

State Legislature invests \$2M in Algebra Nation, UF's answer to high-stakes End-of-Course exam

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GAINESVILLE, Fla. — After hearing from teachers who actively engaged with Algebra Nation in its trial period, the state Legislature has invested \$2 million to expand the reach and impact of the [University of Florida's](#) innovative program to help students succeed on the high-stakes End-of-Course exam.

Developed by UF's Lastinger Center for Learning in partnership with the Florida Department of Education and Gainesville-based Study Edge, Algebra Nation offers Florida's teachers, students and parents a free, accessible, interactive 24/7 online resource and supplemental instructional tool aligned with the latest state standards. "We had planned to continue self-financing Algebra Nation in its second pilot year," UF Lastinger Center Director Don Pemberton said. "We are honored that the Florida Legislature has independently recognized that Algebra Nation is making a difference for teachers, students and parents throughout the state."

The UF Lastinger Center plans to substantially expand Algebra Nation's reach and impact in many ways, including:

- Building a new app that allows teachers to fully utilize the program in their classrooms.
- Aligning the Algebra Nation material with the new Common Core State Standards.
- Creating new assessment tools.
- Designing, building, field-testing and implementing a teachers' Common Core professional development network.
- Producing new instructional videos aligned with this year's state standards and the Common Core State Standards, which will be taught this year but will be tested next year.
- Updating and upgrading the Algebra Nation Workbook.

For Florida's high school students, the Algebra 1 EOC is as high stakes as it gets — it determines their future. They must pass it to graduate. About 48 percent of ninth-graders failed the spring 2013 Algebra 1 End-of-Course exam.

"We've created Algebra Nation to help Florida students succeed in this key STEM subject," said Joy Schackow, UF STEM professor-in-residence in Pinellas County who serves as Algebra Nation's math expert. "Algebra serves as a gatekeeper to success in high school and beyond."

Since it launched Jan. 15, Algebra Nation has exceeded expectations. More than half of Florida's middle and high school algebra teachers, representing 900 schools in all 67 school districts, have used this learning ecosystem. In and out of the classrooms, teachers and students showed and watched the Algebra Nation instructional videos more than 116,000 times.

Students have posted as many as 1,000 daily inquiries, answers and comments on the Algebra Wall, which is monitored in real time by Algebra Nation study experts.

"Research tells us that peer-tutoring is one of the most effective ways to learn," said Boaz Dvir, UF's Algebra Nation project manager. "On our Algebra Wall, students feel

free to ask even the simplest questions. The discussions they spark and the answers they elicit are simultaneously individualized and universal.”

Students also post feedback to the Algebra Nation team, including:

- “This is the best tool I have used in my entire life! I actually used to hate algebra at one point, but my Dad heard about this on NPR ... I hope I get to use this tool throughout my life!”
- “I’d just like to say Bravo! Algebra Nation is so fun and is such a good way to have students practice and learn more.”
- “Math has always been my toughest subject in school (my definite strength and talent is writing), therefore the Algebra Nation team has REALLY been helping me ... I think the practice quizzes are especially helpful, because we can test our knowledge and understanding of what we learned in the guiding videos and apply it to test-taking.”

Teachers are equally appreciative. For instance, Ponte Vedra High School algebra teacher Janice Rausch wrote, “Thank you so much for developing a great resource like Algebra Nation. There are so many fantastic links and resources that I have really loved using in my class. Next year, I would love to use some of your lessons as I go. I have loved using your resources by section to reteach and ‘remind’ them about challenging topics. Thanks again for creating such a rich and wonderful resource!”

Housed in the UF College of Education, the Lastinger Center is an educational innovation incubator. It harnesses the university’s intellectual resources to design, build, field-test and scale models that advance teaching, learning and healthy child development. The center continuously evaluates and refines its work, widely disseminates its findings and roots its initiatives in a growing network of partner sites around the state and country.

Study Edge is a Gainesville-based enterprise that helps college students improve their outcomes. Its founding president, Ethan Fieldman, was the first winner of the Cade Museum Prize for Innovation.

Credits

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<http://news.ufl.edu/2013/07/10/algebra-nation-2/>