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## **Governor Crist Greet Student Representatives at Kids Only Town Hall Meeting**

~ Student panel addresses Florida's Children and Youth Cabinet on issues facing Florida's youth ~  
March 31, 2009

TALLAHASSEE – Governor Charlie Crist today greeted student representatives from middle and high schools across Florida at the Kids Only Town Hall Meeting. The event, held during the legislative session's annual Children's Week, provides a forum for students from across the state to pose poignant questions to the Florida Children and Youth Cabinet about the state of children's issues and services.

"It is important that our leaders hear what Florida's youth have to say and consider their ideas to make our state better for future generations," said Governor Crist. "We recognize that children are our most treasured resource, and Florida's Children and Youth Cabinet is working to ensure that the children of Florida will grow up safe, healthy, educated and prepared to meet their full potential."

Selected from a statewide pool of applications, twelve student panelists and one student moderator exchanged questions and answers with the Florida Children and Youth Cabinet on issues that ranged from positive youth development, mental health and substance abuse treatment, early childhood education as well as many others.

"Every student brings excellent ideas and suggestions to the Cabinet's attention, and I know we will remember these great ideas as we move forward with Cabinet initiatives," said Lt. Governor Kottkamp, Chair of the Children's Cabinet. "I thank these bright students for participating in their government's process and making their voices heard."

"Governor Crist and Lt. Governor Kottkamp have made children's issues a priority in their administration," said Jim Kallinger, Florida's Chief Child Advocate and Children's Cabinet member. "It is their dedication and passion for children that is building on our successes in child welfare and ensuring that we continue to improve our state for future generations."

### **Accomplishments in Children's Priorities**

Governor Crist has made Florida's children a top priority for his administration. His recent accomplishments in education, health care and fitness include:

#### **Education**

- Education Week's "Quality Counts: Portrait of a Population" report ranked Florida's education 10th in the nation, up significantly from 14th in 2008 and 31st in 2007.

- More Florida students are graduating than ever before (75 percent), with African-American and Hispanic students showing some of the greatest gains.
- More than 140,000 children are currently enrolled in a Florida Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten program. Children who attended a VPK program, even for part of the time, performed better on tests given to kindergartners across the state.

### **Health Care for Children**

- As of March 2009, more than 1.5 children are enrolled in KidCare, up from more than 1.4 million in June 2008. In addition, the removal of the 10 percent “full pay cap” in KidCare has allowed more than 548,000 uninsured children to access health care coverage.

### **Adoption**

- Florida set a new state adoption record by finalizing 3,674 adoptions in the 2007-08 Fiscal Year. Florida now leads the nation in the percentage of adoptions of children from out-of-home care. Meanwhile, 2008-09 is on track for a 20 percent increase, potentially reaching almost 4,000 finalized adoptions.

### **Fitness**

- In the 2008 spring semester, 132,128 students in 307 elementary schools participated in the Governor’s Fitness Challenge. In 2008-09, the program expanded to include middle schools. Students participating in the challenge invest 90 minutes each week to improve five skill activities related to strength, endurance, flexibility, speed and agility.

### **About the Florida Children and Youth Cabinet**

In 2007, Governor Charlie Crist signed the legislation that created the Children and Youth Cabinet. The Children and Youth Cabinet consists of 20 members including Lt. Governor Kottkamp who serves as Chairman, the secretaries of the Department of Children and Families, the Department of Juvenile Justice and the Agency for Health Care Administration, as well as the directors of the Agency for Persons with Disabilities and the Agency for Workforce Innovation. Other members include the State Surgeon General, the Commissioner of Education, the director of the Guardian ad Litem Office and the Chief Child Advocate.

Additionally, the Governor appointed five members from around the state who are representatives of children and youth advocacy organizations, but who are not service providers. Rounding out the 20 are the five ex-officio members including: the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, the Attorney General, and the Chief Financial Officer, or their appointed designees.

The Cabinet has created a vision, mission and strategic plan for better coordinating children’s services. The strategic plan, centered upon a long-term commitment to children and youth issues and the alignment of all public resources that serve children and youth and their families in a manner that

supports the healthy growth and development of children, guides the Cabinet in achieving its goal of a shared and cohesive vision and mission.

For more information on the Children and Youth Cabinet, including Cabinet initiatives and future meetings, visit [http://www.flgov.com/youth\\_cabinet](http://www.flgov.com/youth_cabinet).