ENLACE FLORIDA

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A Statewide Network Promoting College Readiness, Access and Success through research, communication, advocacy, and support

POLICY BRIEF

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FLORIDA'S AP PROGRAM:

State Achievement Masks Disparities at Local Level

by Paul Dosal

In 2006, Florida led the entire country in the percentage of high school seniors taking Advanced Placement (AP) exams. The state also ranked seventh nationally in the percentage of seniors passing the tests. In response to the good news, Governor Charlie Crist issued a statement explaining that "these numbers show us that Florida's students are ready and eager for tougher course work that prepares them for the future."[1]

The state has done an admirable job in promoting college readiness through the Advanced Placement program. African-American and Hispanic students are participating in the AP program in ever-increasing numbers. However, a closer examination of the data at the district and school levels reveals disparities and inequities in an otherwise impressive state record. Not all schools and districts are taking full advantage of the state's and College Board's participation to develop vigorous AP programs. Even in districts recording notable increases in testing and performance, Black and Hispanic students still don't enjoy equitable access to AP classes and, more importantly, they are not performing at the same levels as their White and Asian counterparts. Future efforts should be directed at developing AP courses in schools that currently offer very few courses for their students.

The Educational Benefits of the AP Program

The Advanced Placement Program, begun by the College Board in 1955, provides high school students with the opportunity to earn college credit while still in high school. Students choose from 37 different courses taught by specially-trained teachers who develop curricula of high academic rigor that will enable the student to pass a college-level examination in these subjects. Most colleges and universities award college credit to students who receive a passing score on the AP exam (from 3 to 5 on a 5-point scale). According to the Southern Regional Education Board, "research suggests that students who take these courses [AP] and tests perform better in the first year of college than students who do not; the benefit is even evident for those students who do not score well enough to receive college credit."[2]

Moreover, students who participate in the AP Program are exposed to highly qualified teachers and a rigorous curriculum. If students complete an AP course and score a passing grade on the examination, they may receive college credit, thereby reducing the time required to earn a college degree. "More important, such programs often provide an environment of high expectations for students, a setting where a college-going culture may be fostered," educator Frances Contreras maintains.[3]

[1] Ron Matus, "State Leads Nation in Intrepid Scholars," *St. Petersburg Times*, February 7, 2007.
[2] Southern Regional Education Board, "Progress in Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate in SREB States," May 2006 www.sreb.org
[3] Frances E. Contreras, "Access, Achievement, and Social Capital: Standardized Exams and the Latino College-Bound Population," *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 4:3 (July 2005): 197.

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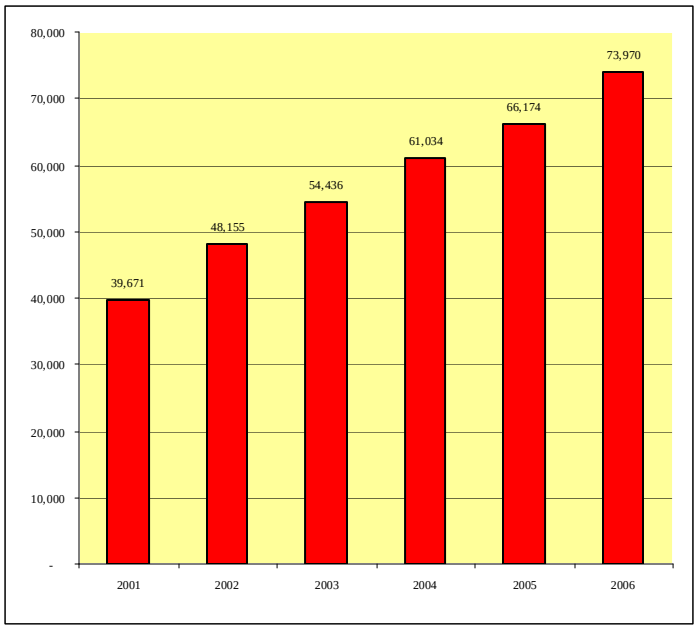
The Expansion of the AP Program

Given these perceived educational benefits, one should not be surprised by the dramatic increases in the number of students taking AP exams in the United States, and specifically Florida. From 1980-81 to 2003-04, the number of United States students taking AP exams increased from 133,702 in to 1,017,396, a remarkable increase of 660%.[4] The number of Florida students taking an AP examination increased from 42,599 in 2001 to 90,681, an increase of 112.9%.[5] Even more importantly, from 2001 to 2006, the number of AP exams scored three or higher increased 86.5%, as illustrated in the following chart.

