



# 2020 Annual Report





# 2020 Annual Report

## Contents

- 2** Mission
- 3** Director's Message
- 5** 2020 Accomplishments
- 9** Program Accomplishments
- 15** 2021 Initiatives
- 17** About Us
- 17** Our Reach



# Mission

Our mission is to create equitable educational systems where every child and educator, regardless of circumstances, experiences high-quality learning every day to support the achievement of critical milestones that are predictive of success in life - kindergarten readiness, third grade reading proficiency, and algebra proficiency by ninth grade.

# Director's Message



Last year tested all of us in new ways. A pandemic that cost thousands of lives. The reckoning of racial injustice. Businesses shuttered for good. Political discord.

But it was also a year of resilience, innovation, and renewed vigor in the effort to provide high-quality learning opportunities for all students. Personally, last year confirmed for me that the Lastinger Center for Learning's work is critical to the successful future of education in this new era.

COVID-19 forced us to reevaluate the shifting needs of students, families, and teachers. The mandatory move to distance learning revealed the accelerated need for innovation, advancement, and access to broadband.

Within weeks of schools closing, we created an online resource hub for students, teachers, and caregivers to support at-home learning. We also conducted a comprehensive analysis of the responses and approaches taken by birth through 12th grade public and private education programs during the closures through a virtual listening tour. With our existing infrastructure and expertise in online platforms, we were able to accelerate our programs to provide remote, robust learning opportunities for students, families, and teachers.

It's our sincere hope that while 2020 is behind us, we may reflect on the lessons learned and use this experience to develop a resilient, accessible evidence-based learning environment for all children.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Phil Poekert'.

Phil Poekert, Ph. D.





"When students receive the early, personalized support they need to succeed in middle school mathematics, the opportunities are endless. We're incredibly encouraged to see so many students using the On-Ramp to 6th Grade platform to help build their math muscles at a time when access to high-quality digital learning tools has never been more important."



Kate Johnson, President, Microsoft U.S.

# 2020 Accomplishments

“Despite the challenges, these leaders see opportunities to redesign education in ways that can benefit students now and into the future. They are creating stronger connections with school communities; implementing new instructional models and supports; and taking steps to ensure all children have the technology and home internet access they need.”  
*Mike Magee,*  
*CEO, Chiefs for Change*

## TEACHER SUPPORTS

We recognize that teachers are the most significant catalyst for improving student outcomes. To ensure that educators are fully supported, we have expanded many of our online tools to bolster professional development access by:

■ Accelerating the development and improvement of our Flamingo Learning System, giving 30,000 teachers more personalized access to online courses, resources, supports, and networks that are carefully designed to provide practical solutions, improve their skills and knowledge, and advance their education and careers

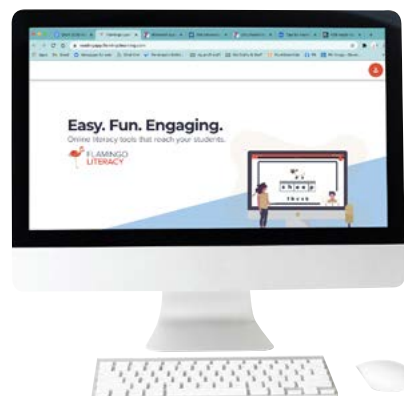
■ Renewing and expanding our partnership with the Florida Department of Education to enroll more than 4,500 teachers in our Literacy Matrix in 2021 — a nine-fold increase from the previous year

■ Launching the On-Ramp to 6th Grade tool within the Math Nation online program, providing individualized instruction to prepare students for middle grades mathematics in four states with support from Microsoft U.S.

■ Extending our literacy-development programs by becoming an approved Read to Succeed Literacy Teacher Endorsement provider in South Carolina

■ Providing more than 120,000 hours of online professional development to 5,200 early childhood educators through our Flamingo Early Learning system

■ Developing a new virtual reading app for teachers to implement evidence-based approaches to reading instruction with individuals or small groups





We create equitable educational systems where every child and educator experiences high-quality learning every day to support the achievement of critical educational milestones.



Kindergarten  
Readiness



3rd Grade  
Reading




9th Grade  
Algebra

## COVID-19 RESPONSE

As schools and early learning programs closed, we quickly leveraged resources to continue serving communities. Since March 2020, we have:

- Offered free, unlimited access to Math Nation so more students could continue instruction undisrupted in 6th-8th grade, Algebra 1, Geometry, and Algebra 2 courses
- Offered free access to the Flamingo Literacy Matrix for teacher educators across the country
- Launched an Online Resource Hub with numerous research-based assets in math, literacy, social emotional well-being, and virtual instruction to support students, families, and teachers
- Leveraged grant funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to conduct a comprehensive Virtual Listening Tour to analyze the transition to distance learning by early learning and K-12 programs
- Supported early childhood educators by facilitating virtual Communities of Practice (CoP) across Florida and Massachusetts



**SHARE YOUR LEARNING IN TIMES OF COVID STORY.**

Submit your story through our contact page and we'll be in touch.

