



Florida Hispanic Heritage Month 2026

Florida Department of Education and Volunteer Florida's Hispanic Heritage Month Essay Contest

"Celebrating Florida's Hispanic Heritage"

Official Essay Rules and Guidelines

Grades 4-5, 6-8, 9-12

Florida Department of Education and Volunteer Florida's Hispanic Heritage Month Essay Contest is open to all students attending any Florida school in grades 4-12. Six winners will be selected: two elementary school students (grades 4-5), two middle school students (grades 6-8), and two high school students (grades 9-12).

Eligibility: Contestants must be Florida residents, attend school in Florida in grades 4-12 (including public, charter, private, home or virtual) and able to provide a Social Security Number. Each student may enter only one essay, written in English, no longer than 500 words.

Entry Dates: Entries can be mailed to Volunteer Florida, Hispanic Heritage Month Committee, 1545 Raymond Diehl Road, Suite 250, Tallahassee, Florida 32308, or submitted electronically at <http://www.floridahispanicheritage.com/>. **All entries must be received no later than 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on Monday, September 21, 2026.** (Contestants are responsible for all shipping costs). Entries submitted electronically will receive email confirmation.

Entry Form: Student must provide all required information requested on the entry form and entry form must be legible. The student and parent/legal guardian are required to read and understand these rules in order to complete the entry form in its entirety. The entry form includes a release and certification that must be signed by a parent or guardian.

Labeling Requirements: Essays must include student's name, home address, telephone number, school the student attends, grade level, title of the essay and a word count. Essays must be no longer than 500 words in length, written in English, and should be typed.

Public Disclosure: The Florida Public Records Act, located in Chapter 120, Florida Statutes, generally requires that all activities, including this contest, are open to the public. Therefore, all aspects of your involvement in this contest, including your essay, will be subject to public disclosure.

Awards: Each winner will receive a 2-year Florida College Plan scholarship provided by the Florida Prepaid College Foundation and a \$200 gift card for school supplies. Once winners are announced, the decision is final.

In addition to the 500-word essay, each student must also submit each of the following:

- ☐ A letter of recommendation (no more than 250 words) from an educator (teacher/principal/coach) or professional (employer/community or business leader) describing why the student is worthy to receive a scholarship and how he/she stands out from his/her peers. **Letters of recommendation sent separately, via mail or electronically, will not be accepted.**
- ☐ A 200-250 word personal essay of why the student believes he/she is deserving of the scholarship, what his/her plans are for the future and what he or she has done recently – during the past six months – to give back to his/her community.

For more information, visit www.floridahispanicheritage.com or contact Volunteer Florida at 850-414-7400.



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There are many examples throughout our state's history of Hispanic Heritage. Using your own words, write about Florida's Hispanic Heritage that has had an impactful effect on our state and should be shared. The subject of the essay should be a Floridian.

Some examples are:

- Juan Ponce De Leon, first European to reach Florida
- Jeanette Nunez, President of Florida International University
- Madeline Pumariega, first female President of Miami Dade College
- Alex Rizo, Florida State Representative
- Esteban Bovo Jr., Mayor of Hialeah

Grades 4-5

Using several credible sources with varying points of view, write about Florida's Hispanic Heritage. **The student should explain in their own words why the subject of the essay is worthy of recognition.**

Be sure to properly cite your sources on a separate page.

(<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/>)

Grades 6-8

Using several credible sources with varying points of view, write about Florida's Hispanic Heritage. **The student should explain in their own words why the subject of the essay is worthy of recognition.**

Write your essay in a way that encourages the reader to continue to explore the topic further.

Be sure to properly cite your sources on a separate page.

(<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/>)

Grades 9-12

Using several credible sources with varying points of view, write about Florida's Hispanic Heritage. **The student should explain in their own words why the subject of the essay is worthy of recognition.**

Write your essay in a way that demonstrates a deep understanding of the topic and historical context.

Be sure to properly cite your sources on a separate page.

(<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/>)



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Essay Contest Checklist:

- ☐ Responds to prompt for appropriate grade level
- ☐ Essay is original work by the student and not aided by any artificial means
- ☐ Student uses their own words to explain why the subject of the essay is worthy of celebration
- ☐ No longer than 500 words
- ☐ Written in English
- ☐ Typed
- ☐ Use of previously published works properly referenced on a separate page

(<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/>)

Information included on essay:

- ☐ Title of essay
- ☐ Word count
- ☐ Student's name
- ☐ Telephone number
- ☐ School student attends
- ☐ Grade level

Additional items to be included and submitted together in the entry packet:

- ☐ Completed, legible entry form.
- ☐ Signed Parent/Legal Guardian Waiver.
- ☐ Letter of recommendation (no more than 250 words) from educator or professional. **Letters of recommendation sent separately, via mail or electronically, will not be accepted.**
- ☐ Personal essay including community service statement (200-250 words).
- ☐ **Submitted in time to be received by Volunteer Florida by 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on Monday, September 21, 2026.**



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Entry Form and Parent/Legal Guardian Waiver Form Grades 4-5, 6-8, 9-12

Student Name:			Grade:		
Title of Essay:			Word Count:		
Home Mailing Address:			Age:		
City:		State: Florida	Zip Code:		
Home Phone Number: (including area code)					
Parent/Legal Guardian Name:					
Parent/Legal Guardian Cell Phone Number: (including area code)			Parent/Legal Guardian E-Mail Address:		
School Name:				County:	
School Mailing Address:					
City:		State: Florida	Zip Code:		
School Phone Number: (including area code)					

Release Statement:

As parent or guardian, I acknowledge that my child has written the attached essay. Should he or she win the essay contest, I agree to allow the essay to be distributed publicly. I also understand that if it is discovered my child used artificial means, plagiarized or that the thoughts expressed are not his or her own, the essay will be subject to disqualification.

I, _____,
(Print Name of Parent/Legal Guardian), hereby certify the following:

I am the parent/legal guardian of _____
1. My child is currently a legal resident of Florida and attends a Florida school.

Parent/ Legal Guardian Signature

Date