



Polk Students Can Choose to Take Online Classes

For the first time, all Polk students can take online classes full time.

By SARAH STEGALL

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BARTOW | Students in Polk County and throughout Florida will have more opportunities to take online classes full time this year.

Since 2004, Polk Virtual School has offered online curriculum services for students in the county, including full-time services for high school homeschooled students.

Full-time curriculum services were offered to middle school homeschooled students starting in 2007.

Recently, the state adopted legislation that requires every county in Florida to offer full-time virtual school opportunities to all students in kindergarten through twelfth grade.

Florida Virtual School, which was started in 1997 as the country's first statewide Internet-based public high school, recently announced what it described as a full-time virtual instruction program to be offered to students, kindergarten through twelfth grade, in participating districts.

With the new legislation, Polk Virtual School, which local officials describe as a franchise of Florida Virtual School, is offering more opportunities for students who prefer online studies.

"The PVS franchise we have is going to remain in place. We're not losing anything, we're adding other services," said Donna Nicolodi, director of Polk Virtual School.

The Polk program "serves public school students (as part of their regular schedule), hospital homebound, homeschooled students and private school students" according to its Web site. Students don't have to enroll full time and can take online classes to complement classes at their regular schools.

Students who take classes such as world history and physics, submit their work online to their class teacher. Students can work at their own pace as long as assignments are completed on time.

All of the online teachers work in Polk schools.

In the past, the state has partnered with two online instruction providers, Connections Academy and Virtual K12, to offer full-time online curriculum services for elementary and middle school students.

The Polk County School District has also partnered with Connections Academy.

Elementary and middle school students who are already enrolled with Connections Academy and Virtual K12 can continue with those programs.

Elementary students who are new to full-time virtual education will be enrolled with Polk-FLVS Connections Academy, which will be the primary elementary curriculum provider, Nicolodi said.

New middle school students can enroll with Polk-FLVS Connections Academy or PVS.

Those in high school can enroll with PVS/FLVS full time or Kaplan Virtual Education, another full-time opportunity.

Which service is chosen depends on the needs of each individual student.

Nicolodi said she hopes the different options will be able to meet the needs of every student.

There are some expectations and requirements for the new full-time programs. Students must participate in all required state and district testing programs and maintain enrollment requirements such as vaccination records and proofs of residence.

In addition, students "must have a parent/guardian available at home with them to serve as the student's learning coach and contact for the virtual staff," and students have to spend four to six hours a day on schoolwork, according to the Polk Web site.

"Attendance is determined by daily submission of assignments and computer access time," according to the site.

There may be other requirements.

Registration is open online. To see if your child is eligible, visit PVS on the Web at <http://schools.polk-fl.net/pvs/default.htm> or call 863-534-7214.

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