[CONTACT US](#)

### TIPS FOR ONLINE FACILITATION

Facilitating a successful meeting, class, or discussion in-person takes preparation and skill. Using technology to collaborate invites a host of new challenges. Technology accessibility and understanding vary widely. But thoughtful planning and practice will ensure that your next online meeting is a success.

**TECHNOLOGY**

**BEFORE THE MEETING**

- Notify participants which platform and software they'll need, include download or tutorial links
- Make sure participants clearly understand the technology requirements
- Disable internet connection that supports video and audio
- Updated software for both audio/video and document collaboration (such as Google Docs)
- Platform-specific considerations (e.g. if using Zoom, participants will not have access to some features if they use a Chromebook)
- Video norms like keeping cameras on and using sufficient lighting
- Who and how they should contact support if they can't access the meeting
- Open the meeting room 15 minutes early so participants can arrive early for technology checks

**DURING THE MEETING**

- Designate a co-facilitator to troubleshoot technical problems to keep the meeting going
- Ask participants to test their microphone
- Show participants how to mute themselves
- Send a "test" chat message and explain how and when to use it
- Identify which and how multiple chat pods should be used are available (such as in Zoom and Google Docs)

**FACILITATION**

**BEFORE THE MEETING**

- Choose the appropriate documents (shared, dynamic document such as a Google Doc or a static document)
- Prepare and share an agenda ahead of time
- Include a link at the top to the online meeting room and links to any external documents
- Limit the number of documents for manageability
- Highlight any assets that need to complete ahead of time
- Prepare and share an agenda ahead of time
- Include a link at the top to the online meeting room and links to any external documents

### TIPS FOR SELF-CARE DURING TIMES OF STRESS

Caregiving takes a lot of energy from you and, when a while, you might start feeling worn out. During times of increased stress, it is imperative to show yourself extra love to take a break and practice self-care. We cannot care for others unless we care for ourselves first.

Simply put, self-care is any deliberate act for the purpose of taking care of yourself. It is a conscious choice to actively engage in activities that promote physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual health.

**Making self-care a priority is the best way to cope with stress during uncertain times. Here are a few ideas to get you started.**

- 1. **Make self-care a daily priority.**
- 2. **Take some time to read a book or do something you enjoy.**
- 3. **Spend time outdoors.** Nature has a way of lifting spirits.
- 4. **Hydrate.** Do whatever it is you enjoy (perhaps it's going for a walk or doing a yoga practice). Even if it's for several minutes, exercise will help release stress and boost endorphins.
- 5. **Rest.** Do whatever it is you enjoy (perhaps it's going for a walk or doing a yoga practice). Even if it's for several minutes, exercise will help release stress and boost endorphins.
- 6. **Exercise.** Do whatever it is you enjoy (perhaps it's going for a walk or doing a yoga practice). Even if it's for several minutes, exercise will help release stress and boost endorphins.
- 7. **Take breaks.** If you're stuck, and retreat to a space where it's quiet or at least the sounds are different. If possible, go outside for a while. Try turning off the radio and TV if available, and avoid keeping them on throughout the day at background noise. Children might also appreciate and respond well to the quiet.
- 8. **Limit screen time.** Take breaks. If you're stuck, and retreat to a space where it's quiet or at least the sounds are different. If possible, go outside for a while. Try turning off the radio and TV if available, and avoid keeping them on throughout the day at background noise. Children might also appreciate and respond well to the quiet.
- 9. **Limit screen time.** Take breaks. If you're stuck, and retreat to a space where it's quiet or at least the sounds are different. If possible, go outside for a while. Try turning off the radio and TV if available, and avoid keeping them on throughout the day at background noise. Children might also appreciate and respond well to the quiet.
- 10. **Limit screen time.** Take breaks. If you're stuck, and retreat to a space where it's quiet or at least the sounds are different. If possible, go outside for a while. Try turning off the radio and TV if available, and avoid keeping them on throughout the day at background noise. Children might also appreciate and respond well to the quiet.

Adapted from: Courchesne, M., Cookley, D., & Stone, J. (n.d.). *Self-Care: A Parent's Guide to Supporting the Well-Being of Children and Families*. Retrieved from [https://www.earlylearning.gov/parenting/parenting-tips/self-care](#)

**EARLY LEARNING**

page 1 of 1

### STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING RESILIENCE IN INFANTS AND TODDLERS

Resilience is the ability to overcome serious hardships. Helping young children build resilience not only helps them deal with the everyday challenges they face today, it will help them develop the skills they need to deal with the challenges and challenges of life in adulthood. Resilient children grow into an enormous amount of change occurs in the first few years of life. Because of this, strategies for building resilience may be different for infants than for toddlers. A strategy that may work for a toddler may not be developmentally appropriate for an infant. However, there are a few strategies for both the universal and some for both infants and toddlers.

