



**For Immediate Release:** October 14, 2009

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## **Statement of Superintendent of Public Instruction On Loss of Adult Education Data**

Superintendent of Public Instruction Patricia I. Wright issued the following statement today, regarding the commonwealth's efforts to notify former adult education students whose personal data were recently lost:

"Protecting the privacy of students is a solemn obligation, and the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) has policies and secure systems to safeguard data and prevent the loss or misuse of personal information. That's why the department's contract with Virginia Tech for research related to federal reporting requirements includes a restricted-use data agreement and an affidavit of non-disclosure.

"However, no policy or system is immune from human error. Information stored on a flash drive was lost in Richmond on September 21 after being given to a representative of Virginia Tech's Center for Assessment, Evaluation and Educational Programming for the purpose of conducting federally mandated research.

"At this time, VDOE has no information to indicate that the device has been found or that any of the information stored on the flash drive has been accessed or misused. Nevertheless, to ensure individuals have the information they need to take necessary precautions, I have directed my staff to treat this incident as if it were a data breach and to contact persons whose data were lost as would be required by state law in the event of an actual breach.

"This week, 77,577 former adult education students — whose data were on the drive and for whom addresses were available — will receive letters from VDOE advising them of the loss and of steps they may take to protect themselves from identity theft. I urge everyone whose personal data were on the flash drive to follow the steps described in the letter.

"The flash drive also contained personal data for 25,693 former adult education students whose addresses are unknown to the department. Persons who did not receive a letter, but finished an adult education course between April 1, 2007, and June 30, 2009, or who passed a high school equivalency test between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2009, may call VDOE toll free at 877-347-5224 between 9 a.m. and 6 p.m., Monday through Friday for information on the incident and measures to protect their identity.

"I know that I speak for all VDOE employees in expressing regret over the loss of the flash drive. We are united in our determination to assist those potentially impacted by this incident and are committed to mitigating any risk to individuals."

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