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**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION COLLABORATES WITH STATEWIDE OFFICE OF
SUICIDE PREVENTION TO COUNTER TEEN SUICIDE IN FLORIDA**

~Governor Charlie Crist and Florida Department of Education voice support for engaging education leaders in policies that affect student emotional wellness as central to quality of life for all Floridians~

TALLAHASSEE, FL –With suicide being the third-leading cause of death for Florida youth, the newly formed State Office of Suicide Prevention has forged a robust collaboration with partners in the public and private sectors, including the Florida Department of Education, to address teen suicide statewide.

Modeling the evidence-based and much-lauded U. S. Air Force program that reduced risk of suicide by 33 percent over a six-year period, the Statewide Office of Suicide Prevention is launching an initiative to better engage Florida education leadership in proactively addressing teen suicide rates in the state.

This initiative is a multi-faceted program called *Well AwareTM* to inform and engage education leaders of the link between emotional well-being and academic achievement. It includes an interactive quarterly bulletin for school administrators—school board members, superintendents, principals and central office administration—plus best practices, and profiles Florida districts and education leaders. The first issue of *Florida Well AwareTM* is being released today and is available online at http://www.flgov.com/suicide_prevention

“In our state, suicide is tragically the third-leading cause of death for youth,” notes Gov. Crist. “To address this significant public-health threat, I signed into law, a bill establishing the Statewide Office of Suicide Prevention within the Florida Office of Drug Control. By creating this office in statute, we have prioritized the protection and welfare of youth in Florida.”

According to the National Youth Risk Behavior Survey, in 2005 14.5% of high schools students seriously considered attempting suicide in the last year and 8.5% of students actually attempted suicide.

Moreover, research from the National Institutes of Health shows that *half* of all lifetime cases of mental illness (often underlying suicide attempts and completions) begin by age 14, and three-quarters of illnesses by age 24 (according to the National Comorbidity Survey Replication, or NCS-R). This research is significant, say experts, in its implications for school systems—the place where these youths can spend the majority of their time.

“Our children—our future—cannot give up on themselves. It is in our role as school leaders that we make a difference in the lives of countless others,” says former Commissioner of Education Jeanine Blomberg. “Through our policies and our performance, we enhance academics and help to ensure our children grow to achieve their full potential. This achievement can be curtailed by circumstances over which youths sometimes have little control—their health, both physical and emotional.”

“There is much we can do to ensure Florida’s citizens of any age do not lose hope in their future and consider suicide as their only option,” says Erin MacInnes, Director of the Statewide Office of Suicide Prevention. “Teens suffering in silence and dying by suicide is something we can prevent. We’re acting aggressively and strategically to counter youth suicide in Florida.”

Well Aware is being brought to Florida by the Statewide Office of Suicide Prevention in collaboration with the Florida Department of Education, and with support from the Beth Foundation and the University of South Florida. For more information contact Director Erin MacInnes at 850-922-0498 or Erin.MacInnes@eog.MyFlorida.com.

About *Well Aware*TM

Well Aware is a multi-faceted strategic communications program to inform and engage education leaders of the link between emotional well-being and academic achievement. It includes an interactive quarterly bulletin for school administrators with research-based content, best practices in the national prevention arena, and other information relevant to school leaders. *Well Aware* is a program from Point de Vue Communications, Inc. (pdvpr.com), publishers of *Advancing Suicide Prevention* (advancingosp.org), a national strategic health policy magazine. For more information contact *Well Aware* staff at talkback@wellawaresp.org.

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