

## Officials mull virtual school for Polk

By **KYLE KENNEDY**

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LAKELAND - As early as next fall, going to high school may become as simple as signing in online.

Polk school officials are considering a proposal to franchise courses from the Florida Virtual School (FLVS). The program offers core curriculum and a selection of Advanced Placement (AP) classes to high school students across the state via the Internet.

FLVS, which began as a state-funded pilot program in 1997, has earned federal dollars as a public high school since July 2003. With about 20,000 online students, it also stands as the largest high school in Florida.

Polk Director of Secondary Education Dr. Bruce Tonjes said that access to FLVS is limited because of high demand from students. He said the district could franchise some of the online classes and offer them locally, while at the same time collecting federal money for students enrolled in the program.

Daniel Jenkins Academy in Haines City is the only Polk school which currently uses FLVS. Under a proposal submitted Thursday to the school board, the middle-high school would administer the FLVS program during its initial run.

In addition to offering AP courses that are unavailable at area high schools, Jenkins Principal Sue Braiman said FLVS students could sign up for a number of elective classes.

"A lot of students don't like to take personal fitness on campus, so that would be an option for them," she said.

Tonjes added that FLVS could prevent dropouts because it allows students to make up credits. FLVS course grades also are transferable and certain classes can be used for college.

The district would pay \$20,000 to franchise FLVS courses the first year, and \$15,000 each year thereafter. Additional costs for teacher training and program administration would be required as well.

If FLVS earns school board approval, district officials will need to decide which courses to offer and advertise for online teachers. The pay for online teachers also will have to be worked out with the district's teacher union, the Polk Education Association.

"This could become a huge thing," Tonjes said. "We're convinced that this is the direction we should head."