FIGURE 1: Florida Public School Students Scoring 3 or Higher on AP Exams, 2001-2006 [6]

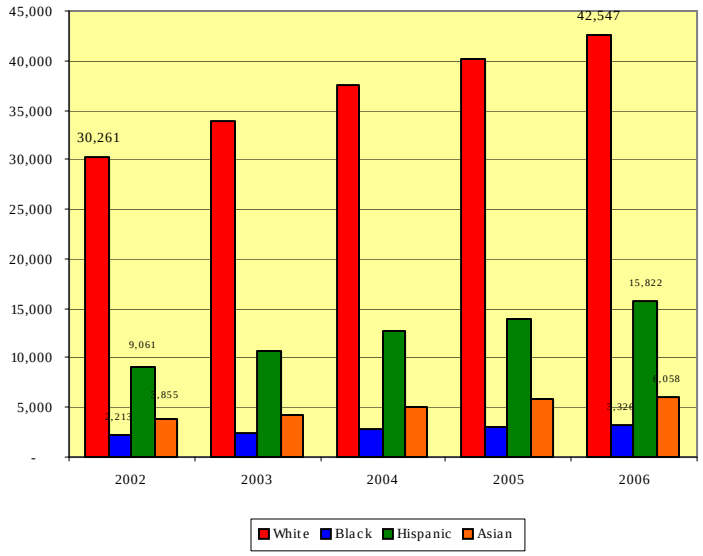


This AP success story in Florida applies in varying degrees to White, African American, Hispanic, and Asian students. As illustrated in Figure 2, the number of students passing AP exams has increased every year for all racial and ethnic groups in the state. The welcome result is that Florida now claims 7th place in the rankings of states with the highest percentage of graduating seniors scoring 3 and higher on an AP exam.[7]

Florida educators and policy makers may also take pride in closing achievement gaps. In 2006, Hispanic students constituted 24.2% of all AP examinees in the state, but they represented only 20.7 % of the Hispanic student population. Between 2001 and 2006, the number of Hispanic students passing AP exams doubled. Likewise, American Indian students made up 0.4% of all AP examinees in 2006, but they represented only 0.3% of the student population. Thus, the College Board boasts that Florida has eliminated the equity gap for these two minority groups.[8] According to Trevor Packer, executive director of AP for the College Board, "every other state has a lower representation of Hispanic students than Florida does." [9]

Florida is, in short, a recognized leader in the AP Program. The College Board recognizes 12 Florida public schools as having the best AP courses in the nation. **"For the second year in a row, no other state in the country has as many public schools recognized."** [10]

FIGURE 2: Florida Public School Students Passing AP Exams, by Race/Ethnicity, 2002-2006 [11]



The "Florida Achievement"

The College Board and Florida education administrators attribute the recent progress in AP testing and performance to two factors: 1) state financial incentives to school districts and teachers to participate in the AP program and 2) the College Board—Florida Department of Education Partnership. The partnership, launched in 2000 to promote educational excellence and equity for all students in Florida, provides professional training for teachers who participate in the AP program.

[4] Saul Geiser and Veronica Santelices, "The Role of Advanced Placement and Honors Courses in College Admissions," Center for Studies in Higher Education (University of California, Berkeley), http://repositories.cdlib.org/cshe/CSHE-4-04

[5] "Florida AP Report," College Board, February 2007, http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/about/news_info/ap/2007/florida_ap-report_07.pdf

[6] Ibid.

