

HIGH-TECH Learning from Home

By
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FLORIDA VIRTUAL SCHOOL'S ONLINE CLASSROOM IS EDUCATING STUDENTS IN A NONTRADITIONAL ENVIRONMENT.

»» With a world of knowledge and information just a click away, obtaining instruction outside of a conventional school setting is fast becoming more common. Most colleges and universities have offered online courses for the past decade. Today, more and more secondary school students are utilizing a similar learning format, thanks to the Florida Virtual School.



360Ed's American History video game, *Conspiracy Code*, will launch for FLVS students next year.

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Florida Virtual School (FLVS) has provided middle- and high-school pupils with the opportunity to receive an education from home since 1997. The organization is recognized as a Florida school district and is funded by the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP). Students in the program don't receive a high-school diploma, but they can take the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) and SAT or ACT for admission into a college or university.

The online learning institution began as a grant-based project in Orange and Alachua counties with 77 enrollees. The program now serves 55,000 to

70,000 active students and provides 90 courses taught by approximately 600 certified teachers who are available by phone, e-mail and the Internet.

President and CEO Julie Young says FLVS can meet the needs of a variety of kids.

"What we're finding is that our program works for very bright, advanced students, but it's also beautiful for kids that need more attention because they can get that without the stress of time, space, calendar or peer pressure."

The school's Internet-based curriculum goes the distance by providing interactive subjects for kids that are struggling or have failed a class, as well

as for those who want to get ahead or are home-schooled. FLVS' structure has given students an opportunity to excel and move ahead in their grade level, and even finish high-school courses a year early.

Next year, FLVS will take interactive learning a step further, partnering with Orlando-based 360Ed. This growing company creates high-tech online learning and education programs in the areas of audio, video, movies and games. Its new *Conspiracy Code* video game invites students to embark on an "American History adventure." The game is designed to enhance the education process by captivating students with

The Latin Club of the Florida Virtual School swept the state competition.



COURTESY FLVS

interactive materials. Plus, it allows teachers to monitor student progress during each of their 10 virtual missions.

"We're taking content that may not be interesting and adding production value to it in order to make it engaging," explains company president Ben Noel.

Noel should know what it takes to engage young minds in the age of computer games. He began his career in Orlando as head of video game powerhouse Electronic Art's Tiburon Studio, which is based in Maitland, Florida. There Noel helped the popular *Madden NFL* become the best-selling video game series in the world.

Noel next took the helm as founding director of the University of Central Florida's Florida Interactive Entertainment Academy, a graduate level program in video game development located in downtown Orlando. 360Ed is Noel's latest foray into bringing content to life, and his partnership with FLVS provides an ideal testing ground.

The Cooney family provides an example of students excelling in the FLVS program. Seventeen-year-old twins Zachary and Morgan Cooney finished high school a year early, while their brother, Harrison Cooney, 14, is currently studying tenth grade material.

"What we think is great about FLVS is that you can go at your own pace with a pace chart that keeps you on track," explains the boys' father, Mike Cooney. "You can work ahead, which kept our kids with their noses to the grindstone."

Harrison Cooney has found the program to be beneficial for him, too. "The best part is that you can work faster and finish a class that would normally take a whole school year in just three months."

cooneyworldadventure.com, to read blogs, ask questions and view photos of their travels.

Catrell Cooney, the boys' mother, had this vision three years ago. She wanted to provide her sons

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This year the Cooney family will become FLVS teachers as well as students. In August they departed Orlando for a year-long global venture, and their ongoing reports will be available to supplement FLVS curriculum.

The family raised monies through donations and selling personal property in order to make their trip a reality. Their back-packing journey will take them to Central and South America, Africa, Asia, Australia and New Zealand. FLVS students can go to their Web site,

with a worldwide perspective about different cultures before they attended college. FLVS also made the trip possible by allowing Harrison Cooney to take courses during their excursion.

"We're going to learn more about each other and ourselves during this trip," says Catrell. "We're just going to try and soak in all of the experiences that we encounter. We're going to let things happen and learn and grow from those experiences."

For more information, visit www.flvs.net and www.360ed.com.



COURTESY COONEY FAMILY

The Cooney family will become FLVS teachers as well as students as they embark on a year-long adventure around the world.