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College Readiness, Access and  
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## POLICY RESEARCH BRIEF



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### **Preparing our Students to Engage, Communicate, and Compete in a Global Economy: The Case for Latin American and Caribbean History**

By Paul J. Dosal and Ana T. Torres-Ayala

Florida's State Board of Education is currently revising its Sunshine State Standards to develop World Class Education Standards that will "prepare Florida's students to effectively engage, communicate, and compete in a global economy."<sup>1</sup> In the upcoming legislative session, Speaker of the House Marco Rubio has once again placed a high priority on the development of a "world-class curriculum to improve the rigor and relevance of our schools." Rubio explains that "our children are no longer just competing with children in Birmingham and Seattle for the jobs of the future; their competition sits in the classrooms of Bangalore and Shanghai."<sup>2</sup> Revisions to the math and science standards have been completed, and the state's Social Science Standards are being revised. It is therefore appropriate and timely for state educators and policy makers to consider the essential elements of a rigorous and relevant social studies curriculum that will prepare our students to participate fully, communicate effectively and compete advantageously in the global economy of the twenty-first century.

The Sunshine State Standards currently require students to take one course in U.S. History and another in World History. Although these requirements are common across the nation, a recent report found that half of American teenagers did not know when the Civil War was fought, and one in four thought that Columbus sailed to the New World some time after 1750, not 1492.<sup>3</sup> Given these startling results, there is little doubt that we still need to improve student performance in U.S. and World History. The World History course offers a valuable introduction to the development of civilizations around the world, but given that it covers ancient Egypt, the Roman Empire, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Industrial Revolution, and the nationalist movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is difficult to provide in-depth coverage of any region or topic.<sup>4</sup> According to Dennis Holt, Supervisor of Secondary Social Studies for the School District of Hillsborough County, "In World History, we're attempting to cover 10,000 years worth of history in one school year and based on that breadth of coverage it is difficult to explore specific time periods or regions in detail."

A world-class high school curriculum should provide ample opportunities for our students to learn more about the history, cultures, and languages of the countries with which we trade and interact on a regular basis. Florida's most valuable trading partners are located in the Western Hemisphere. The history of our neighbors in Latin America and the Caribbean receives no more than a cursory examination in World History. Students completing the sequence of U.S.

<sup>1</sup> Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Instruction & Innovation, Curriculum and Instruction, Sunshine State Standards, <http://www.fldoe.org/bii/curriculum/sss/>.

<sup>2</sup> Marco Rubio, Speaker of the House of Representatives, to Members of the House of Representatives, February 26, 2008, [http://blogs.tampabay.com/schools/florida\\_education\\_policy/index.html](http://blogs.tampabay.com/schools/florida_education_policy/index.html)

<sup>3</sup> Sam Dillon, "Survey: Teens Clueless on Basic History, Literature," *Chicago Tribune*, February 27, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> For a course description, go to: <http://data.fldoe.org/crsCode/default.cfm?level=912&category=Social%20Studies>

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and World History will have a strong foundation on which to build their studies, but they could leave our high schools knowing little about Brazil or the Cuban Revolution, not to mention the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

In 2006, 60% of Florida's exports were destined for Latin America and the Caribbean. In the Fall 2007 semester, however, just **0.6%** of Florida's high school students took a course on Latin America and the Caribbean, signifying that our high school graduates are unlikely to be prepared to "engage, communicate, and compete" with Florida's leading trading partners. According to Joel Goodrick, who teaches Latin American History at Lennard High School, "Many of our students are graduating high school having a very narrow understanding of the rest of the world. With the world becoming increasingly interconnected, this can be detrimental to students over the long run."

