

May 22, 2018

Honorable Moises Denis
Legislative Committee on Education
Legislative Building
401 S. Carson St.
Carson City, NV 89701

CC: Assemblyman Tyrone Thompson
Senator Donald Gustavson
Senator Pat Spearman
Senator Joyce Woodhouse
Assemblywoman Teresa Benitez-Thompson
Assemblywoman Brittney Miller
Assemblywoman Jill Tolles

Dear Senator Denis and members of the Legislative Committee on Education:

Our children are now living in perilous times, and this is especially true as it relates to their educational environment. Schools are faced with unthinkable acts of violence, bullying, sexual misconduct from educators, proliferation of drug use, political and philosophical indoctrination – just to name a few. Parental choice in education is more important now than it has ever been. That is why I am so outraged at the ongoing actions of the State Public Charter School Authority. Executive Director Patrick Gavin and staff member Mark Modrcin clearly have a bias against online education and are using statistics and test score comparisons from financially and socially advantaged schools (so-called 5-star programs) to create a charter school culture that caters to a non-diverse demographic group.

The Authority is currently in the process of trying to close Nevada Virtual Academy. The issue that I have with this blatant attack against school choice is that the Authority is using statistics and performance measures that do not paint a true picture of reality. The Authority board and staff also act like they are willing to work with the school, but they are clearly performing to a pre-planned closure script. It would almost be comical watching Chair Guinasso mispronouncing the words he reads from the script if they were not dealing with something as important as our children's education.

Nevada Virtual Academy accepts many students that have not been able to succeed in other programs or have other unique circumstances that benefit from online education. These students often have very few educational options left. They are often credit deficient and well behind grade level, so it is no surprise that they receive test scores below other schools they are compared against (especially in the elementary grades). The Authority refuses to accept that a more realistic and fair yardstick would track progress throughout time in the program rather than a snapshot of where a student may be at any given time. NVVA administrators presented facts that demonstrate students are making progress the longer they are enrolled in

the program, and I believe it completely unfair to paint a one-star label on a school that demonstrates growth and continual improvement of its students. That is what education is supposed to be about – teaching. It is my belief that the Authority is creating an environment that they were formed to prevent – Charter Schools should not be a free public education for the privileged few “5-star clubs” that lack economic and racial diversity.

The leadership of the Authority has publicly stated that family stories in demonstrating the need for online school are pathetic, and that if students succeed in these environments that they must come from families that have “helicopter parents”. The board and staff behavior and attitude during the public comment time in their meetings (viewing phones and other devices) sends a clear signal that they do not care about those voicing concerns or how the community they represent are impacted by their actions. They have not tried to understand how online schools function and that the curriculum is sound. It does not seem to matter to them that online schools have qualified instructors and students are accountable to their teachers for assignments and class participation.

As a parent, I appreciate the transparency of being involved and knowing what my children are being taught. I also know that my children are in a safe environment where they are not being passed drugs in their high school English class, being bullied, being taught that their religious beliefs are incorrect, or feeling anxiety when they see events like those that recently shook so many families in Texas. These horrific events don’t just happen far away from us. This weekend I was talking to a family member who teaches in St. George, Utah, and he described how his school recently found a bomb that almost went off, placed by an ISIS sympathizer (Snow Canyon High School). How many other situations like this don’t have mainstream media coverage because no one died.

My family has had a very positive experience with Nevada Virtual Academy. Our children scored well on their ACT tests and perform in their university courses at BYU better than their peers who attended public schools. They expressed that the accountability learned through the online program prepared them for and use the same systems used by the university. If we thought that NVVA was doing harm to students, there is no way that we would keep our children enrolled in the program. The opposite is true – they are receiving a great education and we are very thankful for Nevada Virtual Academy.

We simply need to have the choice as parents for what is best for our children’s education and safety. To maintain these choices, the State’s Public Charter School Authority must be reined in before they cause any more damage to families and school choice. Their actions also put the State of Nevada at risk to legal complaints by parents, schools being unfairly targeted for closure, as well as from diversity-focused groups such as the NAACP. I am hopeful that you and your staff will help to protect the rights of Nevada families through actions that promote school choice.

Thank you!
William L Morris