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Northern Arizona University, philanthropic partners collaborate to launch the Arizona Institute for Education and the Economy

New institute will cultivate solutions that drive educational and economic equity throughout the state

Northern Arizona University announced the launch of the Arizona Institute for Education and the Economy (AIEE), which will begin operations on July 1. Under the leadership of its founding executive director, [Chad Gestson](#), who brings nearly 20 years of leadership experience in public K-12 education in Arizona, AIEE will work to convene partners at every level to cultivate actionable solutions and policies that improve K-12 outcomes and build prosperity in Arizona.

The work of the Institute is supported by a fund established at the Arizona Community Foundation (ACF). An initial multi-year investment has been given by funders that include Pharos Foundation, to power this critical work.

“At the Arizona Community Foundation, we are proud to invest in and support people, initiatives and opportunities that improve outcomes for Arizona and Arizona’s families,” said ACF President and CEO Anna Maria Chavez. “The foundation is proud to support the launch of the Arizona Institute for Education and the Economy at NAU, under the leadership of founding executive director Dr. Chad Gestson. We must continue to seek ways to convene education and community leaders to find and cultivate solutions that drive outcomes for our children, families and community.”

AIEE is uniquely situated as an institute in NAU’s renowned College of Education. As NAU pursues bold actions to broaden access to higher education and promote postgraduate success that will enable students to fully realize the promise of Arizona’s booming economy, AIEE will play an important role in connecting NAU’s impact as an engine of opportunity in postsecondary education to the pipeline of public and private K-12 schools throughout the state. By systematically studying and enhancing opportunities for educational attainment and economic equity, AIEE will help support better outcomes for all students in the state.

“I am excited to launch the Arizona Institute for Education and the Economy, which has a powerful vision for promoting equitable attainment and economic mobility for Arizonans,” said NAU President José Luis Cruz Rivera. “Arizona has an educational attainment imperative, and it is only through integrated solutions—with the support of partners at all levels throughout the state—that we can meet this challenge head-on. Under Dr. Gestson’s leadership, AIEE will bring

a solutions-oriented approach, founded in collaboration and partnership, that will uplift the fortunes of countless students in our state.”

AIEE will focus on convening partners that range from grassroots to the grass tops—K-12 educators, business and industry leaders, philanthropic organizations, community-based groups, government agencies and the state’s colleges and universities—to understand gaps facing students in their educational experiences and seek shared and actionable solutions that drive excellence, economic mobility and equitable prosperity.

Gestson has served for the last eight years as superintendent of Phoenix Union High School District (PXU), the largest public high school district in Arizona. Under his leadership, PXU has transformed into a nationally recognized district that has placed an emphasis on serving all students and developing college- and career-ready graduates.

“Throughout my service in Arizona’s public K-12 system, I’ve seen firsthand the critical importance of a strong educational pipeline for promoting economic equity,” Gestson said. “AIEE represents a transformative opportunity to bring policy- and partnership-driven solutions to a truly statewide, and even nationwide, scale. I couldn’t be more proud to return to my alma mater of NAU to lead this important effort that will do so much to shape a better future for the next generation of Arizonans.”

Closely linked to NAU’s statewide postsecondary ecosystem that is uniquely situated to drive economic mobility and social impact for the betterment of the state’s diverse communities, AIEE will work to develop and launch policies, practices, and strategic initiatives and investments throughout the state to spark action and progress in Arizona.