[7] College Board, "Advanced Placement Report to the Nation," 2007, www.apcentral.collegeboard.com

[8] Ibid.

[9] Marilyn Brown, "Advancing Opportunities," *Tampa Tribune*, February 7, 2007.

[10] College Board, "AP Report to the Nation Highlights for Florida," 2007.

[11] Florida Department of Education Evaluation and Reporting AP Tables, 2002-2006, available at: www.firn.edu/doe/evaluation/act-sat-ap.htm

However, this same report contains words of caution and concern to all education stakeholders. Traditionally underrepresented students still demonstrate significantly lower performance on AP exams. Moreover, the equity gap for African American students remains significant. Black or African American students constituted 11% of all AP examinees, yet they represented 19.7% of the student population. [12]

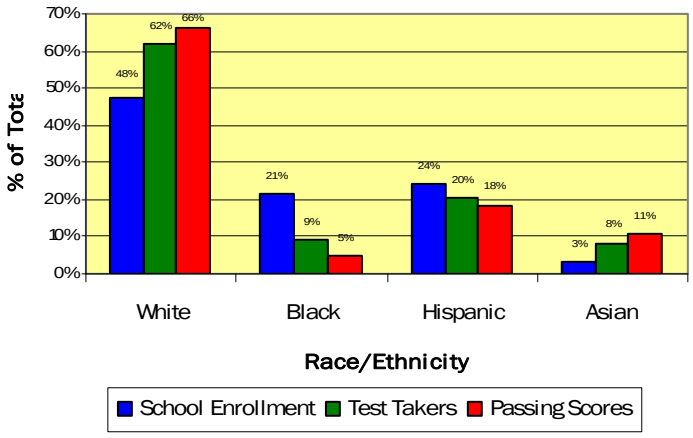
If one examines AP testing and performance at the district and school levels, it is evident that the state and its College Board partners have not yet attained the admirable goal of obtaining equity for all students in Florida. The data reveals that, even in districts recording notable increases in testing and performance, Black and Hispanic students still don't enjoy equitable access to AP classes and that they are not performing at the same levels as their White and Asian counterparts.

District and School Performance

Therefore, a new set of challenges awaits Florida's educators. Continued success requires careful analysis at the district and school levels. African American and Hispanic student access to and performance on AP classes and exams is particularly important. A closer look at the data reveals progress as well as shortcomings.

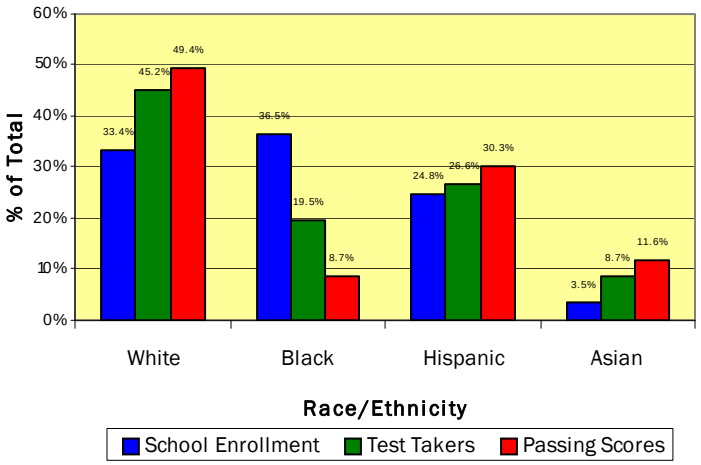
In the School District of Hillsborough County, for example, White and Asian students are overrepresented in the AP program and have greater success rates. As illustrated in Figure 3, although White students represented 48% of the student population in 2006, they constituted 62% of all test takers and scored 66% of exams graded 3 or higher. At the same time, Black students represented 21% of the student population in 2006 yet constituted only 9% of all test takers and registered only 5% of all passing scores.[13]

