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**DPS: 2015-157**

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** School District Superintendents

**FROM:** Hershel Lyons

**DATE:** November 20, 2015

**SUBJECT:** Information on Virtual School Choice Options for Florida Students

Florida offers more virtual options for their students than any other state. Florida students at all grade levels have both full-time (virtual school) and part-time (virtual course) options. The options include virtual schools and courses offered by Florida Virtual School (FLVS) and by all 67 school districts. School districts may operate their own virtual schools or enter into agreements with other school districts, a Florida Department of Education (FDOE) approved private provider or virtual charter schools to provide virtual options for their students.

Virtual Education provides options for students, parents and school districts. Through virtual education, students have expanded access to a variety of courses and schools. Virtual education can be a good fit for students with medical or behavioral issues that limit success in a traditional classroom or for students who need a more flexible schedule to participate and train for performing arts, academic, athletic and other endeavors, and also for students who would like to accelerate or catch up. School districts can benefit by using virtual education to ease overcrowding, meet class size requirements and to offer additional courses and acceleration opportunities for their students in a cost effective manner.

All of Florida's virtual education options are designated by law as school choice options for Florida students. Specifically:

- Section 1002.20(6), Florida Statutes (F.S.), related to educational choice, lists virtual instruction programs and Florida Virtual School as educational choice options.
- Section 1001.42(23), F.S., related to virtual instruction, requires school boards to provide students with access to virtual instruction programs, including Florida Virtual School

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and other approved providers, and to award credit for successful completion of such courses.

- Section 1002.37(3)(c), F.S., states that school districts may not limit student access to courses offered through Florida Virtual School.
- Section 1002.45(1)(b), F.S., requires school districts to provide all enrolled public school students within its boundaries the option of participating in part-time and full-time virtual instruction programs.
- Section 1003.498(2)(a), F.S., related to district virtual course offerings, allows students enrolled in the district to register and enroll in online courses offered by their school district.
- Section 1003.498(2)(b), F.S., related to district virtual course offerings, allows students enrolled in the district to register and enroll in an online course offered by any other school district in the state.
- Section 1003.498(3), F.S., requires that access to these online courses shall be available during the school day and that a district may not require a student to take an online course outside the school day which is in addition to the student's courses for a given term or on school grounds.
- Section 1003.499(1)(b), F.S., creates the Florida-approved courses and tests initiative to expand student choices in selecting high-quality online courses, to include massive open online courses (MOOCs) and those using blended learning models.
- Section 1003.4282(4), F.S., related to the online course graduation requirement, states that a school district may not require a student to take the online course outside the school day or in addition to a student's courses for a given semester. This requirement can be met through online courses offered by Florida Virtual School, district virtual schools, traditional district schools or through dual enrollment.
- Section 1007.27(1), F.S., related to articulated acceleration mechanisms, specifies that articulated acceleration mechanisms must be available for secondary (and postsecondary) students and include dual enrollment, advanced placement and credit earned through Florida Virtual School.

In addition to providing virtual options for their students and allowing access to virtual options offered by other school districts and Florida Virtual School, districts are also required to inform parents about these options:

- Section 1001.42(17), F.S., related to public information and parental involvement, requires school boards to adopt procedures to adequately inform the general public about the public education programs within the district and educational opportunities available through Florida Virtual School.

- Section 1002.45(1)(b), F.S., requires school districts to notify parents in writing about at least one open enrollment window of 90 days for the district's virtual instruction programs.
- Section 1002.45(10), F.S., related to marketing, specifies that each school district shall provide notification to parents and students about a student's right and choice to participate in a district virtual instruction program, to include virtual charter schools, and in courses offered by Florida Virtual School.
- Section 1003.02(1)(i), F.S., related to parental notification of acceleration options requires district school boards to notify parents of students in or entering high school of the opportunity and benefits of various acceleration options, including Florida Virtual School courses.

School choice through virtual education provides students with additional opportunities to pursue their educational and life goals and provides school districts with another mechanism to serve students with diverse needs. The department developed the attached Q & A to help students, parents and districts better understand the array of virtual education options.

HL/lj

Attachment