



# VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION NEWS

DIVISION OF POLICY AND COMMUNICATIONS • P.O. BOX 2120, RICHMOND, VA 23218-2120

**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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COMMONWEALTH *of* VIRGINIA  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

**TO CERTAIN INDIVIDUALS REGARDING PERSONAL DATA:**

This is to notify you of a potential loss of data stored on a flash drive being used to transfer data pursuant to a contract between the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) and Virginia Tech. We have no evidence that any of the information has been misused or that it is in the possession of any person as a result of this incident. However, we want to inform you that the information contained on this flash drive included your name, social security number (if provided), and birth date. The data are related to individuals served by adult education and literacy programs and individuals who received a high school equivalency certificate in Virginia. These data do not include high school grades, high school transcripts, or test scores.

We advise that you take the following actions to help guard your credit and identity related to this or other potential future incidents.

- Monitor your account statements and credit reports for unusual activity. Identity thieves may hold personal information for a time before using it. Periodic monitoring can help you spot problems and address them quickly.
- Request a free credit report annually from each of the three major credit agencies. Checking your free credit report helps reduce risk from new accounts and may provide early notice of a potential fraud or incident of identity theft. To order your report, visit [www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com) or call toll-free (877) 322-8228.
- Call the credit agency if you do not understand something on your credit report. If you find suspicious activity on your credit report, call your local police or sheriff's office and file a report of identity theft. Keep a copy of the report—you may need it for creditors. You also should file a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission at [www.ftc.gov/idtheft](http://www.ftc.gov/idtheft) or at (877) ID-THEFT (1-877-438-4338).

Place a "fraud alert" on your credit file by contacting one of three major credit reporting agencies so that creditors contact you before opening or changing an account. The service is free and easy to request; when one major credit agency places an alert, it notifies the others to do so, too. *(Please note: you will be asked for your social security number. In general, in other circumstances, you should not give that number out.)*

Equifax  
1-888-766-0008  
P. O. Box 740241  
Atlanta, GA 30374-0241  
[www.equifax.com](http://www.equifax.com)

Experian  
1-888-397-3741  
P. O. Box 9532  
Allen, TX 75013  
[www.experian.com](http://www.experian.com)

TransUnion  
1-800-680-7289  
P. O. Box 6790  
Fullerton, CA 92834-6790  
[www.transunion.com](http://www.transunion.com)

For further information regarding how you can protect yourself against potential fraud or misuse of your personal information, check the Federal Trade Commission Web site at <http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/microsites/idtheft/>. Helpful information can also be found at the Web site of the Virginia Attorney General: [www.oag.state.va.us](http://www.oag.state.va.us). Go to "Frequently Asked Questions" and click "Identity Theft."

We regret this incident and any concerns it may raise. The VDOE is serious about the security of personal data. We maintain ongoing and extensive efforts to ensure that personal data are well protected. Please send questions or concerns to the following e-mail address: [dataincident@doe.virginia.gov](mailto:dataincident@doe.virginia.gov).