



DIGITAL MEDIA ARE CHANGING HOW YOUNG PEOPLE LEARN; EDUCATION EXPERTS URGE NEW POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Washington, DC (September 21, 2009) Digital media are changing the way young people learn, play, socialize and participate in civic life, and these changes have important policy implications, according to a panel of experts participating in a Capitol Hill briefing today. The event, hosted by the Consortium for School Networking and featuring speakers from Common Sense Media and the National Writing Project, was held with support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation as part of its digital media and learning initiative.

“Learning is increasingly participatory,” said Julia Stasch, MacArthur’s Vice President for U.S. programs. “Digital media are not only changing how young people are accessing and sharing new knowledge—they are extending the classroom to more informal and unconventional spaces, such as libraries, museums and even online communities. Our support for the field of digital media and learning is designed to help these institutions take advantage of the learning opportunities presented by digital media and to help build an infrastructure for successful teaching and learning in the 21st century.”

Despite the potential benefits of new media, many schools are banning or severely restricting its use, reported Keith Krueger, CEO of the Consortium for School Networking (CoSN), who presented findings from a recent survey his organization conducted about the learning potential of Web 2.0 software in schools. “While school district administrators see the learning potential of these new media, few understand how best to incorporate it into schooling,” said Krueger. “School leaders need help in formulating policies and implementing leadership practices that enable the effective use of digital media.”

Teachers are also critical to the successful integration of new media into schooling, said Sharon J. Washington, Executive Director of the National Writing Project, a professional development network for teachers of writing. “The notion of what it means to write is changing,” said Washington. “Teachers must not only redefine writing, but also increasingly adapt teaching practices so that they are web delivered, user-managed and customized to individual learning goals.”

“There’s plenty of good news about what kids are doing with digital media, from volunteering with charities and posting their own creative work to joining online study groups and supporting causes,” said James P. Steyer, founder and CEO of Common Sense Media, an independent, nonprofit organization that provides ratings and reviews of media, entertainment, and technology. “But our surveys and focus groups this year

revealed that parents don't have a clear idea of what their kids are doing with digital media. We need digital literacy programs to teach the rules of the road, and to empower parents and teachers to embrace digital tools, as well as address the potential negatives.”

The MacArthur Foundation launched its digital media and learning initiative in 2006 to explore how young people are changing as a result of digital media use and what the implications are for libraries, museums and schools.

About the MacArthur Foundation

The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation supports creative people and effective institutions committed to building a more just, verdant, and peaceful world. In addition to selecting the MacArthur Fellows, the Foundation works to defend human rights, advance global conservation and security, make cities better places, and understand how technology is affecting children and society. More information is available at www.macfound.org.

About Common Sense Media

Common Sense Media is the nation's leading nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the impact of media and entertainment on kids and families. Common Sense Media provides trustworthy ratings and reviews of media, entertainment, and technology based on child development criteria created by leading national experts. For more information, visit www.commonsensemedia.org.

About The Consortium of School Networking

Founded in 1992, the Consortium of School Networking (CoSN) is the premier professional association for school district technology leaders. CoSN is committed to providing the leadership, community and advocacy tools essential for the success of these leaders. Its mission is to empower K-12 school district technology leaders to use technology strategically to improve teaching and learning. www.cosn.org

About The National Writing Project

The National Writing Project is the most significant coordinated effort to improve writing in America. NWP sites, located on nearly 200 university and college campuses, serve more than 135,000 participants annually. NWP continues to add new sites each year with the goal of placing the writing project within reach of every teacher in America. Through its professional development model, NWP develops the leadership, programs, and research needed for teachers to help students become successful writers and learners. For more information, visit www.nwp.org.

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