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Commissioner of Education

January 13, 2003

MEMORANDUM

TO: District Superintendents
FROM: Ruben Lopez
RE: Changes to the Florida Information Resource Network (FIRN)

For the past 18 years, the Florida Information Resource Network, better known as FIRN, has provided Internet access, content filtering and other data services to all Florida schools. The use of the Internet as an educational tool has increased tremendously over the last three years, severely challenging FIRN's capacity to meet the needs of Florida's educators, students, administrators and parents without significant growth. Additional funding necessary for such growth has not been available, causing the Office of Technology and Information Services' staff to explore other solutions.

The greatest opportunity for improved Internet service to educational institutions is through the outsourcing of FIRN management. With this approach, increased funding can be realized for services through E-Rate, potentially increasing available bandwidth to schools by 300 percent, eliminating extensive system down-time, and allowing new services to be added as needed.

In order to realize these benefits in Florida, we must

- Privatize the management of FIRN,
- Increase funding through E-Rate, and
- Limit dial-up access to only those areas in the state that have no local service provider.

We are excited about this new direction for FIRN, and about what it will mean for education in Florida.

Several presentations about the new services will be delivered at the Florida Educational Technology Conference, February 4-6, 2003. District technology staff will be briefed on changes and how your district will be affected.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at 850-921-9334 if you have further questions.

Cc: Commissioner Jim Horne

RUBEN LOPEZ
Chief Technology Officer