**The following strategies develop and strengthen emotional skills that build resilience in infants.**

- **Be there for them.** Be a person who is consistent, reliable, and caring. We want a child to be more independent, but not at the cost of losing trust in a caregiver. A reliable caregiver gives the infant reasons to trust other adults.
- **Give them a chance to help themselves.** Even though we want to be reliable caregivers, it doesn't always seem like we're trying to help them. We want a moment to see if they figure it out themselves. If a four-month-old baby has an infant who is crying, we want to see if they figure it out themselves.
- **Teach an infant how to communicate effectively.** Verbal communication might not be early or even possible for most infants. Teach them to baby sign for "help" when caring for them. Sign language is a great way for infants to express their needs.
- **Encourage them to explore and experiment with things.** Try slightly altering a familiar activity, such as practicing with time to adjust the child's pace. A resilient child approaches a new activity with confidence and excitement.
- **Talk with them about what you're going and what they're feeling.** For example, "I'm going to change your diaper now. It might be a little uncomfortable, but you're safe and okay."
- **Helping gently to their needs.** When an infant is crying, help them to feel safe and steady. **Respond to their needs.** For example, "I'll hold you now."
- **Movement is essential.** Make sure there is enough room for an infant to roll, crawl, or scoot around. Holding an infant is great for attachment, but they still need opportunities to get empty out or exercise skills such as prepping themselves up on a table.
- **Other positive words and specific phrases.** Before a hearing, use positive comments like "You're doing so well!" or "You're so smart!"
- **Create routines for daily activities.** Routines are so important for you and your little one. Right now, creating a story before you signs that it is almost time to sleep, infants, especially those who have experienced traumatic events, that offer with structure.

**EARLY LEARNING**

page 1 of 2



# FLAMINGO EARLY LEARNING



“We have become laser focused in building products and programs that are both impactful and scalable, integrating technology with adult learning principles and research-based supports. Our goal of expanding our reach to provide engaging and effective professional learning to a larger audience is being actualized through the Massachusetts Early Childhood Support Organizations initiative. We are thrilled to be working with and learning from some of the best professional development organizations in the early childhood field while supporting this critical workforce.”



Dr. Phil Poekert, Director

# Program Accomplishments

“ This course gave me the confidence and confirmation of my abilities as an educator and leader. These new skills allow me to handle the variety of scenarios and challenges unforeseen during my career in the Early Learning Program. *Program Director, Florida* ”

“ I started my CDA nine years ago, but quit after two months because I was overwhelmed. When I heard about this online opportunity with University of Florida I decided to give it another try. I am so happy that I did because I learned a lot of new strategies I could out try out immediately in the classroom. Since the courses were online, I could work on them at night or during my lunch break and that worked good for me. I am so proud of myself that I finally did this! *Early Childhood Teacher, Shreveport, LA* ”

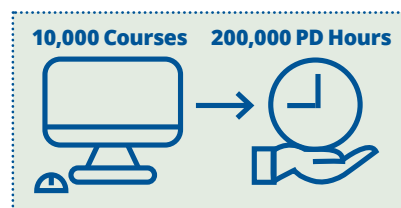
## EARLY LEARNING

Our online professional learning system, Flamingo Early Learning uses a multi-level approach to support early childhood teachers, directors/leaders, instructors, facilitators, and coaches. Courses provide a pathway for Continuing Education Units (CEUs) that articulate to national and state credentials, including the Child Development Associate and Florida Director Credential. In the past year, we've offered nearly 10,000 courses to educators across the country - totaling more than 200,000 hours of professional development. Demand continues to increase with summer enrollment in Florida 93% higher than last year.

### Online Courses Offered in 2020

We have grown our suite of early childhood online professional development products to include 34 English and 11 Spanish

courses, totaling 900 hours of content. Our newest courses reflect a priority focus on the social, emotional, and mental health of children and educators impacted by the pandemic and include Trauma Informed Care, Infant Early Childhood Mental Health, and Reframing Challenging Behaviors.



### Virtual Implementation Supports

We developed and launched a fully online early childhood coaching certification program that empowers early learning professionals to enhance the caliber and impact of support provided to child care centers, family child care homes, and school-based early childhood classrooms.

