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Report: AZ should discuss, explore its digital learning potential

PHOENIX – Coinciding with national Digital Learning Day, a new report on the status of digital learning in Arizona was released Wednesday by its co-authors, the Center for the Future of Arizona and Morrison Institute for Public Policy.

Digital Learning: How to Enhance the Learning of Any Child, at Any Time, and in Any Place is posted in PDF version on the two centers' respective websites: ArizonaFuture.org and MorrisonInstitute.asu.edu. The 18-page report serves as both a primer and a gauge to digital learning in Arizona. As the report's executive summary notes:

Digital learning is more than a technological method of delivery. It is a collection of teaching tools and strategies designed to expand the learning and discovery environment of traditional brick-and-mortar K-12 schools. Its potential to impact education stems from its flexibility (time, place and pace), its ability to help guide and shape the learning experience of students, and its capacity to create a personalized learning and discovery experience for each student.

Digital Learning: How to Enhance the Learning of Any Child, at Any Time, and in Any Place was co-authored by Sybil Francis, Ph.D., who is executive director of the Center for the Future of Arizona, and C.J. Eisenbarth Hager, who is a senior policy analyst at Morrison Institute for Public Policy at Arizona State University.

"Digital learning is not just about bringing technology to the classroom," Francis noted. "Digital learning has the potential to transform the teaching, learning and discovery process as profoundly as digital media have transformed the way we work, play and communicate. Whether or not it lives up to this promise depends on how we go about integrating digital learning into the classroom. These are the kinds of questions and issues we focus on in this report. Quality and accessibility are two key components of the equation."

The report is expected to serve as a catalyst for continued and expanded dialogue concerning the possibilities and potential of digital learning in Arizona, which was touted in the *Nation's Digital Learning Report Card* as "leading the nation in transforming education for the digital age" because of its policies and practices that support a hospitable environment for digital learning.

"At the national level, there's a lot of dialogue about how digital learning can transform our public education system. National organizations have ranked Arizona, along with the other states, on policies that affect digital learning. Meanwhile, many Arizona school districts and charters are moving ahead with innovative digital learning agendas," Eisenbarth Hager said.

"What has been missing is an open discussion about digital learning at the state level. With this

report, we want to get that discussion rolling. There are a number of policies that the state can explore in order to make sure districts have a barrier-free environment, yet still have some guarantee about the quality of education our kids will receive. Our report lays out some of these issues and encourages a public dialogue,” she said.

The report also notes that digital learning should not be viewed as a panacea or replacement of brick-and-mortar schools, with a blended variety of digital learning often the preferred method. There also is the digital divide in Arizona between many urban and rural schools, as well as upper- and lower-income districts and students, that Arizona must address, according to the report.

Included in the report are details of “five critical elements of a digital learning agenda” for Arizona:

- Systems-level changes for more personalized educational experiences for students.
- Issues of quality in digital content and teaching.
- Needed fixes to the system that make digital learning more accessible.
- The importance of supporting an adequate infrastructure.
- The creation of a Digital Learning Center for Arizona to provide a centralized source of information and support for digital learning, especially at the school level.

The report was a co-publication of the Center for the Future of Arizona and Morrison Institute for Public Policy.

The Center for the Future of Arizona is an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Its mission is to help Arizonans shape and define the future through an action-oriented agenda focused on contemporary issues and topics critical to the state. More than a think tank, the center is an independent “do tank” that combines public-policy research with collaborative partnerships and initiatives that will create new opportunities for all Arizonans.

Now in its 30th year, Morrison Institute for Public Policy is a leader in examining critical Arizona and regional issues, and is a catalyst for public dialogue. An Arizona State University resource, Morrison Institute uses nonpartisan research and communication outreach to help improve the state's quality of life.

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