to ensure that the Agency does not accumulate large ongoing reserves.