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Virtual School Leaders Encourage Growth of K-12 Online Learning; Discuss High School Reform at Regional Summit

Florida Education Commissioner John Winn Applauds FLVS for its Commitment to Delivering High Quality Online Learning Opportunities to all Students and Leadership on High School Reform

Alexandria, VA (June 22, 2006) – The North American Council for Online Learning (NACOL) an international K-12 non-profit organization representing online learning practitioners in the United States, Canada, and Mexico, and Florida Virtual School (FLVS), a leading provider statewide public virtual school and model online learning program, hosted a regional professional development summit where teachers and administrators discussed how virtual education programs can create new opportunities to address student’s educational needs. Conference attendees also explored how online learning programs can help address high school reform efforts.

Florida’s top educator, Commissioner John Winn, addressed the conference on Friday morning where he highlighted the accomplishments of FLVS and encouraged educational leaders to look at how virtual schools can create opportunities for rural and minority students by providing them with access to high quality curriculum, AP and Honors courses through online learning programs.

“You are all education visionaries,” Commission Winn told conference participants. “I encourage you to continue to break down barriers so that all students are served well and have the educational opportunities they need to achieve their academic potential so they are equipped to thrive in our global economy. As our economy

changes, so must education and the learning opportunities our students – and future leaders – receive. By offering students access to high quality online learning programs, we are creating life-long learners who are equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in today’s high-tech world.”

Participants also heard from Florida Representative Joe Pickens who challenged attendees to look beyond the school walls for opportunities to serve students by providing parents with educational options and choices in learning programs.

“Florida has been a leader in education innovation for years. We are grateful to both Commissioner Winn and Representative Pickens for their leadership on virtual education and for their insight on how online learning can solve some of our largest challenges in education -- especially in the area of high school reform,” said Susan Patrick, CEO & President, North American Council for Online Learning.

The intensive two-day summit covered everything educators need to launch an effective, quality online learning program. FLVS students presented their experiences at the conference and discussed how their online courses were academically challenging, but they also help develop better time management and communication skills – both essential in today’s global economy. A panel of online teachers also shared lessons learned, tips and insights on how to effectively manage and instruct student remotely. National online learning experts presented numerous workshops ranging from assessing and evaluating online learning, developing strategies on how to effectively communicate the value of online learning to elected officials, understanding the fundamentals of mentoring online students, and teaching online to help at-risk students.

According to an October 2005 report, *Keeping Pace with K-12 Online Learning Programs*, “virtual schools are experiencing tremendous growth which is demonstrated by the over 500,000 course offerings? during 2005-2006. To date, twenty-three (23) states have statewide virtual school programs, thousands of districts and hundreds of charter schools have been launched to help meet student demand for e-learning options. The report found that online learning programs are

experiencing consistent growth of between fifty (50) to one hundred (100) percent annually.

“We know firsthand that demand for virtual education is growing,” said FLVS President & CEO Julie Young. “For the past five years, we have seen double-digit growth in course enrollments just here in Florida. But, we firmly believe that students deserve to receive a high quality education – even if it is online – which is why we’re pleased to have an opportunity to share our experiences and knowledge with our peers and to support the growth of quality online learning programs throughout the country.”

Conference attendees discussed how online learning can help solve national challenges, including the alarming student dropout rate and the shortage of highly qualified math and science teachers throughout the country. “In “Silent Epidemic,” we are told that the reason student dropout rates are on the rise is because students feel ‘they are not learning anything.’ We believe online learning can help reverse this trend because it engages students and provides them with a high quality learning experience,” said Susan Patrick, CEO and President, NACOL.

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About NACOL (www.nacol.org)

The North American Council for Online Learning is an international K-12 non-profit organization representing the interests of administrators, practitioners, and students involved in online learning in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. NACOL is dedicated to fostering a learning landscape that promotes student success and lifelong learning by facilitating collaboration, advocacy, and research to enhance quality K-12 online learning. The founding members of NACOL are public and private school organizations, teachers, school support staff, and professional staff all with an interest in promoting online learning.

About Florida Virtual School (www.flvs.net)

Florida Virtual School (FLVS) is an established leader in developing and providing virtual K-12 education solutions to students throughout the country. A nationally recognized e-Learning model, FLVS founded in 1997 was the country's first, state-wide Internet-based public high school. Today, FLVS serves middle and high school students with more than 80 courses. FLVS is governed by an independent educational entity with a gubernatorial appointed board and is the only public school where funding is tied directly to student performance. Additional information can be found at www.flvs.net.

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