

## LookUp Orlando

### Florida School...Virtually

By *Mark Goldstein*

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Tracy Foisy, now in her eleventh year of teaching, prepares for another day teaching Algebra 1 to her students...all 190 of them. She turns on the computer in her home office and begins to make, and receive, phone calls with her students. Tracy is one of over 250 full-time and 180 adjunct teachers who reside both in and out of Florida and make up the faculty of Florida Virtual School (FLVS).

Founded in 1997, FLVS was the country's first state-wide Internet-based public high school. Today, FLVS serves middle and high school students with more than 90 courses. In 2000, the Florida Legislature established FLVS as an independent educational entity with a gubernatorial appointed board, and it is the only public school where funding is tied directly to student performance. In the 2005-06 school year, FLVS had an enrollment of 31,000 students with 68,000 course enrollments and an average completion rate of 85 percent. While 64 percent of the students come from public school, 27 percent are home schooled and another 8 percent attend private school. Orange County is one of the top districts with 9 percent of total participation.

As I met with Tracy, she received a call from one of her students who had prepared for her monthly progress assessment. As they spoke, Tracy viewed the student's records online, discussed the status of the course completion, gave the student direction and motivation, then spoke with the mother (a school requirement) in a parent teacher conference, a typical interaction for a FLVS teacher.

This is Tracy's first full year as a FLVS teacher. Asked why she chose this form of education, she said that she was glad to be out of the classroom situation and that it gave her the flexibility to be home with her child. For students, there are many reasons to choose FLVS. It is ideal for the student who has failed a class and is a great alternative to summer school. For the exceptional student, it is the opportunity for advanced placement and honors. Students in long-term hospital care or homebound students will not fall behind in their studies. It may be that a student may be self-conscious and chooses to complete a personal fitness class in private. For whatever reasons, students may even choose to complete all of their class work from grades 6 through 12 online.

The good news for parents is that this program is state-funded and is free for Florida residents. Since all of the course material is online, there is no cost for books. Any student in Florida qualifies to be accepted into the program; however, Tracy cautions that the students who succeed are self-motivated and have a lot of parental support. She suggests that both parents and students visit the web site [www.flvs.net](http://www.flvs.net) and speak with the school guidance counselor.