

## Virtual schools increase options

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Caprice Woodburn's sixth-graders travel to Greece in her world cultures class.

Virtually, anyway.

They take the class at Florida Virtual School, an online school that offers supplementary courses to students attending brick-and-mortar high school and middle school. More than 2,000 students in Lee County take courses through that online school.

"More than ever students and parents are requesting choices to fill the gaps in their education," said Julie Young, Florida Virtual School president.

Students can take courses their schools don't offer or that can't fit into their schedules.

Chelsea Franklin, 15, has taken state-required health and physical fitness online, freeing her up for TV production, broadcasting, digital design and Spanish at Cypress Lake High this year.

The school also allows children who failed the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test to take a required course such as reading and still take band or drama at regular school.

Students can sign up and start a class any day for free. They read the material online without textbooks and are assigned one of 600 Florida-certified teachers.

Classes last the traditional 36 weeks, or are extended or accelerated, depending the student's pace. A student can't pass on to the next section of a course until he masters the current one.

Woodburn has taught kids all over Florida and residents with military parents living in Bahrain, Korea and Venezuela.

"I spend a large part of the day on the phone with students," said Woodburn, who must have a conference call with each student and a parent once a month.

"(People) think it's this cold, impersonal thing and nothing could be further from the truth."

"We've tried to recreate and reinvent the learning experience in this online experience rather than to replace the traditional classroom," Young said.

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