

# Treasure Coast Palm

## "Virtual" school in St. Lucie County will allow students to learn from home

By James Kirley

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ST. LUCIE COUNTY — Public school leaders are proceeding with plans to allow kindergarten through eighth-grade students to attend school full-time without ever leaving their homes.

The St. Lucie County School Board was briefed by staff Tuesday on plans to contract with Florida Virtual School Connections Academy, a company which has already provided some remote instruction to the school system.

“By ‘virtual school,’ we mean it’s not a bricks-and-mortar school,” said Owen Roberts, the school district’s assistant superintendent for accountability and assessment. “The student participates in learning by online computer connection”

The company would make the entire K-8 curriculum available online. County schools have offered some online courses to middle and high school students for several years. But this will be the first time that all required courses would be available for elementary and middle school grades.

“Online learning is not for everyone,” Roberts said. “There’s a certain amount of motivation and discipline that the students need to get through these courses. To some extent, you don’t have a teacher in front of you.”

Each student would be assigned a teacher, employed by the virtual school and available by phone.

Roberts said students would take the same Florida Comprehensive Assessment Tests as every other student, and the virtual school would be held to the same academic standards as every other public school.

County public schools would get the same level of state funds for every virtual school student as for those attending school campuses. But part of that money would go to the contractor.

The contractor would also be required to provide computer equipment to students who are economically qualified. State law requires every Florida school district to offer a virtual school by August, Roberts said.

Enrollment is limited to students who already are attending a Florida public school. The virtual school would not be open to students coming directly from a home school situation. But students from military families newly arrived in Florida would be eligible.

Virtual schools are a good fit for students with physical disabilities, Roberts said, and may be a good option for students who otherwise would drop out.

“We’re not necessarily aiming at any particular group of students,” Roberts said. “We are offering another choice to parents and students.”

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