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ARIZONA SCIENCE CENTER TAPPED TO TRAIN EDUCATORS ON TEACHING STEM
*Planning grant from Helios Education Foundation helps prepare teachers
for the 21st-century classroom*

PHOENIX (Nov. 7, 2013) – Arizona Science Center has been awarded a planning grant of more than \$260,000 by Helios Education Foundation in an effort to help improve classroom instruction in the science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) areas. This project will help teachers further integrate critical components such as problem-solving, critical thinking and collaboration into teaching methods.

Educators are facing a critical time as innovations and advancements in technology, science, and engineering are outpacing their ability to adapt how students are taught. The need for a STEM-literate and STEM-skilled population is ever-increasing to respond to the global challenges of the 21st century. It is critical that our teachers are able to prepare our students to succeed in this ever-changing environment.

This planning grant will create *STEM Teaching and Learning Continuums* with partner districts around the state. The purpose is to provide professional development and learning opportunities for teachers in the STEM areas. The project is aimed at developing strategies for leadership, mentoring, coaching and teaching which will ultimately improve classroom instruction.

The initiative will be implemented in Flagstaff Unified School District; J.O. Combs Unified School District with the collaboration of the Pinal County Educational Services Agency; and Scottsdale Unified School District. These districts were selected after an exhaustive screening process substantiated their commitment to enhancing STEM education.

One of many formal educational programs offered by Arizona Science Center, the *STEM Teaching and Learning Continuums* is in its planning year, with a goal of developing the infrastructure for continued investment that will impact hundreds of educational leaders and teachers and thousands of students in Arizona school communities.

“This is an exciting new partnership for Helios Education Foundation as we continue to focus on ensuring that students have high quality experiences in STEM education that better prepare them for the 21st century’s global economy,” said Paul Luna, President and CEO, Helios Education Foundation. “A critical component of those experiences is ensuring teachers have the professional development and training they need to be most effective in the classroom.”

“When the class of 2020 – today’s sixth-graders – graduate, they’ll enter a job market in which 70 percent of jobs are STEM-based or require STEM skills,” said Chevy Humphrey, President and CEO, Arizona Science Center. “It’s imperative that communities pull together at this critical juncture to prepare both teachers and students, as technological advancements are outpacing our ability to adapt to how we teach our students.”

Through the initiative, Arizona Science Center will work with participating school districts to customize research-based solutions, with engagement ranging from professional learning and

development sessions, to one-to-one leadership and instructional coaching, and independent reflective practice models. Specific strategic plans will be created for educational leadership across the districts, as well as professional learning and development for leaders, teachers, and content for students in a specified K-12 continuum.

“This new initiative is a distinct addition to Helios’ portfolio of STEM investments, because it seeks to create continuity and intentionality for the students’ experiences in STEM learning across the education pipeline. It provides an overarching goal of creating a system wide change in the teaching of STEM at all levels,” said Dr. Jo Anne Vasquez, vice president and program director of STEM Teaching & Learning Initiatives, Helios Education Foundation.

“Student achievement is largely dependent on teacher quality,” added Humphrey. “The best way to boost teacher quality is through targeted, customized professional development programs.”

Services will be managed and provided through the Professional Learning and Development department, the teacher and educational leadership professional development and training arm of Arizona Science Center, under the leadership of Dr. Sharon Kortman, principal investigator on the project and vice president of learning at Arizona Science Center.

“We have a unique opportunity to develop a partnership model with formal and informal learning institutions, higher education, parents and the community, and with business and industry for a collective responsibility for student learning,” said Dr. Sharon Kortman. “We look forward to this inclusive engagement of all leaders, all teachers, and all students in rigorous and relevant learning opportunities that can be replicated to other learning communities.”

Horizon Research, Inc. will lead a comprehensive evaluation of the program to document district and school system changes, changes in teaching practices and curriculum, changes in students’ attitudes toward STEM and lessons learned.

With more than 30 years of experience in formal and informal learning, Arizona Science Center is uniquely poised to lead the initiative. The organization serves more than half a million Arizonans annually, in addition to the nearly 300,000 impacted during the 2012-2013 school year by the Professional Learning and Development department.

About Arizona Science Center

The mission of Arizona Science Center is to inspire, educate and entertain people of all ages about science. The Center, located at 600 E. Washington Street in downtown Phoenix, features more than 300 hands-on exhibits, live demonstrations, the state-of-the-art Dorrance Planetarium and a five-story IMAX® theater. For more information, visit www.azscience.org or call 602-716-2000.

The Professional Learning and Development department’s purpose is to advance educational leadership, quality teaching, parent and community engagement for student learning. Content areas of emphasis include the Common Core State Standards – Arizona’s College and Career Ready Standards, Next Generation Science Standards, STEM, Standards in Teaching, Standards in Leadership, and Mentoring and Coaching.

About Helios Education Foundation

Helios Education Foundation is focused on creating opportunities for individuals to succeed in postsecondary education by advancing the academic preparedness of all students and fostering a high-expectations, college-going culture in Arizona and Florida. The Foundation focuses its investments across the education continuum in three key impact areas: Early Childhood Education, the Transition Years and Postsecondary Success.

As an engaged foundation, embedded in communities across both states, the Foundation is contributing its leadership, expertise and financial resources to better prepare students for college and career and to compete successfully in a globally-competitive economy. Since 2006, Helios has invested over \$133 million in education-related programs and initiatives in Arizona and Florida. For more information about the Foundation, visit www.helios.org.