

## FLVS crams a school into your computer

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As middle- and high-school students gear up for the school year, some may want to consider a classroom without chalkboards or assigned seats. These students can be enrolled in courses with the Florida Virtual School

The initiative is a state-funded public school offering virtual classes for grades 6 to 12 and a GED program for adults. The virtual school offers more than 80 courses for high-school students, ranging from regular to Advanced Placement courses. In July, FLVS expanded by adding a middle-school program. There will be 16 new courses for middle-school students.

"With technology all around them, today's students are more equipped to fully engage when virtual courses are presented as an option," Julie Young, CEO and president of FLVS, said in a written statement. "Our new middle-school courses were designed to meet the demands of these students and their parents who have been asking for years for a middle-school program."

The virtual school is an option for students who need to make up credits, have a schedule conflict, want to take courses not offered at their school, want to accelerate their academic program, or are in home-school education. Students can request a course at any time during the year if it is available on the FLVS Web site.

Brandi Barkley, 16, a senior at Leon High School, is taking her first online course, Latin I. She wants to graduate a semester early, and taking the online course this summer is helping her do that.

"I like taking the course online, because I can go at my own pace and it's not a lot of pressure about learning at anyone else's pace," said Brandi.

Currently, 21,453 students are enrolled in 33,767 courses in the school. In Leon County there are 513 course enrollments.

In Leon County, all FLVS courses can be used for credit toward graduation and are placed on a student's transcript, without indication that the course was taken online.

Caitlin McMullen, 17, a rising senior at Leon High, took AP U.S. History online during her junior year. She was required to take the course but didn't have room on her schedule, so she opted to take it online.

"As an online student, there were always additional resources and more study materials. I wasn't just learning from a textbook," Caitlin said.

There is one big difference between a virtual school and a traditional school. The FLVS motto, "Any time, any place, any path, any pace," emphasizes the school's philosophy.

Students can move through the course material at a traditional, accelerated or extended pace.

"The hardest part of taking the online class is making yourself do it," Caitlin said. "You don't have immediate consequences compared to a regular class. It is really easy to make yourself slip and not do it."

Jane Selman, an online instructor for a physical education course, has been with the virtual school full time for one year. She says that, contrary to some expectations, there is a high level of interaction and communication between teacher and student.

"We are really better at communication than most high schools because of the way we manage communication," said Selman, a former assistant principal of East Gadsden High.

All teachers are on call by phone from 8 a.m. through 8 p.m. They are also available through e-mail, and they make monthly phone calls to check on students.

Selman said the online physical education course is more comprehensive and better than taking team sports for credit. The class takes students through an effective program by requiring workouts through the week, which the parents verify and which require the student to be in a group sport. The course also emphasizes nutrition.

Nicole Sellers, an instructor for FLVS, teaches Latin I and II. Before that, she taught Latin at Chiles High School.

Sellers, who became a full-time online teacher because of the flexibility, says she like the varied demographics of students. However, she says it takes a certain student to complete a class online.

"Some students are not made for online learning, but the ones that are, are self-motivated and self-disciplined," Sellers said.

#### MORE INFORMATION

Parents or students seeking more information about the Florida Virtual School can contact a school's guidance office or visit [www.flvs.net](http://www.flvs.net).

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