FIGURE 3: AP Testing and Performance, 2006 Hillsborough



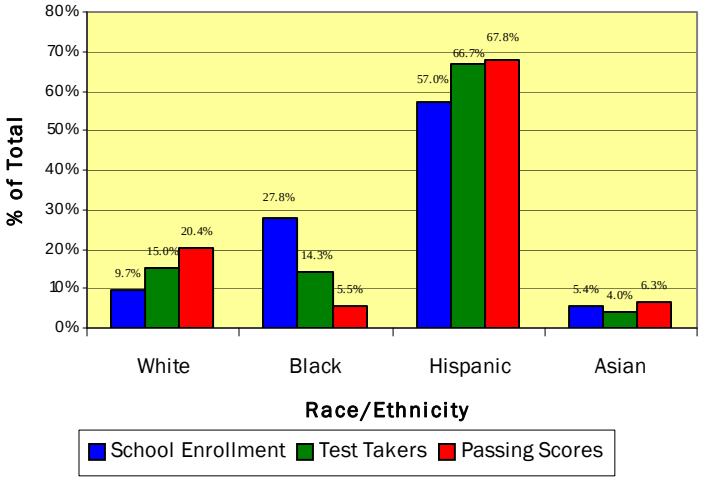
The School District of Broward County, in contrast, shows greater gains for Hispanic students, but a similar equity gap remains among Black students. As illustrated in Figure 4, Hispanic students are overrepresented as test-takers and in terms of success rates. Although they constituted 24.8% of all students, they scored 30% of all passing scores. Meanwhile, Black students represented 36.5% of all students in Broward County yet accounted for only 8.7% of passing scores.

Figure 4: AP Testing and Performance, 2006 Broward



In the School District of Miami-Dade County, Hispanic students outperformed in AP testing and performance, as illustrated in Figure 5. Hispanic students, with apparently greater access to AP classes, passed the AP exams in 2006 at rates higher than their enrollment representation in the school district.

FIGURE 5: AP Testing and Performance, 2006, Miami-Dade



[12] "Advanced Placement Report to the Nation, 2007."

[13] Data for Figures 3,4, and 5 are derived from tables provided by the Florida Department of Education, Evaluation and Reporting, AP Tables, 2002-2006, available at: www.firn.edu/doe/evaluation/act-sat-ap.htm

A number of factors may account for the disparities in access and performance. The number of AP course offerings and the number of actual AP class enrollments vary from school to school, resulting in fewer opportunities for some racial and ethnic minorities to enroll in AP classes and pass the exams. The following two schools in Hillsborough County, which have produced dramatically different AP results, reflect these disparities.

Table 1: Two Hillsborough County High Schools

Leto High School (2006)	Plant High School (2006)
1,163 Hispanic Students	331 Hispanic Students
85 Hispanic AP Examinees	97 Hispanic AP Examinees
49 Hispanics Passed AP Test	95 Hispanics Passed AP Test

Why is it that Plant, with only a third of the Hispanic students of Leto, can produce more AP Examinees and nearly twice the number of AP tests scored three and higher? Plant High School evidently offers more AP courses, so even though fewer Hispanics are enrolled at Plant, students there have greater access to the rigorous curriculum offered through the AP program.

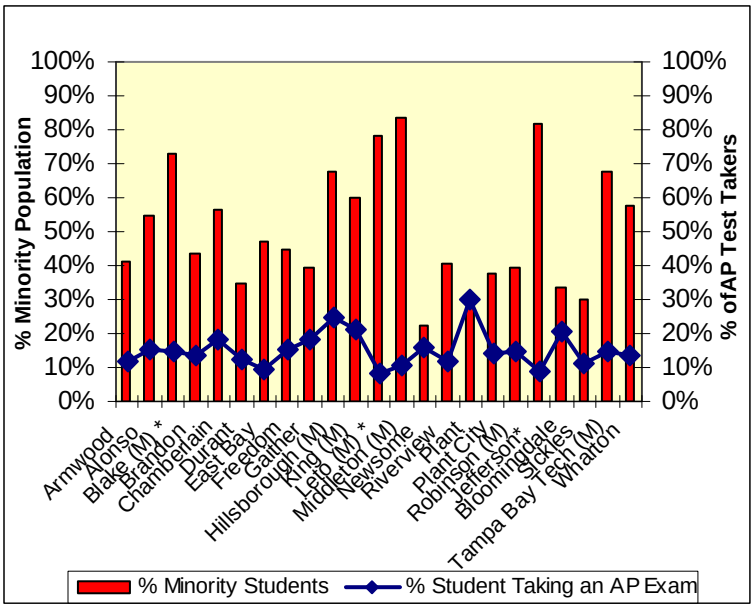
Another example, using data from Broward County, shows that some schools are successful in preparing African American students to pass AP exams. In this case, Stranahan, which has received external funding to raise student achievement, produces more African American examinees and passing test scores with fewer African American students than in Blanche Ely.