### Florida in the Global Economy

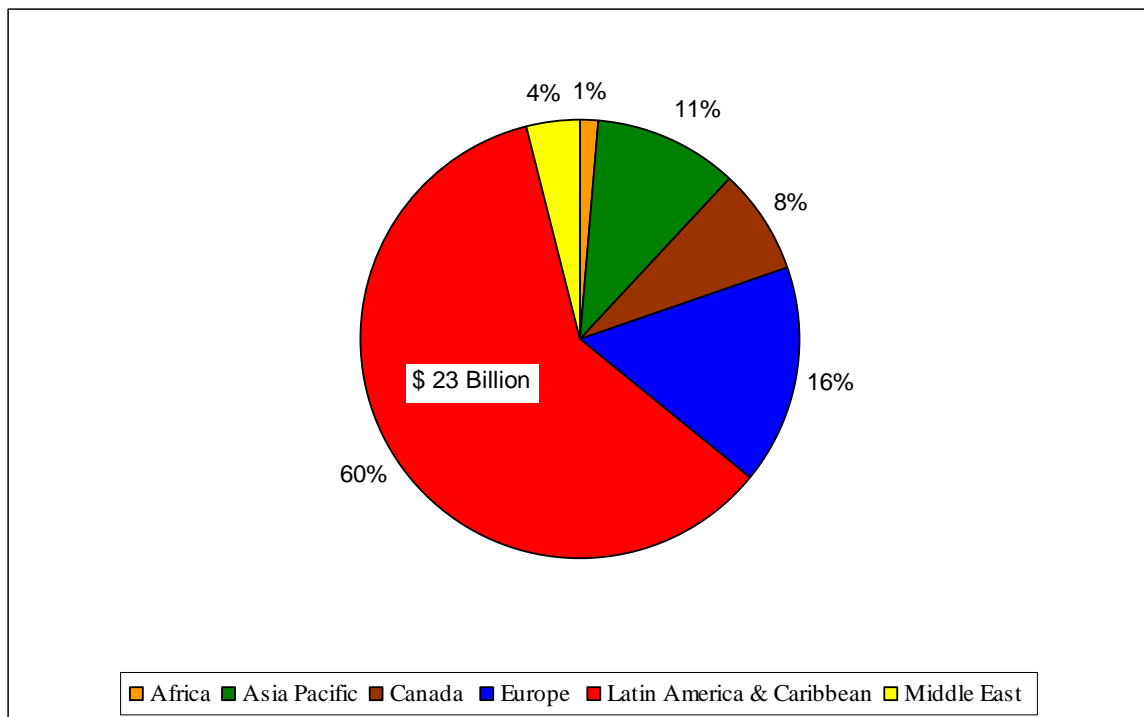
According to data supplied by the U.S. Department of Commerce:

- Florida exported \$38.5 billion in merchandise in 2006 (a 57% increase from \$24.5 billion in 2002).
- Computers and electronic equipment accounted for 29%, or \$11.1 billion, of all Florida exports, followed by machinery (\$4.4 billion) and chemical manufactures (\$3.9 billion).
- One-Ninth (11.4%) of all manufacturing workers in Florida depend on exports for their jobs.
- A total of 28,524 companies exported from Florida in 2005. Of these, 95% (27,048) were small and medium-sized firms that employed less than 500 workers.<sup>5</sup>

The first question for educators as they develop a curriculum designed to prepare students to compete in the global economy should be: who are we trading with? The answer (see Figure 1) is that 60% of Florida's exports went to Latin America and the Caribbean (\$23.3 billion) and another 8% to Canada.

**Figure 1: Destination of Florida Exports, by Region, 2006**

Source: Office of Trade and Industry Information, Manufacturing and Services, International Trade Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce.



<sup>5</sup> "Florida: Exports, Jobs, and Foreign Investment," September 2007, International Trade Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce, [http://www.ita.doc.gov/td/industry/otea/state\\_reports/florida.html](http://www.ita.doc.gov/td/industry/otea/state_reports/florida.html)

Seven out of our top ten foreign markets are in Latin America or the Caribbean; if we include Canada, eight of our top ten foreign markets are located in the Americas (see Table 1).

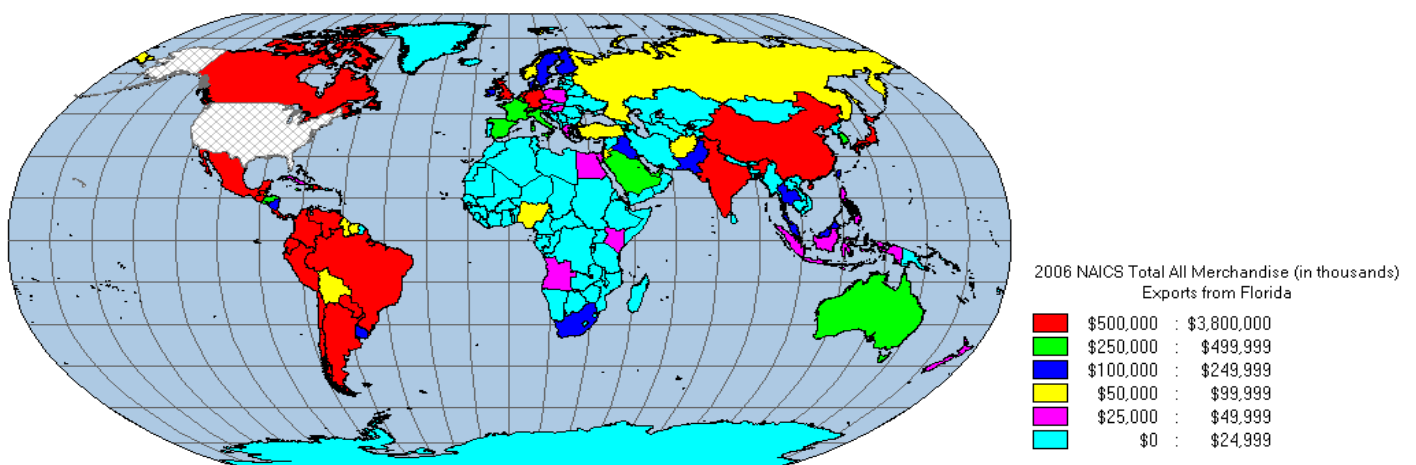
**Table 1: Florida Exports, By Destination, 2006**

