University of Phoenix and Blackboard Announce Free Virtual Teaching Academy to Address Massive Change in K-12 Education Delivery Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Presented by the Alliance for Virtual Learning, a new collective of K-12 and virtual learning experts dedicated to helping schools navigate the new normal and achieve student success

PHOENIX, AZ and RESTON, VA – May 6, 2020 – In response to the massive disruption in K-12 learning and unprecedented challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, University of Phoenix and Blackboard have combined their expertise in virtual learning with leading K-12 experts to form the Alliance for Virtual Learning, a comprehensive effort to help teachers and administrators develop a blueprint for the upcoming school year.

While many organizations have come forward to help teachers quickly pivot online to maintain learning continuity in the immediate term, the Alliance is offering a free Virtual Teaching Academy, the first to provide a comprehensive, longer term approach to creating a virtual teaching and learning environment – from infrastructure to curriculum planning and training.

The Alliance, which includes leaders such as the recipient of USDLA's 2015 "Outstanding Leadership by an Individual in the Field of Distance Learning" Pat Hoge, Getting Smart CEO and author Tom Vander Ark, and 2012 National Superintendent of the Year Heath Morrison, will provide free and comprehensive instruction to help teachers and administrators meet the new requirements of teaching and learning outside of the traditional classroom experience. The program will be delivered through a series of online, interactive events leading up to the Alliance's inaugural Virtual Teaching Academy, June 26 – July 1, 2020. The goal is that school districts, and their administrators and teachers, will walk away with a blueprint on how to pivot to an extended virtual learning experience for the remainder of 2020 and likely beyond.

"Teaching outside of the classroom requires different skills, capabilities and mindset than a traditional learning environment," said University of Phoenix Provost John Woods. "With more than 30 years of experience delivering successful online education, we feel a deep responsibility and sense of urgency to share our knowledge in virtual teaching to help the K-12 education community succeed in today's new normal of remote learning."

With social distancing mandates and other measures, districts need a longer-term solution and the ability to seamlessly transition to virtual schooling when required, while maintaining continuity of learning. The Alliance for Virtual Learning aims to address that need, leveraging the collective's expertise and extensive

experience to bridge the gap in the virtual education space.

With a specific emphasis on planning and execution, the Alliance aims to offer districts, administrators and teachers the tools they need to best position themselves and their students for success as they begin preparing for fall 2020 and beyond. Best practices on how to better engage students, both academically and emotionally, in a virtual environment will also be shared. Experts will present via webinars in May and June moderated by Tom Vander Ark, CEO of Getting Smart and author of books including "Getting Smart," "Navigating the Digital Shift," "Smart Cities," "Smart Parents," "Better Together" and "The Power of Place." The inaugural Virtual Teaching Academy will be hosted in late June 2020.

- **Webinar: What We've Learned: The Shift to Virtual Teaching and Learning –** May 20, 2020

    - A moderated panel discussion during which education thought and district leaders will share experiences and learnings from helping their schools adapt to new ways of teaching and learning amidst COVID-19.

- **Webinar: Where We're Going: How to Succeed in "The New Normal" –** June 17, 2020

    - A moderated panel discussion designed to help school and district leaders in their thinking, analysis and planning as they look to the fall. This webinar will provide guidance on being able to shift seamlessly to virtual teaching and learning, why both are needed, and how to successfully create an intersection of the two.

- **Inaugural Virtual Teaching Academy –** June 26 - July 1, 2020

    - A six-day long workshop designed to provide teachers and administrators with insights to develop a blueprint for the future of K-12 as they prepare for fall.
    - Topics covered will include student and parent engagement, assessment of student learning, equity and disparity when school moves home, addressing the social and emotional needs of students virtually, and more.
    - Attendees can earn free continuing education-professional development hours for the time they attend the Virtual Teaching Academy, which will be granted by the University of Phoenix College of Education.

"COVID-19 has prompted the entire education community to implement and adapt to digital learning environments at an unprecedented pace," said Kathy Vieira, Chief Strategy, Portfolio & Marketing Officer at Blackboard. "As we begin to prepare for the upcoming school year and beyond, it is increasingly important for the entire education community – educators, parents, students, and EdTech providers – to continue to work together. This represents an incredibly unique opportunity to reimagine the tools, training and environment needed to support online learning, and evolve how we personalize education for every student to help ensure they are successful."

The COVID-19 pandemic is the single most disruptive event in the history of K-12 education, with widespread closures of 120,000 schools affecting 55 million students in the U.S. According to a recent survey

of 1,001 K-12 teachers conducted by Edelman Intelligence on behalf of University of Phoenix, there is deep concern about the impact virtual teaching may have on students' **development** (90%). The survey also found that teachers do not feel properly prepared to teach virtually. As schools and teachers have mobilized quickly during this challenging time, **less than half of teachers (47%) feel that the training that is available to them is good or excellent.** Yet nearly all want to learn how to better engage and support their students through virtual learning, with teachers expressing interest in courses that discuss how to **create compelling instructional content** (84%) and how to **best leverage online technology for teaching** (84%).*****

For more information about the Alliance for Virtual Learning, to access resources or register for upcoming workshops, visit https://go.blackboard.com/virtual-teaching-academy.

*Assessed across their school, online platforms, educator resources, district and state offerings

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