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“Ready Now Yuma” To Create Actionable Plan for Graduating High School Students College- and Career-Ready

YUMA – With national graduation rates stalled at around 70 percent and with an estimated 60 percent of all students enrolled in postsecondary education needing remedial coursework, Helios Education Foundation, the Center for the Future of Arizona (CFA) and Yuma Union High School District (YUHSD) are launching **Ready Now Yuma**, an education model designed to graduate knowledgeable and highly skilled students academically prepared to successfully complete a postsecondary education.

This collaborative and innovative partnership is framed around the Arizona Whole-School Move On When Ready initiative and takes a comprehensive, school-wide approach toward student achievement. The goal is to develop actionable strategies that schools can implement to improve education quality and ensure their students master a rigorous, curriculum-driven program of study. Ultimately, this plan will better prepare students to succeed in postsecondary education, whether it is at a trade or technical school, community college or four-year baccalaureate degree granting institution.

Helios is investing \$450,000 toward this planning initiative, enabling CFA and Yuma Union High School District to develop strategies that will require all 9th and 10th grade students to enroll in the Cambridge International Examination instructional system, offer multiple educational pathways for 11th and 12th grade students, provide student academic advising and support, create opportunities for teacher professional development and include a thorough research and evaluation component.

"Ready Now Yuma is designed to raise academic achievement for all students to national and international college- and career-readiness standards," CFA Executive Director Sybil Francis said. "It is about opening doors closed to many students today by ensuring they are prepared to take the next step in their educational career – whether that is achieving a license, associate's degree, or bachelor's degree. This is vital when you consider that by 2013, more than 85 percent of new, high-growth jobs in Arizona that pay a livable wage will require at least some postsecondary education beyond a high school diploma."

Arizona is part of a 12-state coalition working with the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE) to improve students' career- and college-readiness by bringing board examination systems to their schools. The YUHSD whole-school model will include instituting Cambridge International Examinations, one of the board examination systems approved by the Arizona State Board of Education, beginning with this fall's freshman class and making available the Grand Canyon High School Diploma, a new optional performance-based high school diploma aligned to minimum college readiness.

"Helping students prepare for and achieve a postsecondary education is fundamental to ensuring that those same students will have access to successful career opportunities when they graduate," said Helios Education Foundation President and CEO Paul Luna. "In order for students to be prepared for postsecondary education, the academic groundwork has to be laid early on. Developing the Ready Now Yuma model will help provide the planning tools schools need to put students on a track toward education success."

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Helios and CFA are partnering with Yuma Union High School District in this whole-school reform effort because of its ground-breaking leadership in expanding the number of students who are college- and career-ready. Last year, more than 2,500 YUHSD students took the ACT, a widely accepted college entrance exam.

“The partnership between the Center for the Future of Arizona, Helios Education Foundation and YUHSD promises to be of benefit to our students and our community in fulfilling our promise to prepare students for all destinations, and to further the reputation of our community as investment-worthy for business and industry,” commented Toni Badone, superintendent of the Yuma Union High School District. “We believe the skills necessary to be successful in college are the same set of attributes necessary for success in careers. We want our students to be ready to analyze, think independently, create, take initiative, question and research, demonstrate leadership and service, and model competence and trustworthiness.”

The Ready Now Yuma model has the potential to be viewed as a cutting-edge, national initiative that can be used to effectively prepare every student for postsecondary education success.

About the Center for the Future of Arizona

The Center for the Future of Arizona is a Phoenix-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that combines public-policy research with collaborative partnerships and initiatives to address issues critical to the state. CFA serves as the state's liaison with the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE), which is leading the national Move On When Ready effort. Twelve states are working with NCEE to implement board examination systems in their schools. Arizona is the first state to pass Move On When Ready legislation. For more information about CFA, visit www.ArizonaFuture.org.

About Helios Education Foundation

Helios Education Foundation is a philanthropic organization serving Arizona and Florida focused solely on education. The Foundation is focused on changing lives through education, and is dedicated to enriching the lives of individuals and families in both states by creating opportunities for postsecondary education success. With a commitment to creating a college-going culture, the Foundation's community investments are made across three impact areas: Early Childhood Education, the Transition Years (Grades 5-12) and Postsecondary Scholarships. Since 2006, Helios has invested over \$100 million in education-related programs and initiatives in Arizona and Florida. For more information about Helios Education Foundation, visit www.helios.org.

About Yuma Union High School District

Founded in 1909, Yuma Union High School District works to live up to its vision of being “Where Great Minds Grow.” The Yuma Union High School District includes over 11,000 students at five comprehensive high schools and one alternative high school. The student body is 79 percent minority, 68 percent free/reduced lunch-eligible and has a 27 percent mobility rate. The district leadership is focused on a clear bottom line of insuring that every student is ready for their future, including for success in college without remediation. Yuma Union High School District is accredited through AdvancED and is an AVID District. The district was recently named to the AP® Achievement List by the College Board for significant gains in Advanced Placement® access and student performance in 2011. It was also recognized as an “Overachiever District” by the E.P.E. Research Center in a study published in June of 2009 edition of *Education Week*. Yuma Union High School District is a member of the Yuma Educational Consortium, the Arizona Business and Education Coalition, and the Yuma Chamber of Commerce. For more information about the district, visit www.yumaunion.org.

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