	Value of Exports (in Thousands)
World Total	\$38,544,528
Brazil	\$3,700,546
Canada	\$2,992,234
Venezuela	\$2,873,502
Mexico	\$2,448,983
Colombia	\$1,574,438
Dominican Republic	\$1,290,948
United Kingdom	\$1,206,329
Chile	\$1,102,662
China	\$1,011,954
Argentina	\$991,903

Source: Office of Trade and Industry Information, Manufacturing and Services, International Trade Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce.

Given Florida's geographic location, it should come as no surprise that our export markets are located primarily in the Western Hemisphere. Only one European country, the United Kingdom, ranked in the top ten of Florida's most valuable export markets. In 2006, the value of Florida's exports to Venezuela alone (\$2,873,502,000) exceeded the value of Florida's exports to Germany, the Netherlands, France, Italy, and Spain combined (\$2,849,782,000). Most of our most valuable export markets (highlighted in red in the map below) are in our backyard.

**Figure 2: Florida's Most Valuable Foreign Markets, 2006**



Source: Office of Trade and Industry Information, Manufacturing and Services, International Trade Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce.

According to Florida businessman and former member of the Florida Board of Education Charles Garcia, the global marketplace requires businesses and their employees to prepare for the markets beyond Florida's borders. Garcia explains: "Barriers are quickly disappearing. In order to survive, companies have to compete in the international marketplace. Florida's most important international markets are located within the Western Hemisphere, where Florida is the number one trading partner for each of the nations in Latin America and the Caribbean (excluding Mexico). Florida companies with an international focus are less susceptible to economic downturns, and are more able to compete with domestic and foreign companies."

In addition to our export markets, Florida's tourism industry hosted 883,000 South Americans in 2006, behind only Canada (2.1 million) and the United Kingdom (1.3 million) in the number of foreign visitors to Florida in 2006. Let us not overlook the fact that Hispanics represented 20% of Florida's total population in 2006 and that they are projected to constitute 25% of the state's population by 2030.<sup>7</sup>

### Toward World Class Education Standards

The purpose of developing World Class Education Standards is not simply to prepare students for careers in international business and tourism. The broader mission, as defined by the Department of Education, is to promote skills such as "critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, innovation, collaboration and communication."<sup>8</sup> Teaching high school students about the history and culture of foreign countries provide valuable opportunities to promote all of these critical skills, which will in turn facilitate and expand Florida's interaction with the global market. Given the importance of exports, tourism and immigration to Florida's economy and society, it is only reasonable to expect that a new set of World Class Standards will include a curriculum that will encourage students to develop:

- A working knowledge of foreign languages, particularly Spanish, Portuguese, and Mandarin
- A deeper understanding of foreign affairs and international history.

To graduate from high school, students currently are not required to have any foreign language credits if they have not opted into one of the college preparatory curricula. However, two credits in a foreign language credit *are* required for admission to all of Florida's state universities.<sup>9</sup> Currently, the World Language Standards are under review and merit further examination by ENLACE FLORIDA in a future report.

The focus of this analysis is the extent to which social studies standards and course offerings give students an adequate opportunity to understand the history and culture of Latin America and the Caribbean, a region that is vital to the economic, social, and cultural life of our state. Florida Statute 1003.42 (2)(p): currently requires that our public schools teach students about the "Hispanic contributions to the United States." The statute says nothing about teaching students about the history, culture, or language of Latin America and the Caribbean, a much broader topic than currently mandated by the statute. However, the same statute provides a much broader and, for our purposes, a model for instruction in African American history: "The history of African Americans, including the history of African peoples before the political conflicts that led to the development of slavery, the passage to America, the enslavement experience, abolition, and the contributions of African Americans to society."<sup>10</sup>

Despite the limitations of the statutes, Florida's public high schools offer four courses that fulfill the obligation to offer instruction in the Hispanic or Latino contributions to the United States:

**Table 2: Courses related to Latin American Studies**

Course Code	Course Name
2100800	History of the Americas (IB)
2104600	Multicultural Studies
2100360	Latin American History
2100410	Caribbean Studies

All of these courses fulfill the mission of preparing students to "engage, communicate, and compete in a global economy." ENLACE FLORIDA applauds the initiative of the school districts and teachers that offer these courses on a regular basis.

