Testimony of
Dr. Danny A. Harris
Chief Information Officer
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Before the Subcommittee on Technology, Information Policy,
Intergovernmental Relations and Procurement Reform
House Committee on Oversight and Government Affairs

Hearing on
"Transparency through Technology: Evaluating Federal Open-Government Efforts"
March 11, 2011.

Good morning Chairman Lankford, Ranking Member Connolly, and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee today. My name is Danny Harris and I am the Chief Information Officer for the U.S. Department of Education, a position I have had the privilege of holding since October 2008.

I am pleased to discuss the Department's transparency efforts specific to the open-government initiative. On his first day in office, the President sent a memo directing all federal agencies to create unprecedented levels of openness in government. The Department of Education has taken this directive to heart. Our open government plan makes our efforts more transparent, participatory, and collaborative. I am personally committed to these goals, and the Department looks forward to building upon the solid foundation put in place during the first two years of this initiative. For decades, the Department has collected, analyzed, and used data to inform our delivery of services. At the Department of Education, we collect data about the overall condition and effectiveness of education provided by the States, local educational agencies, and institutions of higher education. A key part of our mission is to provide useful information to States, assisting their efforts to allocate resources to educate citizens in the most effective and efficient way. Equally important to our mission is supporting the use of Federal resources toward ensuring fair access to education for all. Open Government efforts place special emphasis on providing information to the public, leading to increased transparency into the information we and the States use for decision-making.

We have established a cross-functional team to develop our Open Government Plan, which is available on our website [www.ed.gov/open]. Also, we have established a governing body to oversee departmental execution of the Open Government Plan and to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of all information collection and dissemination activities. Decisions and recommendations from this board will directly affect IT spending that supports collection and dissemination of information. This coordinated effort will efficiently manage duplicative data requests, reduce burdens on states and local agencies, and optimize department-wide data

aggregation. The board helps coordinate across our principal offices and ensures we are providing new data for public dissemination. At the end of the day, we are not only delivering data—we are delivering tools to drive innovation.

Prior to implementing Open Government efforts, we provided similar information in toolsets, allowing citizens to view the information in ways we thought were useful. Open Government efforts altered this framework, and we now deliver the information in a raw, machine-readable format allowing citizens to analyze the data and transform those data into more useful aggregated information. This open access to data has undoubtedly created new insights and views, enabling previously unthought-of ways for citizens to understand, view and track federal dollars. The clear benefit is that citizens can now view the delivery of services with comprehensive information, and the public's ability to access and analyze these data makes Federal spending transparent—which helps ensure departments are accountable for results and outcomes.

The challenge for the Department is to ensure the quality of the data provided to the various Internet sites (e.g., USAspending.gov, , Federalreporting.gov, and Recovery.gov). Key attributes of data quality include availability, timeliness, accuracy and privacy. The challenge for all stakeholders is to establish proper awareness of and context for these data.

We have already seen positive outcomes as a result of these initiatives. For example, in Race to the Top, we provided a detailed description of the process used to review and select the winners. The Department, in implementing Race to the Top, has demonstrated unprecedented transparency, by posting all applications as well as peer reviewer scores and comments for the public to view. To help spur innovation, our Investing in Innovation team created an Open Innovation Portal—a website where education innovators can share ideas and collaborate, where funders and educators can point out needs, and where people can gather to propose, develop, fund, implement, and improve education solutions in and outside of the classroom. Finally, when the Department dispersed the $48.6 billion State Fiscal Stabilization Fund (SFSF), a part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, it demanded accountability and transparency. The Department posted all SFSF applications and amendments to ensure stakeholders were informed about a states' use of the program funds.

We take the commitment to transparency seriously at all levels within the Department. In May 2009, Secretary Arne Duncan launched his Listening and Learning Tour to engage the public directly in discussing education reform in America. The Department used the input we received from this nearly yearlong dialogue led by the Secretary and senior staff in meetings across America in preparing the comprehensive Blueprint for reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

Transparency through technology provides an opportunity to engage with the public in making the Department of Education more accountable. Specifically, the Department has a significant role in complying with the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (Transparency Act) due to the large number of grants, contracts and loans that we administer. These funds go to numerous recipients and sub-recipients in the States and territories, and the public should know where these funds are going, for what purpose, and what results they should expect. We submit grant and loan funding transactions on a bi-weekly basis from our grants management system in the Federal Assistance Award Data System Plus file layout. We input contract funding transactions into the Federal Procurement Data System – Next Generation system in real time during contract award via our Contracts and Purchasing Support System. Both our grants management and contracts systems are integrated with the Department's General Ledger, ensuring that the transactions reported to USAspending.gov are directly traceable to transactions in our financial system. Finally, the Privacy Act and Federal guidelines govern how we protect personally identifiable information, while complying with the Transparency Act and other public reporting requirements.

In conclusion, I believe that Open Government, USASpending.gov, federalreporting.gov, and recovery.gov all work together to put more and better information in the hands of the public. These initiatives provide transparency that supports participation and accountability. The benefits are tremendous because these efforts lead to increased accountability, transparency, and recognizable links between spending and results.

Thank you Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee for your attention to this important issue, and I would be happy to answer any questions.

Danny A. Harris, Ph.D.
Chief Information Officer, U.S. Department of Education

A 26 year veteran of the U.S. Department of Education, Dr. Danny Harris became the Chief Information Officer (CIO) at the U.S. Department of Education on October 1, 2008. Prior to becoming the CIO, Dr. Harris served for four years as the Deputy Chief Financial Officer.

As the CIO, Dr. Harris oversees the Department's enterprise-wide IT services, including its IT infrastructure, desktops, network, disaster recovery, and printing services. Additionally, he procures and maintains the Department's most mission-critical Financial Management Systems, including the Accounting System, Contracts and Purchasing System, Travel Management System, and the Departments Grant Management System. Dr. Harris also manages the Department's participation and implementation of Federal CIO Council Initiatives and coordinates Council activities throughout the Department. He also frequently collaborates with the Office of Management and Budget and the White House on eGovernment initiatives, such as the recent 25-Point Implementation Plan for Reform of Federal IT.

Most recently, Dr. Harris served on OMB's Financial Systems Advisory Board, which was responsible for significantly reducing waste in the implementation of financial systems across the federal government.

Dr. Harris has served on the Board of Advisors for the Information Technology (IT) Department at the College of Southern Maryland from 1994 to present. He is also currently an adjunct professor at Howard University, teaching courses in Computer Technology. Prior to his tenure at Howard University, he taught at George Mason University, in disciplines such as Organizational Communications Management and Research Methodology and Design.

A native of North Carolina, Dr. Harris holds a B.A. in Communications from North Carolina A&T State University, and an M.A. and PhD. in Organizational Management from Howard University.