Table 2: Two Broward County High Schools

Blanche Ely High (2006)	Stranahan High (2006)
1,805 African American Students	1,149 African American students
148 AP Examinees	183 AP Examinees
41 AP Tests passed	83 AP Tests passed

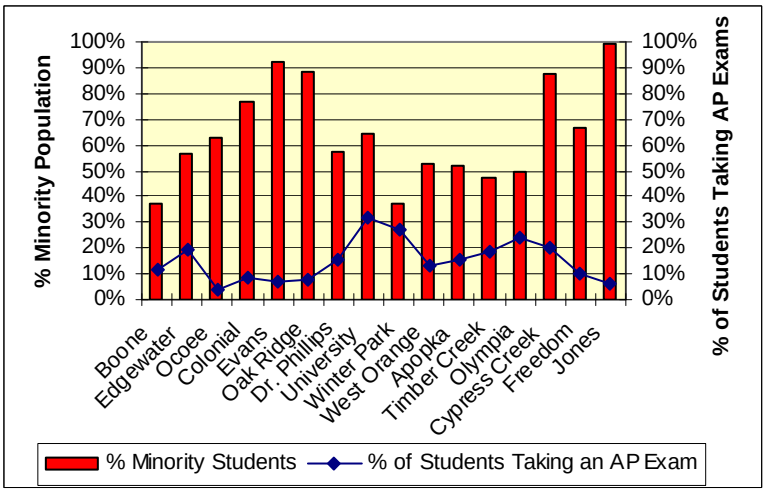
The disparities in AP testing and performance may reflect inequities among schools in terms of AP class offerings. Not all schools have vigorous AP programs. As shown in Figure 6, there are many schools with high minority enrollments that do not participate in the AP program to the same extent as other schools in the district.[14] Therefore, in order to improve college readiness among traditionally underrepresented students, AP course offerings should be expanded in schools with the highest minority enrollments. These are schools in which, critics say, there is insufficient student and parent demand for the more rigorous curriculum of an AP course.

Figure 6: Percentage Minority Student Population and Total Test Taking Population by Hillsborough County School



As illustrated in Figure 7, similar patterns are evident in Orange County. Jones High School, with nearly 100% minority enrollment, has one of the lowest rates of participation in the AP program

Figure 7: Percentage Minority Student Population and Total Test Taking Population by Orange County School



[14] Data for Figures 6 & 7 are derived from tables provided by the Florida Department of Education, Evaluation and Reporting, AP Tables, 2002-2006, available at: www.firn.edu/doe/evaluation/act-sat-ap.htm; enrollment figures are derived from school and district websites.

Policy Implications

Three inter-related state initiatives have contributed to recent successes. Florida enacted legislation in 1998 to provide financial rewards to schools and teachers for each student who scores 3 or higher on an AP exam. The number of AP teachers increased from 2,120 in 1998 to 3,831 in 2005.[15]

The College Board Florida Partnership, begun in 2000-01, is a second significant initiative, providing academic support to the AP Programs, including funds for teachers to attend AP Summer Institutes. The partnership offers scholarships for public school teachers to attend one of the AP Summer Institutes offered in all regions of the state. 750 teachers participated in the summer of 2004 and another 800 receiving training in the summer of 2005.

