

Think outside the crate and support CAFTA

Crew's Parent Academy is only choice for reform

As Miami-Dade County Public Schools' Teacher of the Year and as a citizen of the community we share I feel compelled to respond to publisher Michael Lewis's editorial on The Parent Academy. I support your role of giving voice to issues of interest and concern. As journalists, you are obliged to question initiatives that depend on public and charitable dollars and that promise to touch thousands of lives. However, as a teacher in our school system, and one who cares passionately about our children, I am obliged to champion the rare effort that truly promises to improve our children's education in profound and powerful ways. Such is the case with The Parent Academy. Reams of research, and most any teacher will tell you, nothing improves a child's academic performance like an informed and involved parent. Built firmly on such research and such experience, The Parent Academy is a teacher's dream.

Having been in this school district for many years, and having seen many programs come and go, I know that Superintendent Rudy Crew's determination to tackle this effort in a bold, swift and far-reaching way is the right choice. Indeed, it is the only choice if we are to see such an ambitious reform remain beyond any one person's administration.

I have read the entire Parent Academy plan and found it to be comprehensive and thorough, with answers to many of the questions Mr. Lewis has raised. I personally will encourage the parents of my students to take any and all Parent Academy classes that I believe could help them, and I look forward to teaching an Academy class this fall.

So, let's give The Parent Academy a chance to get off the ground and start its promising work.

Fedrick Ingram, teacher
Miami Carol City Senior High School

"We've Got the Juice" was a popular disco hit during the 1980s. The title is emblematic of Florida's economy during decades past. Since the development of frozen-juice concentrate in the 1940s, orange juice has been the mainstay of the Sunshine State's economy, with aerospace and tourism playing a supporting role.

While these industries remain key pillars of the Florida economy, thanks to globalization, Florida has become a hub for international trade and a magnet for global investment. Indeed, few states have gained more from the rapid globalization of the world economy in recent years than Florida and none has more at stake from free trade agreements in the pipeline. A case in point is the proposed US-Central America Free Trade Agreement.

Already, Florida handles nearly half of the \$16 billion in goods traded annually between the US and the CAFTA signatories - Nicaragua, Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica, El Salvador and the Dominican Republic. This makes the CAFTA countries Florida's top trading partner - accounting for nearly double the value of Florida's trade with regional heavyweight Brazil. Based upon the early success of the US-Chile Free Trade Agreement in promoting trade, the US Chamber of Commerce reckons Florida firms could realize more than \$5 billion in new business and almost 37,000 new jobs in the first decade of the agreement.

Unfortunately, CAFTA faces an uncertain future on Capitol Hill. If the agreement is voted down by Congress, US clothing manufacturers that now buy fabric from mills in the Carolinas and buttons, zippers and thread from factories in Medley and Hialeah and ship it to places like Santo Domingo and San Pedro Sula for assembly

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may relocate to Asia, where labor costs are considerably less. If they do, they will almost certainly substitute locally produced fabrics that are abundant, cheap and of the highest quality.

Moreover, the lion's share of these Asian-produced garments will enter the US at West Coast ports, meaning less business for Florida's seaports and the shipping companies, freight forwarders, truckers and customs brokers that service them.

Given the importance of the apparel trade to the state's economy - the needle trade supports 50,000 direct and indirect Florida jobs - it is puzzling that the Florida congressional delegation remains lukewarm to free-trade deals like CAFTA. One reason is that Big Citrus and Big Sugar tend to reflexively oppose any trade deals that might alter the existing tariff and quota schemes, which keep imports of orange juice and sugarcane low and prices artificially high.

But the sugar and citrus lobbies are not entirely to blame. Our state's political leaders are not doing enough to educate the public about the importance of international trade to our economy nor to position Florida as a preferred location for global investment. In many respects, we are resting on our laurels while competitors like Texas undertake bold initiatives such as a \$295 million enterprise fund to help lure high-tech projects.

We should also be redoubling efforts to help local firms seize export opportunities created by global trade liberalization. Currently, the US exports about twice as much grapefruit as it sells on the domestic market. And while US consumption has soared in recent years, overseas demand remains



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robust - especially in Asia, where the Florida brand name signifies top quality. Unfortunately, the Florida Department of Citrus recently proposed slashing funding for international marketing of grapefruit juice - one of the state's few bona fide agricultural export success stories.

We should also be encouraging growers to produce value-added products geared toward niche markets. Brooks Tropicals of Homestead, for example, has developed an avocado with one-third the calories and half the fat of the Haas variety grown in Mexico and California. The Slimcado has been a home run for the company. Another promising niche product developed by Florida growers is the low-carb potato, which has 30% fewer carbohydrates than the average Idaho-grown Russet Burbank.

As further trade liberalization leads to increased competition for Florida's traditional agricultural products in the US marketplace, Florida's farmers must cultivate new markets both at home and abroad for non-traditional products. This will require thinking outside the crate. Supporting CAFTA would be a good place to start.

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