

# The Mission Is Education: Inside the Strategy, Leadership, and Vision of the country's top-selling Lottery

**John Davis**, Secretary, Florida Lottery

**PGRI INTRODUCTION:** With over \$9.4 billion in sales for FY2024, the Florida Lottery ranks #1 in the nation. This isn't a story about marketing, promotions, or product. This is a story about visionary leadership, operational discipline, and a bold long-term strategy. It's about Plan 2030—the Florida Lottery's blueprint for sustained growth, innovation, and impact. It's about a team united behind a purpose: to fund education, empower futures, and serve the people of Florida with integrity and excellence.



**Paul Jason:** “How would you describe the mission of the Florida Lottery?”

**John Davis:** Our mission here is clear and impactful: to maximize revenues for the enhancement of public education in Florida, while upholding the highest standards of integrity and public trust, as outlined in Chapter 24 of the Florida Statutes. Every decision we make supports that purpose, and for us, it is more than just selling tickets, it is about delivering real value to Florida's students, families, and communities.

**Paul Jason:** “Florida leads the nation in lottery sales for the fourth year in a row, an impressive milestone. But behind those numbers is a deeper mission. How does the Lottery translate record-breaking sales into long-term impact for Floridians?”

**John Davis:** It starts with running a responsible, efficient, and forward-thinking operation. Since 1988, the Florida Lottery has contributed over \$48 billion to education; supporting K-12 schools, colleges and universities, and our vocational and technical schools. One of our most impactful efforts is being the primary funding source for the Florida Bright Futures Scholarship program, which has

helped more than a million students earn college degrees or vocational certifications. Record sales are only meaningful when they translate into real educational opportunities and that is our focus every day.

**Paul Jason:** “You often speak about education as more than just a cause—it's a mission. How has that shared commitment to educational opportunity shaped the culture and priorities of the Florida Lottery?”

**John Davis:** Great question. At the Florida Lottery, our beneficiary is education, and we believe it is the cornerstone and gateway to opportunity. Whether it is a degree or a certification, we want every student, regardless of their background, to have access to a better future. Our culture is built around that belief, which aligns with the priorities of the Governor and Legislature and is reflected in how we operate: through partnerships, student-focused programs that drive long-term success, and workforce alignment.

**Paul Jason:** “You have forged a powerful network of relationships with a variety of groups across the state of Florida. Talk about why they're so important to the Lottery's mission?”



**John Davis:** Partnerships independent of our retailers extend our reach and deepen our impact around education and expand awareness about the Bright Futures Scholarship program. Whether we're collaborating with school districts, nonprofits, or local organizations, it is an opportunity to meet students and families where they are. Programs like our work with the Orange Bowl Committee, Take Stock in Children, and the Orlando Magic help us support learning environments, mentoring, and college readiness. The Florida Lottery is the revenue engine, but these partnerships ensure that impact is felt where it matters most, by our students.

**Paul Jason:** “The Lottery operates with a unique blend of public mission and private-sector efficiency. How does that dual identity help translate your educational vision into real-world results—both in terms of revenue and student impact?”

**John Davis:** We run the Florida Lottery like a business, focused on results. While

we are a state agency, we operate with a private-sector mindset, maximizing revenue to provide additional revenue for education. We are not just funding programs like Florida Bright Futures, we're also raising awareness and ensuring students, parents and communities throughout Florida understand what is available to them. Our partnerships amplify that message, and our efficiency ensures the highest possible returns to education.

**Paul Jason:** "Your dedication to the next generation of Americans is truly inspiring. You've also noted that the Florida Lottery is a multibillion-dollar business enterprise which means staying focused on delivering revenue for education. That requires adopting many of the same strategies used by large, market-driven commercial brands. Tell us about your sales incentive program."

**John Davis:** Prior to joining the Florida Lottery, I spent nine years in medical device sales, which helps me understand many of the things that motivate performance. About half of our employees are in product and sales roles, and the leadership team has worked to build a culture that rewards excellence, and this is one of many examples. The Governor and Legislature supported this legislative budget request, allowing us to formally incentivize the sales team and the overall results have been rewarding. We have led the nation in revenue generation for four years running, with average transfers ranging between \$5.5 to \$7 million a day to education. Competition, recognition, and incentives help drive performance and everyone wins.