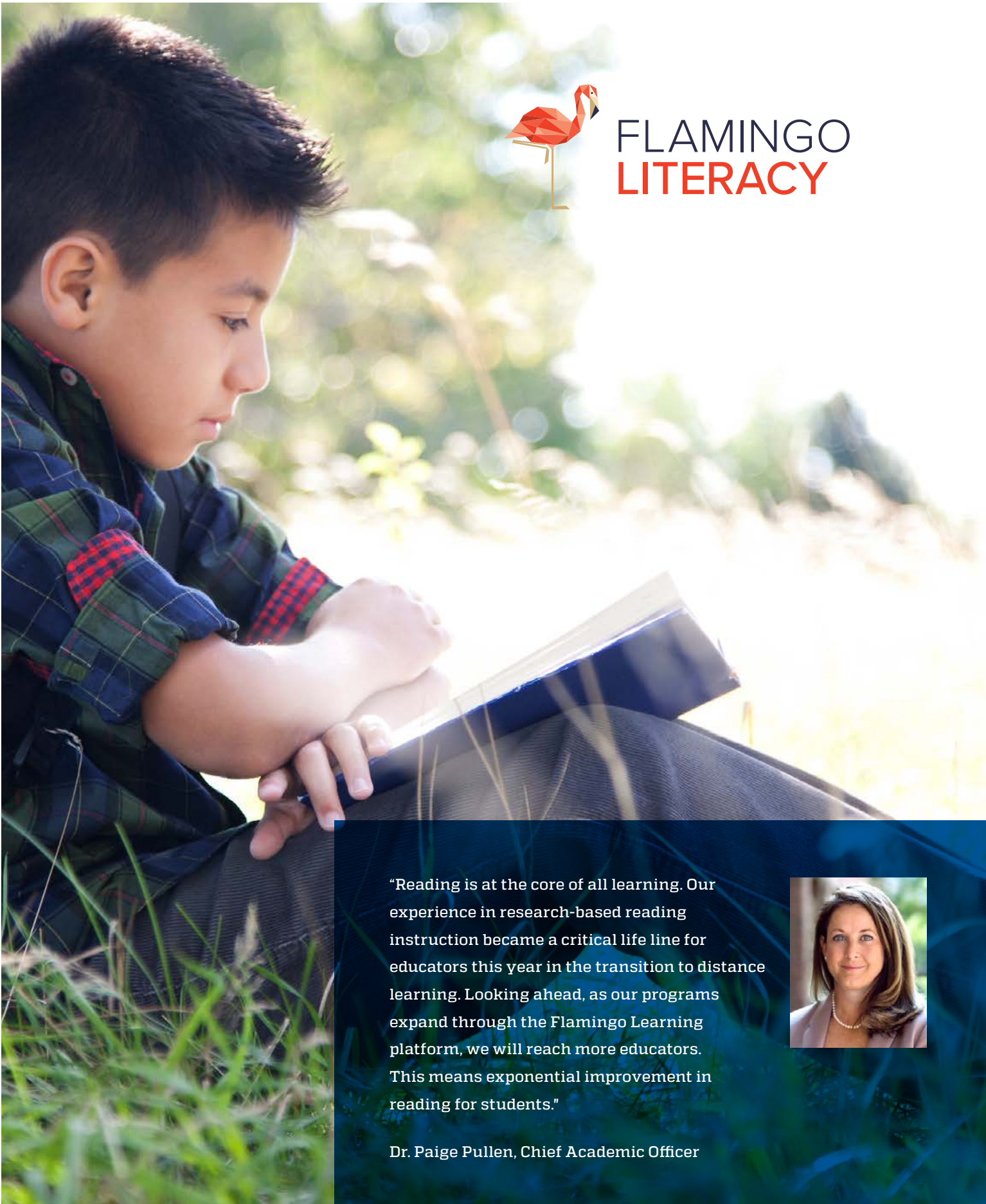
We also offered our Communities of Practice initial training, calibration sessions, and advanced certification in online formats to nearly 300 early childhood professionals during 2020. In addition, our expert facilitators offered their facilitation services to various organizations to convene early learning educators in response to the program closures and then reopenings caused by COVID-19.

### Expansion to Massachusetts

We were selected as one of the Early Childhood Support Organizations for the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care StrongStart Initiative. We will use support program directors and teachers with our model of leadership development and online courses in 50 classrooms in 2021. In keeping with our mission of ensuring children entering kindergarten ready to learn, we are developing a comprehensive approach in Massachusetts that takes our best work in Early Learning and Literacy to ensure a smooth transition for young children into kindergarten.



# FLAMINGO LITERACY



“Reading is at the core of all learning. Our experience in research-based reading instruction became a critical life line for educators this year in the transition to distance learning. Looking ahead, as our programs expand through the Flamingo Learning platform, we will reach more educators. This means exponential improvement in reading for students.”



