

Virtual school aims to educate lawmakers

From eSchool News staff and wire service reports

May 1, 2004

The Florida Virtual School (FLVS) is taking an innovative approach to promoting support for virtual education by inviting legislators to become students.

This spring, FLVS began offering a mini-course to provide elected officials and U.S. Department of Education (ED) personnel with a first-hand look at the school's online learning environment.

"We know that improving the quality of education is a top priority for state and national leaders, and [we] recognize there are many ways to achieve our various goals," said Bruce Friend, chief administrative officer for FLVS. "Our goal, in developing this course, is introduce decision makers to virtual learning. We encourage our nation's public policy makers to step into the shoes of today's students and experience an online course."

Participants in the course have two options: They can sign up for a short course on American government facilitated by a certified teacher and to be completed at their leisure. Or, they may explore the course without an instructor. This would enable them to get a look at the curriculum as an observer in the class--24 hours a day--for a two-week period.

Legislators are encouraged to sign up anonymously for either option. In both cases, participants would not be required to hand in work, nor would they receive grades for their participation. Rather, it's a way for policy makers "to take a peek at what virtual learning really looks like," Friend said.

The course is intended to dispel what Friend says are some common misconceptions about online learning--mainly that it is a solitary and disengaging affair--while giving legislators a chance to see and feel how the program actually works.

"It's a way for the people who fund us to learn about our environment,"

Friend said. "This is an opportunity for us to spread the word [about virtual learning] to those who hold the purse strings about what online learning really looks like."