

Nevada's Virtual Charter Schools

Student Achievement and School Performance within the Current Accountability Framework

In Nevada, 1.2 percent of students, or 5,712 students out of the total K-12 enrollment of 485,768, were enrolled in virtual charter schools during the 2017-2018 school year. However, the Guinn Center notes that virtual charter schools in the State of Nevada both academically underperform and serve fewer percentages of students classified as English Language Learners (ELLs) or students receiving free and reduced price lunch (FRL) when compared to statewide averages.

The Guinn Center finds the state's virtual charter schools are never the lowest performing schools in the State of Nevada. However, in nearly all measures, these schools perform below the statewide average. This places many of the virtual charter schools at risk of being shut down due to underperformance. The current law (Nevada Revised Statutes 388A.330) states that the sponsor of a charter school (in this case, the State Public Charter School Authority - SPCSA) can reconstitute the governing body of a charter school, revoke the written charter, or terminate a charter contract for academic underperformance, partially defined as:

- The charter school operates a high school with a graduation rate in the previous year of less than 60 percent.
- The charter school has persistently underperformed, based on the performance indicators and metrics presented in the performance of the charter school.
 - "Persistently underperformed" is interpreted to mean a school that was rated as a one- or two-star school in the three previous ratings of charter schools in the Nevada School Performance Framework (NSPF).

Our review of the data finds that several virtual charter schools are performing within the bounds that will place them under consideration for termination of their contract. In the absence of new policies and interventions to support and/or guide virtual charter schools, several may be closed due to lackluster student achievement. See Table 1 for more information regarding the individual schools. The data is from the NSPF.

Table 1 - Comparison of NSPF Index Scores and Star Ratings

Name	2017-2018 NSPF Index Score	2017-2018 Star Rating	Rank	2016-2017 NSPF Index Score	2016-2017 Star Rating	Rank
Nevada Connections Academy Elementary	18.89	1	372/396	24.44	1	327/366
Nevada Virtual Academy Elementary	21.33	1	362/396	21.11	1	340/366
Leadership Academy Middle	36.11	2	124/158	53.89	3	71/140
Nevada Connections Academy Middle	26.11	1	145/158	51.67	3	75/140
Nevada Virtual Academy	40.50	2	113/158	61.11	3	52/140
Argent Preparatory Academy High	11.11	1	116/124	A	A	A
Leadership Academy High	51.74	3	81/124	A	A	A
Nevada Connections Academy High	12.78	1	115/124	A	A	A
Nevada Virtual Academy High	52.00	3	92/124	A	A	A

A - The 2016-2017 High School NSPF was different (included different measures) than the 2017-2018 NSPF. As such, a comparison between years would not be appropriate.

Table 2 compares the demographic breakdown of each virtual charter school to that of all SPCSA schools and the statewide average for the 2017-2018 school year. As noted in the table, the student demographics of virtual charter schools do not necessarily reflect the demographics of students in Nevada. It is especially important to note that virtual charter schools are serving very few students who are receiving free and reduced price lunch (FRL) and students classified as English Language Learners (ELL).

Table 2 - Race/Ethnicity and Special Populations

Name	Race/Ethnicity							Special Populations		
	Native American/ Alaskan Native	Asian	Latino	African American	White	Pacific Islander	Two or More Races	IEP	ELL	FRL
Argent Preparatory Academy	A	0.0%	12.0%	A	74.4%	A	A	27.8%	0.0%	39.1%
Leadership Academy of Nevada	A	A	11.7%	A	75.6%	A	7.8%	6.0%	0.0%	11.3%
Nevada Connections Academy	0.8%	2.9%	23.6%	11.0%	50.2%	1.2%	10.3%	8.4%	0.9%	35.1%
Nevada Virtual Academy	1.5%	5.5%	24.2%	17.3%	48.7%	2.7%	0.0%	11.7%	1.5%	46.9%
SPCSA	0.6%	6.6%	29.4%	10.2%	44.1%	1.7%	7.5%	9.1%	6.6%	21.9%
State of Nevada	0.9%	5.5%	42.4%	11.1%	32.5%	1.4%	6.2%	12.3%	16.8%	58.3%
A - Data Suppressed by the Nevada Department of Education										

Recommendations

The Guinn Center invites interested individuals to read the full report. However, we summarize our findings below.

1. Strengthen Accountability for Virtual Charter Schools

- While being rated under the NSPF is required by law, virtual charter schools can choose to be rated under the alternative performance framework. To do so, they must serve at least 75 percent of students that qualify as being traditionally underserved students.
- Collect better data regarding the reasons for students who transfer into/from a virtual charter school.

2. Improve Alignment of Student Needs at Virtual Charter Schools

- Consider an application process that includes criteria to increase the chances of student success.

3. Manage Enrollment at Virtual Charter Schools

- Consider an enrollment cap for underperforming virtual charter schools.
- Mandate that district-sponsored virtual charter schools are only allowed to enroll students who physically reside within the sponsoring school district.

4. Fund Virtual Charter Schools More Efficiently

- Consider alternative methods of funding virtual charter schools based on either actual costs of instruction or student achievement.