

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Statewide listening tour launches to find ways to improve K-12 math instruction and achievement in Florida

A large majority of Florida students are not able to reach proficiency in math

Alachua County, Fla. – The University of Florida Lastinger Center for Learning has launched its 2023 Listening Tour to gather stakeholder input on education needs and identify ways to substantially improve K-12 mathematics education and achievement in Florida. This comes as only 17% of eighth graders and 33% of fourth graders scored proficient in math in the 2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as the Nation’s Report Card.

“At the Lastinger Center, we always strive to serve communities, educators, students and their families in the ways that work best and make the biggest difference in their future,” shared Director Phil Poekert. “To do that, we have to listen to their needs and understand how we can come together in common purpose to find solutions that meet those needs.”

The Listening Tour team will visit 10 regions around the state, from the Panhandle to the Keys, conducting interviews, focus groups and surveys. They seek to learn from all kinds of community stakeholders including students, families, educators, community leaders, district-level leaders, education foundations, educational associations, parent-teacher organizations, and community-based non-profit organizations.

The UF Lastinger Center will use this feedback to inform the development of their professional learning programs and initiatives for students and families from early learning to literacy to mathematics. Furthermore, themes and recommendations identified through the Listening Tour will be shared with state policy, education, community, and business leaders to inform their understanding of Florida’s education system from birth through 12th grade.

The tour officially launched on Tuesday with a kickoff event in the Alachua Elementary School cafeteria. Hosted with the Lastinger Center’s New Worlds Reading Initiative team, the evening was filled with fun reading activities for kids, dinner, free books and raffle prizes for families. Staff was on hand to help eligible students sign up for the New Worlds Reading Initiative to

receive free at-home reading activities and books. All attendees were invited to share their current and past experiences learning to read and do math. The Lastinger Center team listened to parents and caregivers, educators, and community leaders who shared their perspectives on the current needs and opportunities within K-12 education.

Dozens of young learners attended, along with their families, as did the Mayor, City Manager, and Economic Development Manager for the City of Alachua. Dr. Cathy Atria, Deputy Superintendent for Alachua County Public Schools, and leaders from Alachua Elementary joined as well.

Principal Holly Burton of Alachua Elementary shared, “I am really excited that we were the first stop on this Listening Tour!”

City of Alachua Economic Development Manager David Wisener noted, “For two years in a row, helping our local community, both our schools and our daycare and early education centers, to improve their quality has been our city commission’s highest priority.”

“We want to learn the results of that tour,” shared Alachua Mayor Gib Coerper. “We want to follow what you're doing, but we also want to sit down with you and learn exactly what you learned. That will help us with the whole school system here.”

Dr. Cathy Atria, Deputy Superintendent for Alachua County Public Schools, spoke of the tour stating, “One of the things that I have always appreciated about the Lastinger Center and their work, not just in their listening tours, but in the fact that they do go out and talk to stakeholders at all different levels, and they actually listen.”

Helios Education Foundation is one of several funders who have made the Lastinger Listening Tour possible by supporting the collection of interviews, focus groups, and surveys on mathematics education, with a mind to identify the most effective ways to improve Florida students’ mathematics outcomes.

“We at Helios believe math is one of the fundamental pillars of education,” said Paul J. Luna, president and CEO of Helios Education Foundation. “That is why we are proud to support the UF Lastinger Center for Learning’s efforts to improve math instruction and achievement in Florida.”

Regional schedule of the Listening Tour:

- North Central Florida | Week of Sept. 11, 2023
- Southwest Florida | Week of: Sept. 18, 2023
- Western Panhandle | Week of: Oct. 2, 2023
- Central Florida | Week of: Oct. 9, 2023

- Tampa Bay | Week of: Oct. 16, 2023
- Treasure Coast | Week of: Oct. 23, 2023
- Southeast Florida | Week of: Oct. 30, 2023
- Northeast Florida | Week of: Nov. 6, 2023
- Central Panhandle | Week of: Nov. 13, 2023
- Florida Gateway | Week of: Nov. 27, 2023

Get involved:

- To learn more about the tour visit <https://lastinger.center.ufl.edu/research/listening-tour/>
- To take the 10-minute Listening Tour Survey visit <bit.ly/ListeningEventSurvey>
- To participate in a focus group or interview visit <bit.ly/ListeningTourParticipant>
- To hear the Listening Tour playlist visit https://bit.ly/tour_playlist

About the UF Lastinger Center for Learning:

The UF Lastinger Center for Learning researches, develops, and scales equitable educational innovations for adults and children that put all learners on trajectories for lifelong success. With a portfolio ranging from early learning and literacy to mathematics and technology, the center supports transformative, sustainable change in collaboration with educators and other stakeholders in Florida, across the country, and around the world. Three strategic goals guide the center's work: optimizing impact on teaching and learning, enhancing the scale of the center's work and achieving long-term sustainability. To learn more visit <https://lastinger.center.ufl.edu/>.

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