<sup>7</sup> Smith, Stanley K. and Stefan Rayer, "Population Projections by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin for Florida and Its Counties, 2004-2030," *Florida Population Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (June 2005), Bureau of Economic and Business Research, University of Florida; U.S. Census Bureau, Florida QuickFacts, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/12000.html>

<sup>8</sup> Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Instruction & Innovation, Curriculum and Instruction, Sunshine State Standards, <http://www.fldoe.org/bii/curriculum/sss/>.

<sup>9</sup> "Florida's Guide to Public High School Graduation," Florida Department of Education, October 2007, <http://bsi.fsu.edu/schoolimprove/studentprogression/highschgradreq.htm>

<sup>10</sup> Florida Statutes, <http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/>

**Table 3: Statewide Enrollment for Each Course**

Course Name	Enrollment
History of the Americas (IB)	2,970
Multicultural Studies	1,371
Latin American History	252
Caribbean Studies	354

Source: The data provided in Tables 3 and 4 were provided to ENLACE FLORIDA by the Florida Department of Education in response to a data request.

The 4,947 students enrolled in these four courses in the Fall 2007 semester represent only 0.6% of all students in Grades 9 to 12 in the state. The School District of Hillsborough County had the largest total enrollment and largest percentage of students enrolled: 2.4% of high school students in the district (see Table 4).

**Table 4: Enrollment in Courses Related to Latin American Studies by School District**

District	Course Enrollment	Membership in Grades 9-12	% of students enrolled in LAS courses
ALACHUA	122	9,371	1.3%
BREVARD	85	23,310	0.4%
BROWARD	37	79,833	0.0%
CITRUS	17	5,122	0.3%
CLAY	63	11,052	0.6%
DADE	869	108,785	0.8%
DESOTO	1	1,442	0.1%
ESCAMBIA	76	12,797	0.6%
FLAGLER	25	3,676	0.7%
GADSDEN	8	1,596	0.5%
HILLSBOROUGH	1278	53,674	2.4%
INDIAN RIVER	43	5,463	0.8%
LEE	315	22,495	1.4%
LEON	64	9,318	0.7%
MANATEE	61	12,039	0.5%
MARION	93	12,916	0.7%
MARTIN	68	5,865	1.2%
OKALOOSA	51	9,762	0.5%
ORANGE	339	51,161	0.7%
OSCEOLA	43	15,887	0.3%
PALM BEACH	358	53,060	0.7%
PASCO	53	19,009	0.3%
PINELLAS	189	35,854	0.5%
POLK	57	26,162	0.2%
ST. JOHNS	88	8,274	1.1%
ST. LUCIE	97	11,032	0.9%
SARASOTA	39	13,225	0.3%
SEMINOLE	107	20,901	0.5%
VOLUSIA	301	20,382	1.5%

The addition of Latin American studies courses to the social studies curriculum would enhance rigor and relevance for all students. Studies have shown that the incorporation of culturally relevant texts promotes reading and learning. According to USF Professor of Secondary Education Bárbara Cruz, “students’ engagement in reading tends to increase when culturally relevant literature and nonfiction are provided.”<sup>11</sup> It is therefore unfortunate that two of the top five districts with the highest number of Hispanic students in K-12 public schools, Orange and Palm Beach, did not offer the Latin American History course. The School District of Osceola County did not offer the course either, although its 25,000 Hispanic students represent 49.5% of the public school students in the district and would probably constitute a significant portion of the students interested in taking it as an elective.

However, all students should be encouraged to study Latin American and Caribbean history to develop the skills and knowledge they need to compete in a global economy. According to Dennis Holt, “Florida serves as a gateway to Latin America and the Caribbean, and it makes strong economic sense to promote an understanding of the region among our students.”

### Policy Implications

To develop the World Class Education Standards we need for our students to compete in a global economy, the state of Florida and our local school districts should accelerate efforts to encourage more students to study foreign languages and international affairs. It is particularly important for our students to learn more about the people who trade with, visit, and immigrate to Florida.