**Paul Jason:** "Am I wrong to think that the incentive doesn't need to be large amount-it just needs to be enough to make it fun, spark little healthy competition, make things interesting, and show people that their hard work is noticed and appreciated?"

**John Davis:** You're exactly right. Incentives don't have to be large; they just need to spark competition, add excitement, and show appreciation. That mindset is key to how we operate. Every decision is ROI-driven, not just in dollars, but in team morale and as well. When people feel valued and supported, they perform at their best, and with the backing of the Governor and Legislature and a motivated team, we'll keep building on that momentum.

**Paul Jason:** "Your investment in people extends to the whole team, not just sales people. Can you talk more about how you harness the energy of the whole team to reach stretch goals?"

## "We were created to operate like a business enterprise—and that's exactly how we run the Florida Lottery every day."

**John Davis:** You're spot on. I spend a lot of time traveling across the state, visiting our nine (9) district offices, with weeks passing at times with me not in Tallahassee. The Governor has emphasized that he wants his agency heads in the field sharing the work we're doing, which is in-line with my desire to spend as much time as possible in the field with our district teams. If we expect excellence, we must show support and express gratitude. These visits allow me to gain first-hand insight into their needs and gather ideas and suggestions to keep us moving forward. We maintain open communication, and I've made it clear to everyone: there are no repercussions for raising concerns. When you take care of your people, they will take care of the mission.

**Paul Jason:** "You've clearly cultivated strong relationships with the Governor, legislators, and stakeholders. How do you do that?"

**John Davis:** Paul, I consider myself very fortunate. One thing that makes the Florida Lottery unique is it's a standalone agency with the Secretary reporting directly to the Governor, which speaks to the value of this agency. With vast experience in both the public-private sectors; having served as a former political operative, and community and business leader- this combination has played an intricate role in establishing long-term relationships and building trust across various spectrums at every level. Relationships matter, and we've been able to build upon them by being transparent, strategic, and showing that we are results-oriented.

**Paul Jason:** "The Florida Lottery takes a firm stance against retailers who violate rules and regulations- especially around bulk purchasing or facilitating the re-selling of lottery tickets outside of Florida. Can you speak to your enforcement approach?"

**John Davis:** Integrity is non-negotiable. We have over 13,500 retailers, and when rules are broken or issues occur, we act quickly to rectify them without hesitation. The bulk purchase and resale of lottery tickets outside of Florida is a clear violation of our rules and regulations, and we make this very clear to our retailers. We have had recent reminders

that even when you're doing everything right, things can still slip through the cracks. That's why we remain vigilant.

Our Division of Security is a fully accredited, state law enforcement agency, and they work closely with our general counsel, the inspector general, and local law enforcement to ensure the integrity of our games. We have a law enforcement presence in every district, which isn't the case for every state lottery. They are backed by the latest technology to help us monitor and investigate anything unusual.

We constantly reinforce what is expected of our retailers, provide clear guidance, and maintain close relationships through our sales team, and we will continue tightening our processes to protect the public's trust in the Florida Lottery.

**Paul Jason:** "You've even shut down top-selling retailers who didn't comply with your directives."

**John Davis:** That's right, Paul. Florida is a very business-friendly state, and we welcome retailers who want to be a part of the Lottery's mission and succeed commercially. But violating the law or rules will not be tolerated. Even top-performing retailers will be shut down if they refuse to comply. Being highly successful while breaking the rules is not something we're going to reward.

**Paul Jason:** Going forward, can you describe your business planning process?

**John Davis:** Absolutely. We approach the Florida Lottery with a business mindset, guided by a 2030 strategic roadmap currently in development to align our short and long-term objectives. Over the past four years, we've consistently exceeded \$9 billion in annual sales, and our focus now is on how to sustainably surpass \$10 billion.

Our planning process includes continuous trend analysis, understanding consumer behavior, and evaluating emerging technologies to stay ahead of the market, and we will use SWOT analysis to anticipate opportunities and challenges.

As a business enterprise with government oversight, we will continue to engage with the Governor's team and the Florida Legislature to bring forward clear data, sound strategies, and a purposeful vision to maintain our status as an industry leader.