Finally, Florida statute now exempts all Florida public students from the payment of any fee to take an AP examination. With fees over $80 for an AP test, this recent legislation eliminated a significant barrier to low income students. Likewise, the state also covers the costs for 10th grade students to take the Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test, which are important diagnostic tools that help schools identify students with the potential to do well in the AP program.[16]

Although Florida's teachers and students have achieved national distinction in the AP program, the state remains short of the College Board goal of eliminating all "barriers that restrict access to AP courses from ethnic, racial, ad socioeconomic groups that have been traditionally underrepresented in the AP Program."[17] The equity gap among Florida's African American students remains the most significant challenge. The number of African American students taking and passing an AP exam falls below the percentage of African Americans in Florida's schools. Despite the significant gains in Hispanic student AP participation, there is still considerable room for improvement in particular schools and districts.

In Florida's 2006 legislative session, Senator Les Miller and Representative Audrey Gibson sponsored legislation that would have required each high school in the state to offer a minimum of four AP courses, one each in English, math, science, and a foreign language. The bills, designed to ensure equal access to rigorous coursework, never made it out of committee. Some skeptics wondered whether there were enough qualified students to enroll and succeed in the new AP courses that schools would have been required to offer.

The state of Arkansas enacted similar legislation in 2004 and as a result, the number of Black students who participated in AP more than tripled.[18] There is every reason to believe that students—white, black, or Hispanic, urban or rural—will take advantage of a rigorous curriculum if they are given the opportunity to do so.

The College Board is committed to the principle that "**all students deserve an opportunity to participate in rigorous and academically challenging courses and programs.**"[19] Schools should make every effort to ensure that their AP courses reflect the overall diversity of their student population. The College Board currently helps schools to generate lists of students who are likely to succeed in an AP course, using PSAT/NMSQT scores as an indicator of a students' AP Potential. Given that the percentage of Florida's 10th graders taking the PSAT has jumped from 20.7% in 1999 to 67.5% in 2006, the data is there for Florida's educators to boost access to college-prep courses in every high school.[20]

Two school districts, Duval and Hillsborough, deserve high praise for their efforts to develop the AP program in schools with high percentages of limited income students and racial or ethnic minorities. Through the EXCELerator Schools project, launched by the College Board in 2006 with a $16 million investment from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, these school districts aim to improve graduation and college readiness rates in urban schools with high numbers of limited income and traditionally underrepresented students. Continued progress in the AP program requires every school and district in the state to create a higher level of expectation and a culture of academic achievement in which every students will be expected to succeed in a college prep curriculum

For further reading on the AP program:

Dougherty, Chrys, Lynn Mellor, and Shuling Jian, "The Relationship between Advanced Placement and College Graduation," National Center for Educational Accountability 2005 AP Study Series, Report 1 (Feb. 2006).

Geiser, Saul and Veronica Santelices. "The Role of Advanced Placement and Honors Courses in College Admissions," Center for Studies in Higher Education (University of California, Berkeley), 2004.

Kettler, Todd and Susan K Johnsen Alexandra Shiu. "AP as an Intervention for Middle School Hispanic Students," *Gifted Child Today* 29:1 (Winter 2006).

Klein, Alyson. "Researchers See College Benefits for Students Who Took AP Courses," *Education Week*, 26:2 (February 7, 2007).

Saunders, Terrie. "Boostin Black Academic Achievement and AP Enrollments," *Education Digest* 70:6 (Feb. 2005).

Van Sciver, James H. "Closing the Diversity Gap in Advanced Placement Course Enrollment," *Multicultural Perspectives* 8:3(2006).

[15] "Rising Participation and Performance; AP, PSAT/NMSQT, SAT," Florida Department of Education, 2006.
[16] http://www.collegeboard.com/floridapartnership/
[17] AP Report to the Nation, 2007.
[18] Southern Regional Education Board, "Progress in Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate in SREB States," May 2006.
[19] http://professionals.collegeboard.com/k-12/assessment/ap/equity
[20] Florida Department of Education, "PSAT and PLAN Test Takers as a Percentage of 10th Grade Membership."

