

**COMMISSIONER'S REMARKS**  
**Race to the Top**  
**July 24, 2009**  
**11 a.m.**  
*(5-7 minutes)*

Good afternoon

And thank you for the opportunity to speak today about a topic I am particularly passionate about.

The state of Florida first established a method to identify and track individual students throughout all of Florida's school districts in the mid 80's, but it might as well have been a century ago in hindsight.

The original purpose of the exercise was to develop an efficient yet effective method to accurately distribute funding for the state's local education agencies.

At the time, our initiative was met with some skepticism, but the obvious informational value of a statewide tracking system was too great to ignore.

The project was eventually embraced due in large part to the grassroots efforts that quickly materialized in support of a better system of allocating funding to our school districts.

So with that, whether we realized it or not, Florida was off and running on our journey for data.

As the years progressed, the manner of our data collection and storage continued to evolve along with the scope of information we sought.

By 2001, the state officially embarked upon the creation of a master student and educator longitudinal data warehouse capable of not only storing, but also integrating the various streams of information we aimed to collect.

By mid 2003, the warehouse was complete, and Florida's educators, administrators and policy-makers were afforded a window into our state's education system like never before.

Today, what started as a singular tracking mechanism for individual students to determine local funding has grown to encompass **27** different state and national informational sources integrated into one seamless prekindergarten to post-secondary data system that serves multiple purposes.

Right now, in the state of Florida we are tracking the progress and achievement of both students and teachers utilizing standardized testing, SAT, ACT, Advanced Placement, enrollment, graduation, certification and course completion data, just to name a few.

Within our system, we possess the ability to track every individual student's progress from prekindergarten all the way through to their very first job out of college or career training along with other outcome measures (public assistance programs, incarceration).

We have the ability to track our state's future teachers, following their progress through their college program of study into the classroom to learn more about how they utilize their education in practical application.

The data we collect allows us to inform instruction, tailor learning experiences for our students, and provide administrators with invaluable tools.

Virtually every aspect of our educational system can be reviewed and dissected to see where we are and where we are headed.

From a policy standpoint, this has served as a tremendous tool to evaluate the effectiveness of our efforts and to dissect the challenges we experience.

We know more now than ever before about our state's educational foundation and our progress and it's because of this comprehensive data warehouse.

The knowledge we've acquired allows us to make informed, insightful decisions about the future of our system alongside education stakeholders throughout the state.

Our data warehouse has also played a significant role in the successful passage of groundbreaking legislation which has helped to move our state forward.

Time and time again, we have utilized our data capabilities to provide much-needed information during the legislative process to help decision makers understand fully the challenges and benefits of carrying out specific policies.

For example, our newly created accountability and school improvement program, which combines state and federal accountability

measures, was expertly designed thanks to the depth of data we possess.

Through this new model we saw many of our most struggling schools improve this year, and the program has now been expanded to encompass every public school in Florida.

Later this fall, we'll unveil our state's new High School Accountability system, which was signed into law in spring 2008.

The new system will allow us to evaluate the progress and achievement of our high schools on several measures instead of just one.

Using our data warehouse we'll be able to gauge student participation and performance in Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate and Dual Enrollment courses, as well as credit schools for industry certification participation and performance in any of Florida's 155 programs.

We'll augment this information with SAT, ACT and CPT performance to establish how well our high schools are doing preparing our students for higher learning and career.

But perhaps the most valuable aspect of our entire system is the fact that all of this data is collected and maintained while ensuring complete and total confidentiality for all of the students and teachers tracked within it.

By utilizing a single, unique identifier for every pupil and educator from prekindergarten through to post-secondary, we measure achievement and identify challenges without targeting or exposing individuals.

It is this anonymity married with the sheer scope of the data collected that allows us incredible flexibility and depth in researching our successes and our failures.

So you may be asking, what is the next step for Florida? Where can we possibly go from here?

Moving forward, our goal is to expand the availability of this data to new populations. So far, administrators and educators utilize the information collected but there is so much more that is possible.

How can the information we possess be shared with the business community throughout our state to move our economy forward?

What role does enterprise play in the continued growth and development of our student population?

It appears that despite all of the time and energy we've invested in our system over the last 20-some years, we have only just begun to scratch the surface.

It is my hope that years from now, we'll be able to share the results of our own data mining exercises which will undoubtedly reveal new trends and phenomena that will continue to

inform our decisions and carry us forward into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Thank you for your time today and for your support for our data experiment in Florida.

We've yielded tremendous results thanks to the continued development and strengthening of our data system.

I'm confident we've only just begun, and the future of the sunshine state is brighter than ever.

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