Dr. Paige Pullen, Chief Academic Officer

“Highly engaging and eye opening. Understanding that comprehension cannot be mastered until decoding and fluency are mastered completely changed my approach. I would recommend this program to any and all teachers.”  
*Teacher, Pinellas County, Florida*

## LITERACY

Third grade reading proficiency connects to every quality of life indicator, from college and career readiness to lifetime earnings. The data shows that our research-based programs centered around the science of reading instruction empower teachers to be their best by equipping them with the knowledge and skills to support struggling readers.

### Flamingo Literacy Matrix

Our literacy-focused, online professional development system trains K-5 teachers to implement evidence-based reading instruction with even the most struggling readers. The Flamingo Literacy Matrix is approved for the reading endorsement requirement in Florida and was extended this year by becoming an approved Read to Succeed Literacy Teacher Endorsement provider for the state of South Carolina.

Teachers who participated this year:

- Showed an **82%** normalized gain in knowledge acquired across all strands
- Increased the rate of mastery of content from less than 10% at pre-assessment to nearly **100%** at post-assessment

### Creating a Literacy Culture

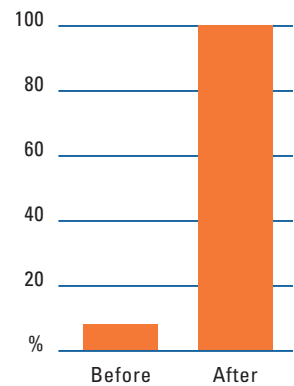
We have expanded our literacy-focused program offerings to create a more comprehensive approach to support early readers by developing education ecosystems to meet their needs. We are working with multiple levels of the school community including administrators, literacy coaches, teachers, caregivers, and students to create and encourage an effective and expanding literacy culture through:

- Literacy Coaching with supporting Playbooks
- Early Literacy Content Clinics
- Literacy Leadership Program
- Literacy Tip Sheets and Corresponding Videos

“I have learned to make sure that instruction should be explicit and systematic. Modeling and guided practice should be implemented on a regular basis. There are so many strategies that I learned during the Literacy Matrix coursework. Using these strategies will allow me to provide successful intervention to my literacy groups.”  
*Teacher, Charleston County, South Carolina*

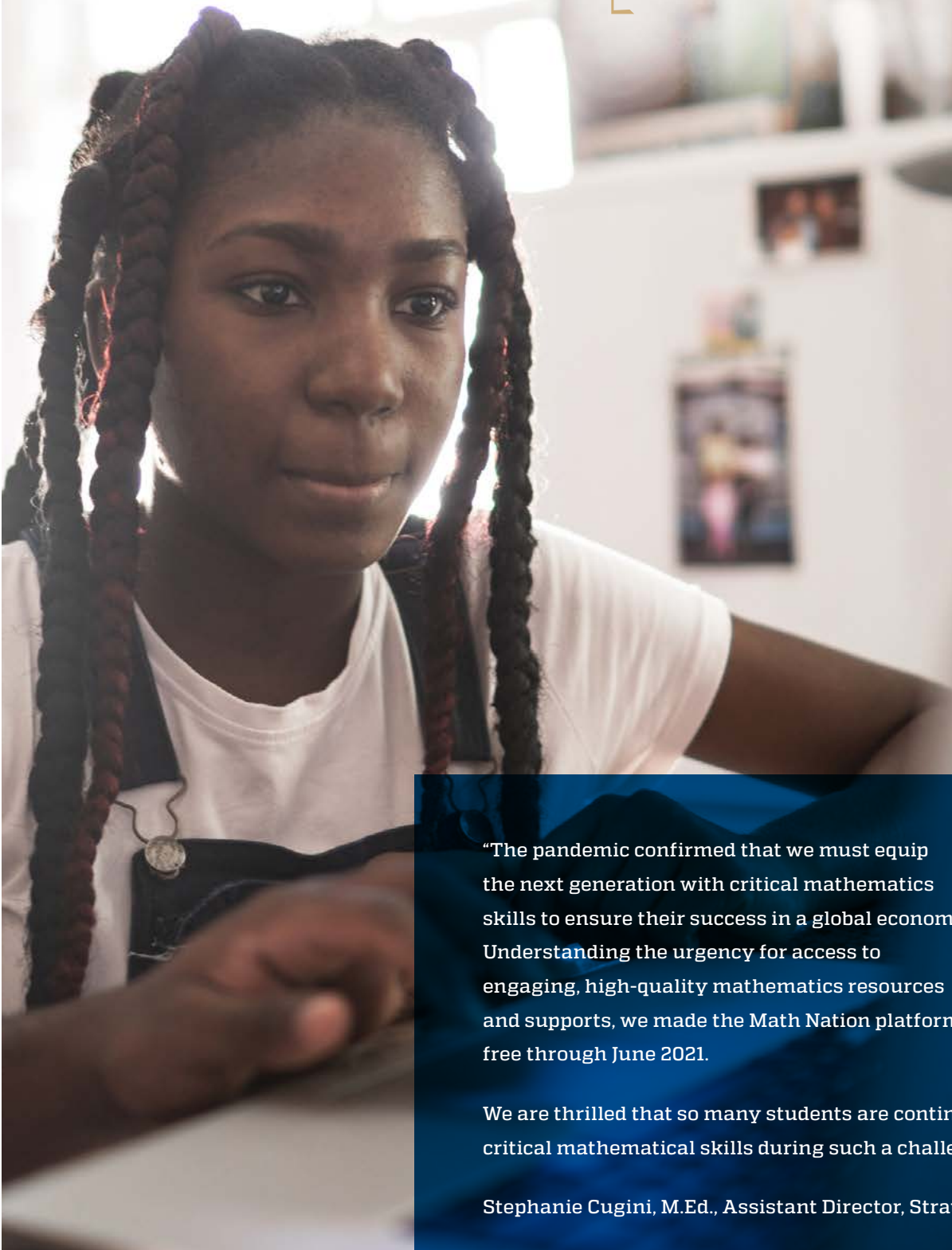
Consistently, educators who complete courses in Flamingo show growth in instructional and content knowledge of two standard deviations, equivalent to having a personal tutor.

