

Hernando Today

Internet classes on the increase

By ANGELINE TAYLOR
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Hernando County students have enrolled in 1,800 courses of Florida Virtual School (FLVS) during the 2006-07 school year.

To some, that may not seem all that impressive. However, that figure represents a leap of 900 enrolled courses from the previous school year.

Those who work with FLVS, an accredited school offered over the Internet, said that one reason for the enrollment increase is the personalized education FLVS provides.

"You get real, personalized instruction," said Elaine McCall, FLVS instructional leader.

McCall has worked in Citrus and Alachua county school districts. She was a traditional school teacher.

But now, McCall said, her new job as FLVS instructional leader gets her more in touch with students.

"The student is at the heart of every decision that is made," she said.

McCall's current job is equivalent to that of principal. The only difference, she said, is that she doesn't have to worry about the brick and mortar associated with the school buildings.

According to FLVS, more than 305 full-time and 160 adjunct teachers live throughout Florida. McCall said all FLVS teachers have a degree and certification in the area that they teach. That's not always the case in the public school district.

"Our satisfaction rate is 97 percent," she said.

The program is expected to serve as many as 80,000 enrollees for the 2006-07 school year. FLVS started in 1997 and is recognized by the Florida Department of Education as a school choice option.

However, there are requirements that must be met in order to participate in FLVS. School districts are not allowed to limit access to FLVS courses. School counselors will determine if the course taken online is appropriate.

School districts must also accept class credits passed by FLVS. The online program is an accredited public school, which means that school districts can award a diploma to the student who takes part in the online classes.

"I get a chance to interact with parents and students," McCall said.

About 90 courses are offered through FLVS. Since the classes are delivered on the Internet, teachers must be prepared to communicate with students and parents on a regular basis. They do that by phone, e-mail, online chats, instant messaging and discussion forums.

According to Florida's department of education, 96 percent of FLVS students exercise the option of using the online schooling to supplement public, home or private school education. State education department documents reveal that about two-thirds of the FLVS students are public school students.