



The Nevada Policy Research Institute

For Immediate Release
September 13, 2011

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NPRI study: Digital learning offers alternative way to improve education in Nevada

LAS VEGAS — Digital learning offers schools a chance to multiply the impact of their best teachers, personalize the education experience for each student and do both while spending less, a new study from the Nevada Policy Research Institute finds.

The report, titled “Transforming Education in Nevada Through High-Quality Digital Learning,” explains how digital-learning options are changing the structure of learning around the country. Co-authored by Dan Lips, a senior American education analyst and Steven Miller, NPRI’s vice president for policy, the report notes that enrollment in digital-learning options is rapidly increasing, with 1.5 million students around the country currently enrolled in online- or blended-learning environments.

“The 2011 Nevada Legislature saw the emergence of a bi-partisan consensus that Nevada’s students must have the very best teachers possible,” said Miller. “And online digital learning is making that happen, as, using technology, the best teachers can now teach hundreds or even thousands of students.”

Miller noted that the Carpe Diem Academy in Yuma, Ariz. — using computer-based instruction for half of all student courses in a “blended learning” curriculum — recently posted the high math and science scores for the state. Evidence also suggests that, across the country, students in The Florida Virtual School are outperforming their peers in traditional public schools.

The report comes as Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval, legislative officials from both major parties and community leaders have acknowledged that increasing educational achievement is essential to diversifying Nevada’s economy and producing future leaders.

“Online learning allows students to learn at their own pace, receiving fully personalized instruction from the best teachers,” said Miller. “And since digital learning uses technology to multiply the instruction of the very best teachers, digital-learning programs could save Nevada tens of millions of dollars.

“Despite the state’s spending well over \$10,000 per student per year, only 24 percent of Nevada’s eighth graders scored ‘proficient or better’ on 2009 reading tests,” Miller noted. “Nevada’s parents and students need brand-new choices in education.”

The report finds that Nevada is in the middle of the pack, nationally, when it comes to the embrace of digital-learning options for students. While the Clark County School District has a virtual high school, Nevada is one of only 11 states without a statewide, state-run virtual school.

“In Nevada, students enrolled in online schools increased by 40 percent in the 2008-09 school year and 76 percent in 2009-10, while 6,669 students took classes online in 2010-11,” said Miller. “As more parents and students find out about the benefits of digital learning, that number will continue to grow.

“Lawmakers have taken some of the steps needed to eliminate barriers to online learning, such as seat-time requirements. The next step is to empower parents to choose from a fully transparent menu of online and blended-learning schools, so they can select just the right schools for their children.

“If dollars follow students to the schools their parents choose,” said Miller, “competition for those students and for quality teachers — teaching their specialties, digitally, statewide — will soon put a stop to Nevada’s long-running public-education tragedy.”

An executive summary of the study is available online at <http://www.npri.org/publications/transforming-education-in-nevada-through-highquality-digital-learning>. The full study can be downloaded at http://www.npri.org/docLib/20110912_Digital_Learning_report.pdf.

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