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# Q & A with Secretary John Davis and the Florida Lottery Team

**Paul Jason:** Do you try to preserve a product mix that drives growth in draw-based games? Or does the product mix not matter that much as long as net funds to good causes continues to increase every year?

Absolutely: Maintaining a healthy product mix—with targeted strategies for Draw game growth—is key to sustainable growth. While our overarching goal is to maximize funding for education, we know that a balanced, engaging portfolio helps drive consistent participation across a broad player base. This approach helps stabilize revenue during non-jackpot periods and mitigates the impact of payout variance.

That's why Florida has made strategic, sustained investment in strengthening our Draw game lineup. Over the past decade—particularly since the first billion-dollar jackpot—we've taken deliberate steps to reduce jackpot dependency and build long-term resilience in this category. That includes:

- Rebranding and optimizing in-state games
- Launching new offerings such as **PICK 2**, **PICK 5**, **CASH POP**, and **CASH4LIFE**
- Introducing add-on features to increase play flexibility
- Adjusting draw times to expand access
- Adding midday and additional weekly draws
- Running targeted promotions to drive engagement

This approach has helped us maintain momentum in the Draw category, even during periods of low jackpots, ensuring stable revenues and continued contributions to Florida's students.

**Do players want a range of price points in the draw games like they do in the Scratch-Off games?**

We've seen that price sensitivity varies significantly between product categories. Regarding draw games, while there was reluctant acceptance from casual players following previous price increases from \$1

to \$2, the jump to \$5 has alienated a larger group of players, including core players, resulting in a 40% drop in transactions.

That's why we remain committed to preserving a full range of price points in both Draw and Scratch-Off games. In Scratch, for example, we've observed a more natural migration to higher price points. Players are often drawn to the stronger value proposition: better odds, bigger prizes, and a more immersive experience. This shift happens organically, not because we've removed lower-priced options, but because players see the benefit.

Ultimately, choice matters. Providing options across the pricing spectrum helps keep the Lottery accessible while encouraging gradual engagement with higher-tier products.

**Are Lottery Vending Machines the wave of the future or are we seeing retailers develop new ways to serve the consumer?**

Self-service is absolutely growing, and Lottery Vending Machines are a big part of that trend—generating over 13.5% of total sales last year. They also play a strategic role by extending our footprint across Florida's busy retail landscape, increasing both visibility and accessibility, especially in high-traffic locations.

But convenience should never come at the cost of the customer experience. Take for example, a recent visit I made to a store that had completely eliminated staffed checkouts. Trying to navigate a self-checkout system with a cart full of construction materials wasn't only inefficient but also frustrating. It reminded me that technology should enhance service, not replace it entirely.

Lottery is no different. Our market research consistently shows that while some players enjoy the speed of self-service, many still prefer the personal connection and assistance that come with traditional counter sales. In fact, retailers that offer both tend to outperform those that go all-in on automation.

Self-service is here to stay, but our strategy is to integrate it thoughtfully, enhancing the customer journey without removing the

human element that drives long-term loyalty and trust.

**How effective is your Lottery Sales Performance Incentive Plan? Describe it, how you got approval to implement it, and how well it is working?**

Our sales incentive plan has been a tremendous success. From the start, we designed it to be a shared success story—for our sales reps, our retailers, and ultimately for Florida students, families and communities. It rewards performance, encourages innovation, and aligns everyone's efforts toward a common goal: increasing revenue to fund education in Florida. In that sense, the program truly pays for itself.

When I joined the Lottery in 2020, launching a performance-based incentive program was one of my top priorities. As someone with a background in sales, I've always believed in the principle that you have to invest in growth to achieve it. It required close collaboration with the Governor's Office, our state legislators, and their staff to bring the program to life—and their support was instrumental in getting it across the finish line.

Since implementation, we've seen measurable and meaningful results:

- Scratch-Off sales are exceeding early projections
- New game activation rates are strong from day one
- Float percentages remain low
- Retailer recruitment is reaching record highs statewide

The beauty of this model is that it doesn't just generate more revenue—it creates momentum. It motivates teams, fosters accountability, and builds a culture of continuous improvement. We're committed to building on this momentum by refining and expanding the incentive plan in the years ahead. As always, our focus is on delivering a positive return on investment and making data-driven decisions that support our mission to fund education in Florida. ■