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WEDNESDAY, APRIL 27, 2005

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**GOVERNOR BUSH ANNOUNCES “SUNSHINE CONNECTIONS” TO
IMPROVE LEARNING AND INCREASE ACCESS TO EDUCATIONAL
RESOURCES STATEWIDE**

*~Breakthrough initiative will provide greater efficiency in the classroom and
bolster student performance~*

TALLAHASSEE- Governor Jeb Bush today announced a five-year partnership with Microsoft Corporation to develop “Sunshine Connections,” an online collaborative environment that will provide Florida’s teachers with tools linking them to student data, curricular materials, document management and educators around the state. This program will support everyday classroom activities. This new technology is a core component of the Governor’s continued commitment to improving student achievement.

“Florida is committed to providing teachers with the most innovative tools as they help build the foundation for our children’s future,” said Governor Bush. “With the help of Microsoft’s U.S. Partners in Learning, this state will revolutionize teaching capabilities and reach beyond the classroom and district for resources. Through this innovative approach to student performance data management, Sunshine Connections will serve as a blueprint for other states to follow.”

The initiative will be rolled out in multiple phases by the Florida Department of Education (DOE) through Microsoft’s U.S. Partners in Learning. The first phase of the program will reach more than 35,000 users in 2005, as it is initially launched across 17 school districts and one community college. Statewide availability is targeted for the fall of 2006.

Sunshine Connections enables administrators and teachers anywhere across the state to easily access the online tools regardless of their computing environment. Building on technologies that have proven to be cost effective in education, government, and commercial sectors, Sunshine Connections is also designed to be economically sustainable in the long term.

“Together with Governor Bush and the Florida DOE we are breaking new ground with Sunshine Connections by establishing a benchmark for how this online collaborative environment can drive action at the classroom level to increase student achievement,” said Gerri Elliot, Microsoft’s senior vice president of World Wide Public Sector. “Microsoft is excited to be part of this breakthrough collaborative effort with the State of Florida to ultimately help teachers and students reach their full potential.”

Teachers, principals and educators from Florida school districts all provided Sunshine Connections input related to the development of this initiative.

“Sunshine Connections will provide greater efficiencies in the classroom enabling teachers to dedicate more time to instruction rather than paperwork,” said Education Commissioner John Winn. “Additional instruction time will lead to rising student achievement and we are encouraged by the enthusiasm we are seeing from teachers and students alike.”

For more information about Sunshine Connections, visit the Department of Education’s website at www.fldoe.org/sunshine_connections <http://www.fldoe.org/sunshine_connections>.

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