TEACHER DISPLAYING CONTENT MASTERY





# FLAMINGO MATHEMATICS



“The pandemic confirmed that we must equip the next generation with critical mathematics skills to ensure their success in a global economy. Understanding the urgency for access to engaging, high-quality mathematics resources and supports, we made the Math Nation platform free through June 2021.



We are thrilled that so many students are continuing to build critical mathematical skills during such a challenging time.”

Stephanie Cugini, M.Ed., Assistant Director, Strategy

“I have never found a better standards’ aligned, comprehensive, and reliable resource as Algebra Nation and Math Nation. The developers understood the need, collaborated with teachers and have done a great job creating a quality, engaging, multi-level resource.”

*District Administrator,  
Hernando County, Florida*

## MATHEMATICS

Mathematical competency is a foundational pillar for the advanced technical skills necessary for success in our 21st-Century workforce. To combat the urgent issue of mathematics illiteracy, it is critical to leverage our most powerful catalyst for change: educators.

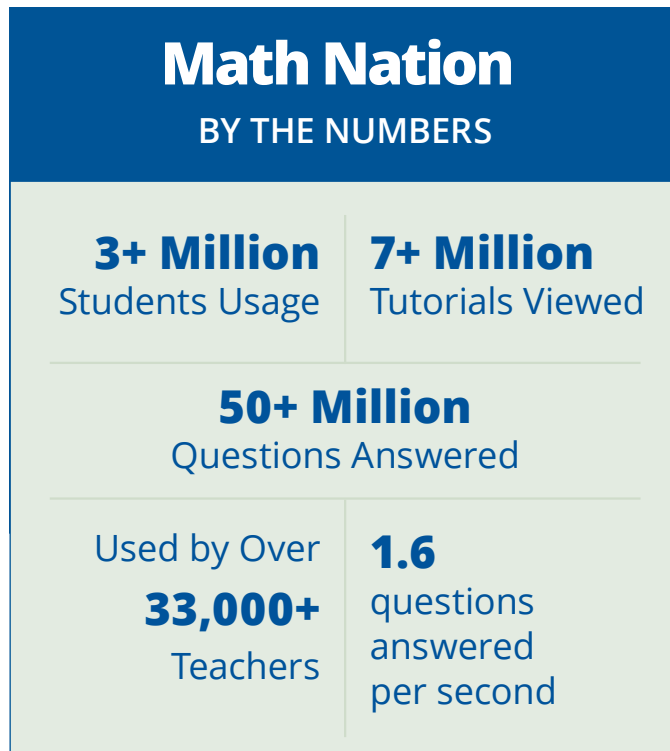
### Math Nation

In the spring of 2020, we made our comprehensive web-based system Math Nation (Algebra Nation) free of charge as students transitioned to distance learning. The program supports students enrolled in middle grades mathematics courses, as well as Algebra 1, Geometry, and Algebra 2.



