

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: September 7, 2005

CONTACT: Lindsay Hodges (850) 488-4257

**Agency for Persons with Disabilities Welcomes National Governors Association Policy
Academy Delegation**
~~ Academy makes initial visit to Florida ~~

TALLAHASSEE - The Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) today welcomed the National Governors Association (NGA) Policy Academy on Improving Outcomes for Young Adults with Disabilities. This site visit marked the first meeting of the Florida delegation, which has outlined a vision "that all individuals, with and without disabilities, live, learn, work and participate together in all life experiences; that this initiative be used to refine and build capacity of existing work in the state."

"As we embark on the NGA policy academy initiative, we aim to shift the paradigm of social services by fully recognizing the valued contributions persons with disabilities make in society," said Shelly Brantley, Director of the Agency for Persons with Disabilities and leader of the Florida delegation. "Our participation represents a new opportunity for Florida to be at the forefront of maximizing the potential of young adults with disabilities to contribute to their communities with real jobs and a better life."

Through the unprecedented leadership and support of Governor Jeb Bush and the Florida Legislature, Florida is already a leader in innovative programs for persons with disabilities. The Academy offers Florida's delegation the opportunity to incorporate the state's innovations into national policy. It also complements the work of Governor Bush's Blue Ribbon Task Force and Implementation Group.

"Today's meeting is a critical step in Florida's steadfast efforts to develop and implement effective policies that promote the American dream for youth with disabilities," added Nila Benito, a parent advocate and Florida delegate.

The NGA Policy Academy brings together teams from different states to examine issues relating to youths with disabilities and form policy solutions for better outcomes. Teams from Florida, Connecticut, Kansas, Colorado, Montana, and Washington have been selected to participate.

Florida's delegation is a cross-representation of agency representatives, stakeholders, advocates, consumers and legislators. Joining Director Brantley are: Senator Steven Wise, M.D.; Curtis Austin, President and CEO of Workforce Florida; Gary J. Weston, Executive Director of the Advocacy Center for Persons with Disabilities; Beth Kidder, Bureau Chief of Medicaid Services at the Agency for Health Care Administration; Dr. Alex Penn-Williams, Director of Interagency Programs for the Florida Department of Education; Bill Palmer, Division Director of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Department of Education; Nila Benito, parent advocate; Alex Brown, self advocate; and Michele Pollard, Educational Policy Analyst for the Bureau of Special Education and Student Services.