NEWS RELEASE

Ahn Presents MEP Policy Brief on Online Education to Maryland Legislators

College Park, MD (February 2015) — This month, the Maryland Equity Project released a new policy brief on the future of online education in Maryland. Assistant Professor June Ahn of the Department of Teaching and Learning, Policy and Leadership and the iSchool, along with MEP co-authors Bradley Quarles and Austin Beck, presented findings and recommendations at a legislative briefing in Annapolis on Wednesday, February 4.

In the brief, Dr. Ahn observes that increased access to technology is permeating school districts and there is a growing national trend toward online education, but teachers and administrators are also struggling with choosing and implementing educational technologies effectively. School governance and funding models, traditionally designed for students enrolled in a neighborhood school, encounter unique obstacles when students enroll in online schools across geographic boundaries. Most crucially, this brief argues that simply adopting policies to facilitate *access to technology* is not sufficient to improve educational outcomes.

"Instead, successful districts often begin with a very specific instructional focus – such as increasing small group instruction in classrooms – and then strategically use technology to achieve these goals, for example by employing blended learning models," Dr. Ahn points out. "Without laying out clear goals and guidelines for the use of technologies in schools and classrooms, attempts to leverage technology to improve student learning, enhance teacher proficiency, and achieve equitable education are not likely to be successful."

Dr. Ahn notes that Maryland has lagged behind some other states in pursuing a range of online learning options, but he also suggests that this "slow and steady approach" is helping the state avoid many of the problems affecting other states, such as Ohio and Pennsylvania, where experiments with fully-online charter schools have encountered numerous implementation difficulties. Currently, Maryland law only allows for the creation of "blended" charters, where students attend a physical school with on-site teachers but access most of their curriculum online. One example is College Park Academy.

Finally, Dr. Ahn reports, successfully implementing technology in classrooms requires policy that supports teachers' professional development and technological proficiency, in part by finding out what resources are available to teachers and what skills they need to better integrate technology with their teaching practices.

The Maryland Equity Project conducts independent, non-partisan research and policy analysis on education and related social and economic challenges that impact education in Maryland. Its mission is to improve public education through analysis that supports an informed public policy debate on the quality and distribution of educational opportunities in Maryland.

June Ahn is an assistant professor jointly appointed in the College of Education's Department of Teaching and Learning, Policy and Leadership, and the College of Information Studies (iSchool). He is an affiliate faculty member of the Human-Computer Interaction Lab, a senior fellow of the Center for the Advanced Study of Communities and Information, and a fellow of the Maryland Equity Project. He received his Ph.D. in Urban Education Policy from the University of Southern California.

Bradley Quarles is a research assistant with the Maryland Equity Project and a doctoral student in the Education Policy Studies program in the Department of Teaching and Learning, Policy and Leadership. Prior to joining the Equity Project, he was a research assistant in the Workforce and Lifelong Learning Program at the American Institutes for Research, where his work focused on early childhood literacy and teacher quality.

Austin Beck is a research assistant with the Maryland Equity Project and a doctoral student in the College of Education's Technology, Learning, and Leadership program. Austin has taught high school government and financial literacy, interned at the U.S. Embassy in the Marshall Islands, and conducted field research on microsavings in Uganda.

Click here to learn more about the Maryland Equity Project.

Click here to read more about Dr. Ahn's research.

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