### On Ramp to 6th Grade

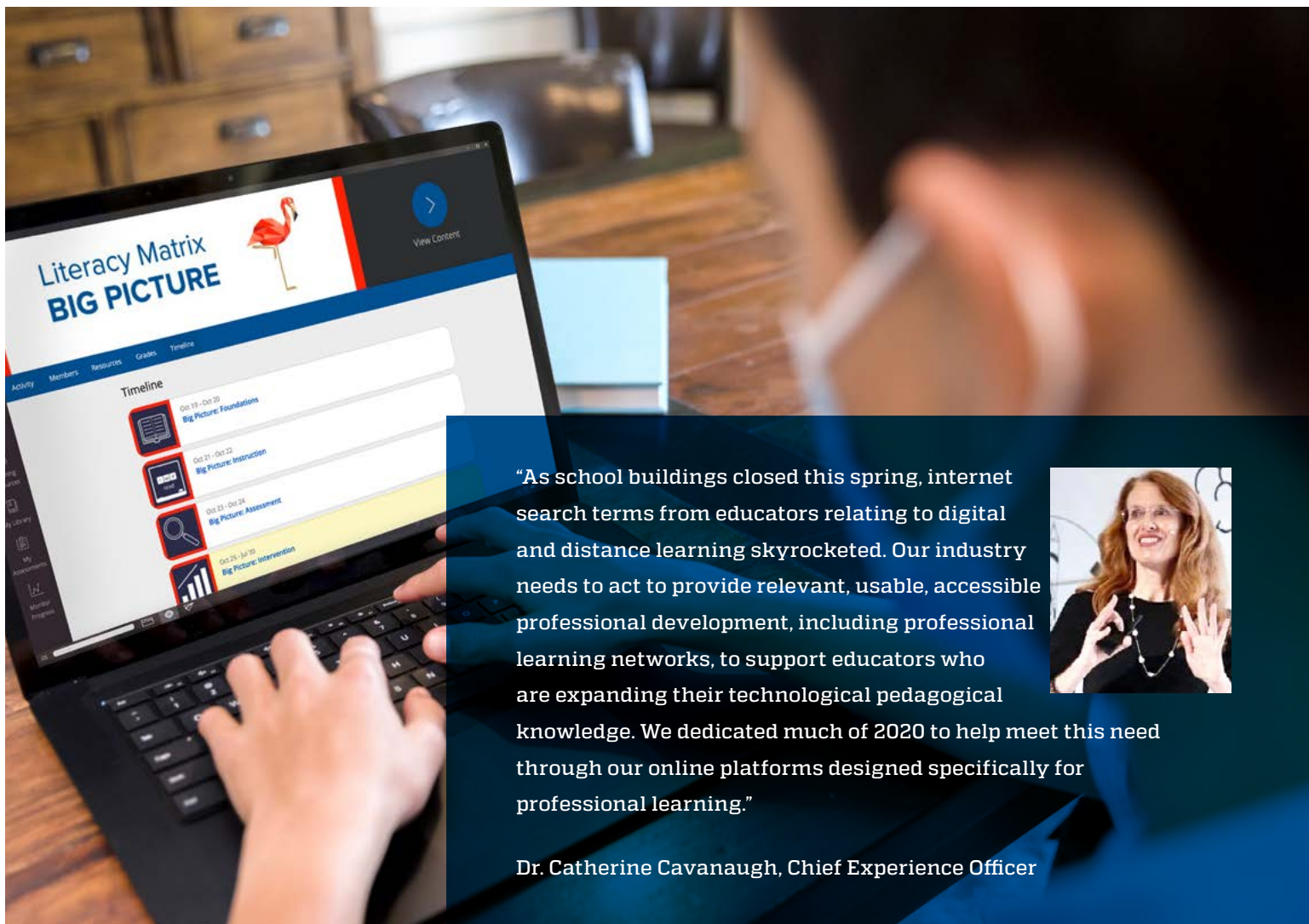
Microsoft U.S. invested nearly \$1 million to accelerate the development of our On-Ramp to 6th Grade tool for teachers and students in Florida, Michigan, Mississippi and South Carolina. The tool helps students prepare for the rigors of middle school mathematics - Using adaptive, diagnostic and instructional pathways, students have anytime-access to tailored, research-based instructional support.



## INNOVATIONS

The Lastinger Center has been a pioneer in the learning sciences, having consistently maintained a connection to the ever-changing needs of teachers and learners alike by forecasting educational trends. Well in advance of 2020, our researchers identified an increased demand for quality online educational tools, which became even more vital as schools moved to distance learning.

Our custom-built Flamingo Learning system, launched in 2019, is designed to be a one-stop hub for educators that connects them to the highest quality, evidence-based courses, resources, support, and networks to provide practical solutions, improve their skills and knowledge, and advance their education and careers. We have expanded our user base over the last year, reaching 5,200 early childhood educators and 1,500 elementary educators through more than 183,000 hours of professional development content.



“As school buildings closed this spring, internet search terms from educators relating to digital and distance learning skyrocketed. Our industry needs to act to provide relevant, usable, accessible professional development, including professional learning networks, to support educators who are expanding their technological pedagogical knowledge. We dedicated much of 2020 to help meet this need through our online platforms designed specifically for professional learning.”

