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I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your brick and mortar school away

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The year is 2020. It is 8 am Monday morning. Twelve-year-old Johnny Jones is just waking up. He begrudgingly sits up in bed and reaches for his laptop setting on a nightstand beside him. Opening the laptop, Johnny begins his Spanish lesson from the comfort of his bedroom. Johnny is enrolled in a virtual school. All of his courses are taken online. He no longer rides a bus to school or guesses what the lunch special of the day will be. No bells are rung. No lockers to manage. Still, he socializes with other online students his age. There are social gatherings and extracurricular activities for him to participate in with other enrolled students. His teachers are awesome. Despite his ADHD, he has shown tremendous improvement in all of his academic courses since he started taking online classes. Johnny no longer hates school. He no longer carries with him the label of a "special needs" child. His confidence and self-esteem are improving by the day. Mostly though, Johnny loves school now.

Johnny and thousands of other middle school-aged students are completing their K-12 studies through an online virtual school. Statue funding for education dropped so considerably since the recession of 2008 that most schools have closed their doors. Teachers now work from home. Administrators and other school leaders work from centralized district offices. County monies once used for paying school electric bills, building new facilities and maintaining older structures is now funneled into the virtual school program. Precious resources have been saved. Busses no longer crowd the city streets during rush hour. Pollution is less. Accidents involving school-aged students and speeders in school zones are nonexistent.

The year is 2008. Given the current state of the economic affairs in our state and country, I firmly believe that one day in the near future K-12 education will be provided through virtual schools for all students. It won't be a choice. Since its inception, the Florida Virtual School (flvs.net) has seen a steady increase in enrollment. Just this past school year over 80,000 students took online courses. Currently many students enrolled in the FLVS are taking classes that are not otherwise offered at their brick and mortar sites. However, there are some home-schooled students currently enrolled as well. A number that is sure to rise with each passing year.

If you think this statewide virtual school environment concept is far-fetched, I invite you to think again. Enrollment figures for online learning at the university level have sky-rocked over the past few years. With many universities cutting faculty due to budget shortfalls, more students are looking at virtual schooling. They have no other choice. Not only is the virtual environment a convenient way to earn a degree or diploma, but it provides a great amount of flexibility. Students can login to their courses at any time, asking for help literally twenty-four hours a day and get the all important personal one-on-one time with their teachers. Isn't that what parents expect today?

Having online course design and teaching experience, I am well aware that online learning may not, at first, meet every student's needs. Typically students who are successful in the online learning environment are disciplined time managers who don't need a subtle push to get started. To be successful in the online environment, one must be self-motivated and organized. For those students in K-8, parents could provide the push needed. For students in 9-12, responsibility resides with them along with perhaps a slight parental push.

Change is difficult for many of us. With the advancement of technology and its effect on society and our personal and professional lives, there is no denying the inevitable. It may not be in my lifetime, but I assure you in the near future K-12 education in a traditional brick and mortar setting will be a part of history, just like the eight-track player.



