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digiLEARN, Durham Public Schools Partner to Launch Innovative, Teacher-Led Professional Development Program in Durham

Durham, NC – Durham Public Schools and the Digital Learning Institute (digiLEARN), a national nonprofit founded by former NC Governor Bev Perdue, announced today they will partner to bring digiLEARN’s successful Digital Scholars Initiative to Durham.

Founded in 2014 by Perdue, who serves as its chair, digiLEARN is dedicated to accelerating digital learning for all ages with a goal of increasing personal learning options for students and expanding instructional opportunities for teachers.

digiLEARN’s Digital Scholars Initiative focuses on creating opportunities for teachers and schools to accelerate innovation and build effective personalized learning models for students. Participating teachers, or scholars, take on leadership roles at their school and district level while remaining practicing classroom teachers. They receive release time, personalized professional development and extended employment to learn how to lead other educators in digital and personalized learning practices, use their classrooms as learning labs for other teachers to observe these practices, and collaborate with researchers and other educators to design solutions to help their schools innovate and create new learning models.

The Digital Scholars Initiative completed a pilot year of the program with Rowan-Salisbury Schools in Salisbury, North Carolina in June and is currently implementing year two of the program in that district. A report on outcomes from the pilot year is [available online](#).

“As a former teacher and policymaker who now works with educators across the country, I believe we must listen to our teachers, empower them to lead and give them the resources and professional development they need to help their students achieve,” Perdue said. “We’ve seen great results from our pilot in Rowan-Salisbury Schools, and I am delighted to work with Durham Public Schools to bring the program to the Triangle.”

Alexander Groff, a history teacher from Riverside High School, and Lena Deskins, an AIG teacher from Sandy Ridge Elementary, were chosen by district leaders as the Durham Digital Scholars because of their expertise in digital and personalized learning.

“Our district strategic plan calls on us to increase academic achievement for every child by using technology as a tool for accelerating and personalizing student learning,” said DPS Superintendent Pascal Mubenga, Ph.D. “The Digital Scholars Initiative is about more than technology for its own sake; it’s about meeting our students where they are and helping them to leap ahead. We’re proud to partner with digiLEARN, and of Mr. Groff and Ms. Deskins for being selected.”

digiLEARN created the Digital Scholars Initiative after a survey of 1,327 teachers revealed that 85 percent believe digital tools that provide immediate, ongoing information about student understanding will increase learning, but

that most teachers feel they lack the skills and knowledge to use digital tools and adopt personalized learning practices in their classrooms.

Expansion of the program into Durham is supported by the North Carolina GlaxoSmithKline Foundation.

“The N.C. GlaxoSmithKline Foundation has a long history of supporting education in North Carolina,” said N.C. GlaxoSmithKline Foundation Executive Director Marilyn Foote-Hudson. “We are proud to support this work, which will help ensure the future workforce is successful by using innovative technology and educational practices to prepare students for college and careers.”

About The Digital Learning Institute (digiLEARN)

The Digital Learning Institute (digiLEARN) is a national nonprofit dedicated to accelerating digital learning for all ages, with a goal of increasing personalized learning options for students, expanding opportunities for teachers, and improving the ecosystem for education entrepreneurs. It serves as the front line for teachers, research and the development of new learning models, tools and content needed to help every learner succeed. Former North Carolina Governor Bev Perdue founded digiLEARN in 2014. A longtime champion of using technology to enhance the classroom learning experience for teachers and students of all ages, she serves as the organization’s chair. Former Wyoming Governor Jim Geringer is vice chair. For a full list of board members, visit www.digilearn.org/board. For more on digiLEARN, visit www.digilearn.org.

About Durham Public Schools

Durham Public Schools is one of the ten largest districts in North Carolina, serving more than 32,000 students in the city and county of Durham with a vision of igniting the limitless potential of its students. It is one of the top 30 districts in the nation for employing teachers certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, and three of its high schools are on the US News & World Report's Best High Schools list for 2018. DPS embraces, educates, and empowers every student to innovate, serve, and lead.