

**Reports on the South's Condition: Jobs, Education and Export Gap**

Three new policy reports offer insights into employment, education and trade trends currently influencing the South.

**1. Job Growth**

Though still suffering the effects of a decline in traditional industries, several Southern states have led the nation in gains in nonfarm jobs this year, according to the federal [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#).

The Bureau's May report on regional and state employment and unemployment allows a look at trends employment and unemployment trends since January 2004. The table provides data for the Southern states. These findings stand out:

- Florida (+74,700 jobs) and Texas (+ 60,700 jobs) led the nation in total job growth, while North Carolina (+49,000 jobs) ranked fourth.
- In terms of rates of job-growth, two Southern states – Oklahoma and North Carolina – ranked among the top five nationally. The others were Oregon, New Hampshire and Nevada.

<b>Seasonally-Adjusted Nonfarm Employment in the South (Ranked by Percent Change) January-May 2004</b>				
	# of Jobs (thousands) January 2004	# of Jobs (thousands) in May 2004	# Difference May-January	% Change, May- January
Oklahoma	1441.7	1464.3	22.6	1.6%
North Carolina	3799.3	3848.3	49.0	1.3%
Florida	7354.1	7428.8	74.7	1.0%
Virginia	3549.4	3582.4	33.0	0.9%
Texas	9385.4	9446.1	60.7	0.6%
South Carolina	1821.7	1832.8	11.1	0.6%
Arkansas	1144.2	1149.2	5.0	0.4%
Mississippi	1119.7	1123.6	3.9	0.3%
Tennessee	2682.7	2687.3	4.6	0.2%
Alabama	1878.3	1878.2	-0.1	0.0%
Louisiana	1910.5	1909.1	-1.4	-0.1%
West Virginia	724	722.8	-1.2	-0.2%
Kentucky	1793.4	1789	-4.4	-0.2%
Georgia	3896.9	3876.8	-20.1	-0.5%
<i>South</i>	<i>42501.3</i>	<i>42738.7</i>	<i>237.4</i>	<i>0.6%</i>
<b>Source:</b> Bureau of Labor Statistics				

- Thus, even though the larger states of Texas and Florida produced more total jobs, North Carolina exceeded the rate of growth among the major Southern states and outpaced all of its Southeastern neighbors. North Carolina's growth rate was 1.3 percent, compared to 1 percent in Florida, 0.8 percent in Virginia and 0.6 percent in Texas. North Carolina's job creation rate has been twice the Southern average so far this year.

**2. Education**

As the economic and demographic face of the South has changed, the American high school has begun to change – and it needs to.

This is a central finding of *The State of the South 2004*, the fifth biennial report just released by MDC Inc., a Chapel Hill-based research firm. (Full disclosure: Ferrel Guillory, the director of the UNC Program on Southern Politics, Media and Public Life, is a co-author of the report.) The report is available at [www.mdcinc.org](http://www.mdcinc.org)

*The State of the South 2004* identifies these levers for change:

- The South must align high school curriculum and standards with the requirements of the emerging economy and postsecondary education. The region must strive for measurements that go beyond a single, standardized test, and literacy instruction ought to be extended through high school.
- The South should give students more options and equitable options. In an era rich with experimentation, the South should get ahead of the curve in testing alternative models for high schools.
- Guidance counselors can serve as powerful connectors – and the South should adopt a new model for guidance of students.
- Wherever possible, the South should eliminate high-poverty schools to bring an end to ethnic and social class isolation.
- The South should recognize the primacy of teaching. Every state needs a corps of superbly trained, well-paid, professional teachers under the leadership of skillful principals. The South needs to break up the systematic assigning of the most vulnerable teachers to the most vulnerable students.

### **3. Foreign Trade**

At its annual meeting earlier this month in Oklahoma City, the Southern Growth Policies Board released a report titled, “The Globally Competitive South,” that calls on the region to pursue aggressively global economic opportunities.

“The Southern export gap – the difference between what the region actually exports and what the South would export if our performance as a region were at the national average – was \$28 billion in 2001,” says the report. “Closing the gap in that year would have created approximately 382,000 more jobs in the Southern economy.”

A website for the report is still under construction, but the executive summary can be found at [www.southern.org](http://www.southern.org)

### **Articles of Interest**

John Quinterno (opinion). “Back in Play.” *Bacon’s Rebellion*. June 21, 2004.  
(<http://baconsrebellion.com/#Quinterno>)

\* An analysis of presidential voting patterns in Virginia.

Joshua Green. “Dumb and Dumber: Why are Campaign Commercials So Bad?” *The Atlantic Monthly*, July/August 2004.  
(<http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/2004/07/green.htm>)

\* A discussion of campaign commercials and how they work and how some people are trying to improve them.