For these reasons, ENLACE FLORIDA strongly recommends that our education leaders adopt statutory language that provides a broader mandate for the instruction of Latin American, Caribbean, and Latino history in our public schools. The existing language provides only for instruction in the “Hispanic contributions to the United States.” More appropriate language for our World Class Education Standards would be:

The study of Hispanic American contributions to the United States, including and extending to the history of Spanish colonization of the Americas, the emergence and development of independent Latin American republics and their relations with the United States, and the incorporation of Hispanic Americans into the political, economic, social, and cultural life of Florida and the United States.

To encourage and support school districts and teachers who offer courses in Latin American History, Caribbean Studies, and Multicultural Studies, ENLACE FLORIDA also recommends the creation of a Hispanic American Heritage Task Force. Task forces on African American History and the Holocaust already exist, created by the Commissioner of Education to fulfill statutory mandates to offer instruction in these topics.<sup>12</sup> These task forces provide teacher lesson plans, links to resources, and general guidance for the state’s efforts to provide instruction in these critical areas. A Hispanic American Heritage Task Force would fulfill similar functions. The task force should provide support to teachers, some of whom may be interested in specialized training to develop new courses or incorporate Latino and Latin American history into existing courses. A Task Force composed of historians and civic leaders should also offer appropriate guidance and organizational support to the state as it approaches the year 2013, when Florida will commemorate the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the landing of the Spanish conquistador Juan Ponce de León, the first European to set foot on the peninsula, which he named *La Florida*.

Finally, enrollment statistics demonstrate the value of offering Advanced Placement (AP) courses. In the fall of 2007, 7,226 high school students in Florida enrolled in the AP course in European History, the highest enrollment in any non-U.S. history course. Non-AP courses/electives attract fewer students. This may be due to the fact that high school students can not receive college credit for passing them. An Advanced Placement Course in Latin American History would undoubtedly attract more students into the course. The College Board, which administers the AP program, currently offers 37 AP courses in 20 subject areas, including U.S., European, and World History. ENLACE FLORIDA is prepared to work with state education leaders and ENLACE colleagues around the country to develop an AP course in Latin American history. In order to prepare Florida’s high school graduates to “engage, communicate, and compete in a global economy,” ALL students should have the opportunity to take rigorous and relevant courses in foreign languages and international affairs, including Latin American, Caribbean, and Latino history.

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<sup>11</sup> Bárbara C. Cruz, “Stories from Afar: Using Children’s and Young Adult Literature to Teach about Latin America,” *Social Education*, 71:4 (May-June 2007): 170.

<sup>12</sup> Go to: <http://afroamfl.com/>



The development of a highly skilled workforce with the skills required to compete in the global economy requires a serious commitment and investment by the state and our school districts. Investments in education and further improvements in high school and college graduation rates and college are critical to Florida's economic development. The Florida Chamber of Commerce Foundation, in its report, the *New Cornerstone Revisited*, urged the state to "develop a first-rate workforce by investing in education and the training, recruitment and retention of talented employees."<sup>13</sup> This recommendation received critical reinforcement in a report issued by J. Antonio Villamil, Chief Executive Officer of The Washington Economics Group. Villamil concluded: "The key to Florida's future success in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century relies on the ability of policy makers and all Floridians to commit to the long-term investment effort involved in providing a quality and equitable education system at all levels, preparing students for today's globally competitive workforce."<sup>14</sup> By expanding course offerings and increasing enrollment in elective social studies courses such as Latin American, Caribbean, European, African, and Asian history, we will prepare a larger segment of our workforce to compete effectively in the global economy.



**ENLACE FLORIDA** is a statewide network funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and managed by NCCEP to promote college readiness, access, and success for Latinos, African-Americans, and other underrepresented students through non-partisan research, communication, advocacy, and support.

For more information, go to: [www.enlaceflorida.org](http://www.enlaceflorida.org)

<sup>13</sup> New Cornerstone Revisited: A Look at Our State in Transition, Florida Chamber of Commerce Foundation, November 1, 2007; <http://www.flchamber.com/mx/hm.asp?id=newcornerstone>

<sup>14</sup> J. Antonio Villamil, Chief Executive officer, The Washington Economics Group, "White Paper on Educational Outcomes and the Economic Development of Florida in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," February 18, 2008, p. 9; [http://www.utd.org/UTD\\_News/White\\_Paper/utd\\_president\\_and\\_former\\_governo.htm](http://www.utd.org/UTD_News/White_Paper/utd_president_and_former_governo.htm)