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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OCTOBER 09, 2008

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## Governor Crist Praises Florida's Virtual Education for Leading the Nation

*~Study ranks Sunshine State as No. 1 for online learning~*

**TALLAHASSEE** – Governor Charlie Crist and Education Commissioner Dr. Eric J. Smith today accepted a plaque from the Center for Digital Education recognizing Florida as the top provider of virtual education in the nation. The Center for Digital Education recently conducted a nationwide review of state programs and support for online learning. Based on the study's findings, Florida ranked first in the nation for its policies, programs and strategies implemented to promote online learning.

"Online learning is a bright star for our state's future, and I applaud Florida Virtual School for years of success in delivering high quality educational options to all students," said Governor Crist. "As school leaders are asked to do more with less, I am encouraged to know our online learning policies are moving schools in the right direction to ensure students gain the skills and knowledge needed for life-long success. And I applaud the legislative leaders for their efforts in providing more options for 21<sup>st</sup> century learning for more families in Florida."

Julie Young, president of Florida Virtual School, and LeiLani Cauthen, publisher of Converge, joined Governor Crist, Commissioner Smith and members of the Florida Legislature to celebrate Florida's success.

"Florida continues to lead the nation in providing students opportunities to learn in new ways, and I'm thrilled our state has been recognized for its efforts," said Commissioner Smith. "Online learning is another shining example of a way to engage families in the education process, while preparing our next generation of students."

In 2008, the Florida Legislature created the School District Virtual Instruction Program, requiring school districts to offer full-time virtual instruction programs for students in kindergarten through eighth grade. In August, Florida Virtual School announced its new partnership with Connections Academy to extend online learning options to elementary school students under the new District Virtual School program.

Over the past 11 years, Florida Virtual School has delivered more than 530,000 courses to students across the state and has grown into an industry leader. The fully accredited school offers more than

90 middle and high school courses that are taught by the 530 Florida-certified teachers who are also subject-certified.

“Our focus is giving all students access to a high quality education, complete with the skills and knowledge they need for success for years to come,” said Florida Virtual School President and CEO Julie Young. “Today’s announcement is a testament to the leadership and the vision of the Florida Legislature and the Department of Education for creating an environment that allows our program to thrive and support all students.”

To view a complete copy of the Center for Digital Education report, visit [www.centerdigitaled.com/story.php?id=108006](http://www.centerdigitaled.com/story.php?id=108006).

To view the message Governor Crist shared with virtual school students and teachers at today’s event, visit [www.fldoe.org](http://www.fldoe.org).

To learn more about the Department’s virtual education options, visit [www.floridaschoolchoice.org](http://www.floridaschoolchoice.org).

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