Florida Atlantic University
University of Central Florida
Florida International University
University of South Florida

ENLACE is a multiyear national initiative launched by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to strengthen the educational pipeline and increase opportunities for Latinos and other underrepresented students to enter and complete college.

ENLACE FLORIDA MISSION: to promote college **readiness**, **access**, and **success** for all underrepresented students through non-partisan research, communication, advocacy, and support.

ENLACE (ENgaging **L**atino, **A**frican-American & Other **C**ommunities for **E**ducation), derived from the Spanish *enlazar*, builds partnerships among universities, community colleges, K-12 schools, community-based organizations, students, and parents. **ENLACE FLORIDA** was formed in 2006 by USF, FAU, FIU, and UCF, funded by a $1.4 million grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation through the National Council for Community and Education Partnerships (NCCEP). **ENLACE FLORIDA** is composed of four clusters led by a member university, in partnership with community colleges, school districts, community organizations, students, and parents.

ENLACE FLORIDA is closely aligned with the Governor's *Access and Diversity Initiative* which is intended "to improve higher education access and success for students from previously underserved populations."

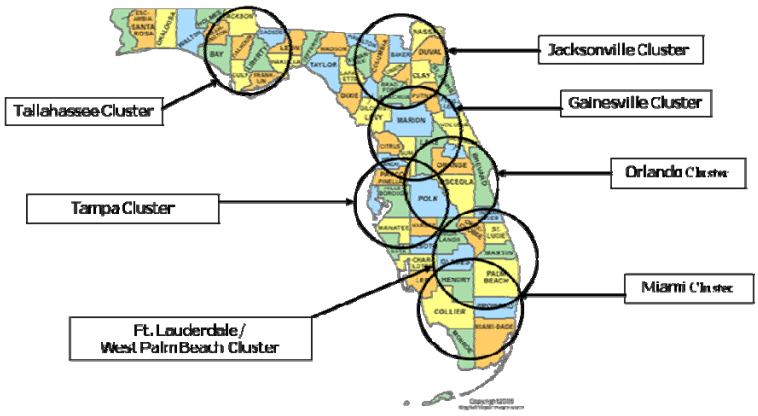
RATIONALE:

- Florida's Hispanic population is projected to increase from 2.6 million in 2000 to 6.3 million in 2030;
- Florida's African American population is projected to increase from 2.3 million in 2000 to 4.2 million in 2030;
- By 2030, Latinos and African-Americans will constitute 42% of Florida's population;
- In the 25 year period from 1977 to 2003, Hispanic public K-12 enrollment increased over 462% and African-American enrollment increased 77%;
- By 2014, blacks and Hispanics will account for 50% of Florida's high school graduates.

EXPANSION OF THE ENLACE FLORIDA NETWORK

In 2007, the Florida legislature approved $500,000 in non-recurring funds to support **the Florida Access and Success Initiative (FASI)**, a Board of Governors project that will allow ENLACE FLORIDA to:

- Expand to three new member universities and broaden the scope of its research and policy advocacy to include all underrepresented groups
- Identify and disseminate best practices in readiness, access, and success
- Analyze patterns and trends regarding access and diversity as measured by student enrollment, progression, and graduation data
- Promote academic achievement of all students through the Access and Success Initiative of the National Association of System Heads
- Develop highly focused recommendations for systemic action



To learn more about readiness, access, and success:

College Board AP Central, http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/apc/Controller.jpf

The Education Trust, http://www2.edtrust.org/edtrust

Excelencia in Education , http://www.edexcelencia.org/default.asp

Florida Department of Education, Office of Equity and Access, http://www.firn.edu/doe/eeop/

W.K. Kellogg Foundation, ENLACE (Engaging Latino Communities for Education), http://www.wkkf.org/

National Association of Latino Education Officials, Educational Fund, http://www.naleo.org/

National Center for Education Accountability, http://www.just4kids.org/en/

National Council for Community and Education Partnerships, http://www.edpartnerships.org/

Southern Regional Education Board, http://www.sreb.org/

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