

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2011

**CONTACT: DOE PRESS OFFICE**  
(850) 245-0413

**SUNSHINE STATE SCHOLARS PROGRAM TURNS FLORIDA'S TOP STEM STUDENTS INTO BLUE CHIP SCHOLARS**

*~ Two-day awards and recruitment event puts a spotlight on Florida's best STEM scholars ~*

**ORLANDO** – Florida's efforts to expand and enrich its focus on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) careers got an added boost during the last two days through the newly revamped Sunshine State Scholars program being championed by the Florida Education Foundation and the Florida Department of Education. This year's Scholars program invited the top-performing STEM-focused students from each school district to attend an event honoring their achievements. The program also provided each student with direct access to Florida's university and college recruiters to discuss postsecondary opportunities and reasons why their talents and knowledge would bring them the greatest success if kept here in the Sunshine State.

"The Sunshine State Scholars Program is exactly what Florida needs to keep our STEM talent here at home and build up the types of thriving industries that will revitalize our economy," said Florida's Commissioner of Education Dr. Eric J. Smith. "These STEM scholars truly have a chance to make a difference here in Florida and I can't thank our program sponsors enough for making this awards and recruitment ceremony possible."

The program began yesterday evening with a welcome reception keynoted by Commissioner Smith and Stacy Carlson of the Helios Education Foundation, one of the event's main sponsors. This morning's activities featured a breakfast event headlined by Dr. Will Holcombe, Chancellor of the Florida College System, and Frank Brogan, Chancellor of the State University System of Florida, followed by a recruitment fair where the scholars began meeting with higher education officials to talk about their futures and explore the opportunities that could await them in a Florida postsecondary education. The event was capped off with an awards luncheon where scholars were treated to an inspirational speech by Florida's Public Schools Chancellor Dr. Frances Haithcock, and a keynote address by Mark Woodbury, from Universal Orlando Resort, who shared details about the growth of immersive storytelling and ground-breaking technology found in Universal Orlando's most iconic attractions.

"The STEM disciplines are the key to Florida's economic future. These scholars are tomorrow's industry leaders in the cutting edge technologies that will keep us competitive as a nation," said Dr. Holcombe.

"As we recognize these Sunshine State Scholars currently in high school, we hope that the State University System will be where these students pursue their degrees. We need the best and the brightest to join our march in both keeping and growing the national and global competitiveness of Florida," Brogan said. "The New Florida Initiative – a partnership of the Legislature and the State University System – offers the latest exciting doors of opportunity to be involved in tomorrow's research, innovations, lab discoveries, new market products and vital societal cures."

The Sunshine State Scholars program is a collaboration between the Florida Education Foundation (FEF), the State University System of Florida, the Division of Florida Colleges, and the Florida Department of Education. Event sponsors of this year's program include the Helios Education Foundation, Universal Orlando Resort, Gulf Power, Florida Trend Magazine, and the Florida Lottery.

"I'm proud to have the Foundation involved in this wonderful event and to see our partners in the business community contribute so generously to make it possible," said Florida Education Foundation Chairman Alan Levy. "Keeping our top scholars in their native state presents the type of win-win scenario we have been looking for – better opportunities for them and a spark of home-grown talent to drive our workforce into the future."

###