

# CLASSICS IN AMERICAN SCHOOLS

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For *The Future of the Classics: A Discussion of the State of the Art*  
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## OVERVIEW

- ◆ Current State of Affairs
- ◆ Challenges
- ◆ Creating Meaning in the Classroom
- ◆ Marketing the Value of Classics

## CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS

In American public and private schools, most students' exposure to Classics comes through studying "core curricula" such as Literature and History. With the adoption of national and state standards, students have mandated exposure to Mythology, Greek and Roman cultures. Depending on available programs, students may elect to study Latin as early as elementary school, with the majority of students beginning Latin in 9th grade. Considerably fewer students have access to Greek at the high school level. According to the National Latin Exam Committee, in 2010 over 150,000 students enrolled to take the National Latin Exam, while 1,709 took the National Greek Exam. The College Board reports that numbers of students taking Advanced Placement Latin peaked in 2007 at 8,700 but since the discontinuation of the Latin Literature exam in 2009, numbers have dropped to 6,500.

## CHALLENGES

Teachers starting or growing Latin programs face many challenges. Today's students present a wide range of academic abilities and are steeped in a culture of infotainment. In an effort to prepare students for a global job market, many schools now promote studying Spanish, Chinese, and Japanese. Economic strain has caused many schools to cut Latin programs, limit after-school activities such as Junior Classical League and increase class size. To address these issues, teachers and advocates for Classics must reexamine the message they send to students and to the greater community about the value of Classics in American schools.

# CREATING MEANING IN THE CLASSROOM

Increasingly, teachers must help students navigate an overwhelming amount of information. These strategies can help students prioritize, evaluate and integrate what they have learned:

- ◆ **AUTHENTIC LANGUAGE AND CULTURE** Use oral Latin and primary sources daily, have books pictures and technology that stretch students’ abilities.
- ◆ **SOCIAL NETWORKING** Get students involved with the local Junior Classical League chapter, Certamina, and other Latin Clubs.
- ◆ **THE CLASSICAL UMBRELLA** Help students design projects that match their current interests in art, music, geology, writing, mythology, reading, languages, and gaming to relevant studies in Classics.

ELITIST PARADIGM	SKILL-BASED PARADIGM
Latin is for “top” students	Latin is for all students
Latin increases SAT Verbal scores	Latin builds academic skills
Latin helps students become doctors and lawyers	Latin prepares students for tomorrow’s workplace
Latin provides “essential knowledge”	Classicists can pursue multiple interests
Latin competes with other languages for the ‘best students’	Strong students should study more than one language

## MARKETING THE VALUE OF CLASSICS

While there is merit to promoting Latin as a language for high-achievers, fostering an elitist attitude can be counterproductive to growing programs. It is important to articulate the skills that students build when they study Latin and Classics using education’s current terminology. In this way, parents, educators and community members can understand how Latin helps students in their studies at school as well as in preparation for the workplace:

- ◆ **READING STRATEGIES** Students identify root words, prefixes and suffixes to increase word recognition and use context clues to increase reading comprehension.
- ◆ **LANGUAGE AWARENESS** Students learn about language structure, connect derivatives between English and Latin, and discover relationships between Latin and Romance Languages.
- ◆ **ANALYTICAL THINKING** Students support statements with examples from primary sources and analyze complex word endings.
- ◆ **FLEXIBLE THINKING** Students find synonyms, alternate solutions and make predictions about narratives.
- ◆ **PROBLEM SOLVING** By encountering real problems in archaeology, literature and history, students learn how to investigate topics that interest them.