

## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Virtual Listening Tour Examines COVID-19 Impact on Florida Schools**

*UF Lastinger Center for Learning and Impact Florida collaborate after receiving funds from Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation*

**GAINESVILLE** – The [University of Florida Lastinger Center for Learning](#) has launched a comprehensive analysis of the responses and approaches taken by birth through 12th grade public and private education programs throughout Florida during the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of a Virtual Listening Tour, researchers will interview students, parents, teachers, early childhood and K-12 educators and administrators about the effect of COVID-19 and how it impacted the delivery of educational services. In addition to the one-on-one interviews, they developed brief surveys, in both English and Spanish, for dissemination statewide. The Lastinger Center received \$100,000 to fund the endeavor from the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#) alongside a matching grant to [Impact Florida](#) to assist with the dissemination of the findings.

“COVID-19 impacted every facet of education in Florida,” said Dr. Philip E. Poekert, Director of the Lastinger Center. “We’ve all heard anecdotal accounts of how schools and early learning programs responded, but without a systematic research effort to assess the impact, we miss the opportunity to draw conclusions about what worked well. Thanks to the generosity of the Gates Foundation, we will likely discover some innovative and efficient practices that could advance education and enhance student learning.”

The Lastinger Center research team began designing the protocols and mapping its distribution strategy in May. Researchers will target communities throughout the state to ensure maximum variation and a sample that reflects Florida’s diversity. Once collected, data will be used to develop briefs, a website that geo-tags findings, and a final report that highlights best practices, key themes, challenges and solutions to support future planning and policy efforts at the local, state and national levels.

"Florida was an early national leader in ramping up distance learning options for students at the beginning of the COVID pandemic," said Impact Florida Executive Director Mandy Clark.

"Sharing the lessons learned from that experience will help ensure that all students are able to receive a high-quality education no matter what the upcoming school year brings."

The first of the series of publications is set to release in August. Impact Florida, a key partner in the endeavor, will help disseminate the findings throughout the state and into the hands of key influencers. Floridians interested in sharing their experiences of the Florida's educational system response can complete the survey [here](#).

**About the University of Florida Lastinger Center**

*Housed within the College of Education, the Lastinger Center is a national leader in the design, delivery, and scaling of technology-enabled educational systems to transform teaching and learning. Focused on critical milestones of kindergarten preparedness, third grade reading proficiency, and ninth grade algebraic proficiency, the Lastinger Center envisions a world where every child and educator, regardless of circumstances, experiences high-quality learning every day. Since its founding in 2002, the it's leveraged private and public funding to develop high-impact programs, including [Early Learning Florida](#), the [Literacy Matrix](#), and [Math Nation](#). Click [here](#) learn more about the virtual listening tour. The Lastinger Center also developed a new [resource](#) hub with a suite of free resources for students, parents, teachers and faculty.*

**About the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation**

*Guided by the belief that every life has equal value, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation works to help all people lead healthy, productive lives. In developing countries, it focuses on improving people's health and giving them the chance to lift themselves out of hunger and extreme poverty. In the United States, it seeks to ensure that all people—especially those with the fewest resources—have access to the opportunities they need to succeed in school and life. Based in Seattle, Washington, the foundation is led by CEO Mark Suzman and Co-chair William H. Gates Sr., under the direction of Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett.*

**About Impact Florida**

*Impact Florida is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that believes excellent classroom instruction can move the needle for all students. It focuses on supporting education leaders and teachers with the knowledge and resources they need to ensure that great teaching and learning is consistently realized in all Florida schools.*

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