Dr. Catherine Cavanaugh, Chief Experience Officer

# 2021 Initiatives

Looking ahead, we continue to expand our research, product development, and innovations so every child and educator has access to high-quality learning experiences.

- We are taking a renewed focus on building and delivering impactful products and services and are committed to:
  - Reviewing and enhancing current products with an equity lens to ensure we are effectively meeting teachers' and students' needs with culturally diverse and relevant content
  - Prioritizing additional Spanish early learning course development to further support a significant portion of educators
  - Expanding articulation pathways across product lines to enable educators to advance their education and careers through our offerings
  
- We are investing in further enhancements to our Flamingo Learning platform that will improve user engagement and experience and promote market expansion, including:
  - Artificial Intelligence integration using personalization and recommendation algorithms
  - Data infrastructure build-out to closely monitor critical usage and engagement metrics
  
- We are expanding our professional development offerings to support secondary mathematics teachers by:
  - Conducting a landscape analysis to better understand the current state of teacher preparedness to deliver quality mathematics instruction
  - Designing a comprehensive online mathematics professional development system designed to develop educator content and instructional knowledge so that they can effectively instruct and support all students, particularly our most underserved populations
  
- We are deploying the Flamingo Reading App to support teachers and students in distance learning that will:
  - Enable small group reading instruction in a virtual setting
  - Empower teachers to bundle multiple steps into a single lesson and incorporate the components of the science of reading
  - Include more than 900 app-accessible books for Small Group Instruction also available in Spanish

Teachers using the platform and professional development in a pilot program saw greater student growth during a 6-week summer camp than over the entire school year.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

In 2020, we saw well-intentioned and traditional plans for education slowly shift due to school closures caused by the pandemic. But still we found a way to innovate. School districts, communities, and private businesses rallied to support the transition to distance learning, even as we faced some difficult truths about the infrastructure of Florida's current education system. However, along with the resilience of our citizens, we realized the opportunities before us. The Lastinger Center for Learning is seizing this unique opportunity to leverage real-time, advanced solutions so every child and educator, regardless of circumstances, experiences high-quality learning. We look forward to bringing new, innovative solutions to learning.



## About Us

Established in 2002 by Allen and Delores Lastinger, the University of Florida (UF) Lastinger Center for Learning is a responsive innovation hub dedicated to transforming educational systems and structures by engaging in translational research to drive decision making, inform policy, and improve systems within Florida and across the nation. The Lastinger Center is a unique asset to Florida, serving as the only applied early learning to postsecondary education innovation center in a state university. Lastinger Center associates are educators with content and practice expertise, enabling us to deliver research-based instruction to students and educators. The Lastinger Center capitalizes on the high caliber of university faculty by working across disciplines and colleges to bring a further depth of expertise to innovations that support talent development and to grow the knowledge base on successful educational interventions through applied research.



Since its founding, the Lastinger Center has blended academic research with practice, making meaningful improvements in education and student learning. Historically, the organization has championed the effort to track academic success via critical developmental milestones, including kindergarten readiness, 3rd-grade reading proficiency, and mastery of algebra skills. Dedication and innovative responsiveness to these key milestones rapidly moved the Lastinger Center from a lean start-up to a state and national education innovator.

## Our Reach

### FLORIDA

Flamingo Early Learning  
Flamingo Coaching Certification  
Flamingo Literacy Matrix  
Math Nation  
K-12 Instructional Leadership  
Virtual Learning Lab

### MASSACHUSETTS

Flamingo Early Learning

### SOUTH CAROLINA

Flamingo Early Learning  
Flamingo Literacy Matrix  
Charleston Comprehensive  
Literacy Initiative  
Trident United Way  
Reading By Third  
Math Nation

### LOUISIANA

Flamingo Early Learning

### ARIZONA

Instructional Leadership  
Development

### ALABAMA

Math Nation

### MISSISSIPPI

Math Nation

### MICHIGAN

Math Nation

### TENNESSEE

Math Nation



The **University of Florida Lastinger Center for Learning** is an education innovation hub that blends cutting-edge academic research and practice to transform education and accelerate learning. We work to create equitable educational systems where every child and educator, regardless of circumstances, experiences high-quality learning every day to support the achievement of critical milestones in children's trajectory through school that are predictive of success in life. Our innovations include Algebra Nation and Flamingo Early Learning Florida and serve more than 500,000 students and 50,000 teachers across ten states in the nation each year.

**UF** | Lastinger Center for Learning  
UNIVERSITY *of* FLORIDA

618 SW 12th Street  
0711 Norman Hall  
PO Box 117052  
Gainesville, FL 32611

(352) 273-4103

[www.lastingercenter.com](http://www.lastingercenter.com)

  @LastingerCenter