

WCJB - ABC

Virtual Learning At Eastside High School

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By Stacey Samuel, WCJB TV20 News

Administrators are trying everything they can to improve the grades of students at Eastside High School. Now, that includes a new high tech classroom.

Eastside High School is one of the area's lowest performers on the FCAT, so they've come up with another way to get their students performing better. And it's free.

Scoring on the field is as important to 12th grader Darryl King as it is scoring on the FCAT. He says, "I'm taking it so it can help me on the FCAT so I can pass and to get the extra credit that it has so my GPA can go up."

Since the school year began, Darryl has spent four days a week doing virtual learning that gets him the extra help he needs in reading.

But helping their students do well on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) is a team effort at Eastside High School. According to Assistant Principal Sherry Estes, "In this class alone there are four or five football players. They're putting off practice until 4:15 when normally it starts right after school, and the coaches support us on this."

While it might look like a regular classroom, by pairing up with the Florida Virtual School, Eastside High School has set up a computer lab for students to work one-on-one with a teacher who can't be seen. There's a teacher in the classroom for assistance, but students work independently and at their own pace. However, when they're really stuck there's an added resource they can call on 24-hours a day for help. Estes says, "They also have a teacher in virtual land."

And there's an added benefit according to the teacher who oversees this first virtual class, Natalie Strappy, who added, "I think a lot of our kids unfortunately are not technology savvy, and so they're able to get the best of both worlds, FCAT and the computer skills."

While students say they often find test prep examples boring, this new virtual learning environment has found innovative ways of keeping them coming back. Strappy added, "They feel intimidated by World War II, if it's an article about a new dance skill or a new football skill something of that

nature, it's kind of like 'Oh, I understand this, I can relate, I can see where they're coming from."

Furthermore, Estes says, "It's not stoic, it's not mundane, it's not the same thing day after day." And that's enough to keep motivated students like Darryl coming back every day. He added, "I feel if i don't make it in athletics then I have a back up plan for academics."

There are roughly 300 students at Eastside who could use the program and since the students in it have demonstrated improved grades, as of Monday, they will be offering the class to an additional 30 students.

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