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MEMORANDUM

TO: District School Superintendents, Assistant Superintendents for Instruction, District Student Services Directors, District Directors of Secondary Education, Secondary Principals, Secondary Guidance Counselors

FROM: Dr. Eric J. Smith

DATE: January 8, 2009

SUBJECT: Florida Virtual School as School Choice Option

Florida Virtual School (FLVS) is a fully-accredited public virtual school that offers free online courses to middle and high school students in Florida. All FLVS teachers are Florida-certified in the subjects they teach and all courses are aligned with Florida's state standards.

Florida Virtual School provides options for students, parents, school districts, and schools. Through FLVS, parents and students have expanded access to courses, and school districts have options to help ease overcrowding and/or to provide their students with additional course and acceleration opportunities. Students with limited or no access to a specific course are given priority for enrollment. Florida Virtual School may also be a good fit for students who have medical or behavioral issues that may limit success in the traditional classroom or for students needing a more flexible schedule due to training for other extra-curricular endeavors.

The Florida School Code establishes Florida Virtual School as an educational choice and an acceleration option for parents and students. Approximately 96 percent of FLVS students exercise this option as a supplement to their public, home, or private school education and average one course per student. Approximately two-thirds of FLVS students are public school students. Articulation agreements are in place between FLVS and all school districts to develop a seamless partnership for students. For the most part, access to FLVS courses and the subsequent transfer of successful credit completions for public school students has been routine. However, in some cases, students, parents, and school district staff have posed questions regarding access to FLVS courses and the transfer of FLVS credits. The following questions and answers are intended to address these concerns.

1. In general, why do public school students take FLVS courses?

Public school students generally take FLVS courses to fill gaps or to serve unique needs. These include resolving scheduling conflicts, taking courses not offered by or with limited access at their home school, allowing for more flexible scheduling and pacing due to personal or family circumstances, responding to students' learning preferences, completing courses for credit recovery for timely graduation, and taking courses for acceleration.

2. How can providing opportunities for their students to take FLVS courses benefit school districts?

Providing opportunities for students to take FLVS courses gives districts additional resources to meet the unique needs of each student whenever they occur. District schools can also provide opportunities for students to take courses with low student requests without having to hire additional staff or to take courses in curriculum areas facing teacher shortages. It can also help district schools meet class size requirements or find an alternative and safe environment for students with medical, behavioral or emotional issues.

3. Can public school districts and schools limit access to a Florida Virtual School (FLVS) course?

No. **Section 1002.37(3)(c), F. S.**, clearly states that school districts may not limit student access to FLVS courses. However, the school counselor will determine if the course is academically appropriate for the student based upon the student's academic history, grade level, and age.

4. Can public schools deny access to an FLVS course if the school offers the same course?

No. Schools may not deny access even if they offer the same course.

5. Can a student be enrolled in the same course at the traditional public school and at FLVS at the same time?

No. A student cannot enroll in the same course concurrently at two different public schools.

6. **Section 1001.42(23), F.S., requires school districts to provide access to FLVS during or after the normal school day and through summer school enrollment. What does this mean?**

It is the duty of each district school board to provide students with access to FLVS classes. Access must be available as part of the student's full day curriculum, before or after the school day, and during the summer term.

7. **Is funding available to districts for providing supervision for students who choose to access FLVS courses from their district school campuses?**

Yes. For the 2008-2009 school year, FLVS has agreed to provide a reimbursement equal to five percent of the Base Student Allocation to participating districts. This reimbursement applies to all FTE generated by public school students in the district who successfully complete FLVS courses, regardless of whether they work on or off campus or require any onsite support.

8. **Can a district limit the number of credits a student may earn at FLVS based on school board policy that limits the number of credits a student may earn in one or more school years?**

No. Florida Statutes place no limits on the number of credits a student may earn at FLVS during a single school year or multiple school years.

9. **Can a district limit the number of courses a student may take from FLVS during the school day by requiring the student to take a minimum number of courses at the traditional school?**

No. The law sets no minimum or maximum number of courses a student may take from FLVS during the school day.

10. **How many courses may a student take from FLVS and still earn a high school diploma from his or her district of residence?**

Students should check their school district policies for earning a diploma. FLVS is a regionally-accredited public school like many traditional public schools in Florida. Thus, district policies regarding awarding diplomas and student movement/transfers among accredited public schools also apply to students earning credits from FLVS.

FLVS does not award high school diplomas. However, full-time FLVS students can be admitted to colleges and universities and receive Bright Futures Scholarships based on evaluation of their official high school transcript, college entrance exam score, and other admission criteria. FLVS has a guidance department (info@flvs.net) and information regarding planning for education beyond high school at the following web address: (http://www.flvs.net/students_parents/index_of_links_sp.php).

11. Does the required access to FLVS include middle school courses, even though middle school students only receive grades and do not earn “credits” for completion?

Regarding access to FLVS courses, the Florida Statutes do not differentiate between middle and high school students. Students have access to both middle and high school courses; however, *middle school* students who want to take *high school* courses should consult with their guidance counselors about relevant district policies.

12. Must receiving schools accept FLVS credits at face value? In other words, can a student take an honors course at FLVS and be refused the honors designation on the student’s transcript after completion of the course?

Section 1001.42(23), F.S., lists the duty of the district school board to provide students with access to enroll in courses available through the Florida Virtual School and to award credit for successful completion. The following points further require the acceptance of FLVS credits.

- Florida Virtual School is funded through the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP).
- **SBE Rule 6A-1.09441, FAC**, requires that courses which are funded through the FEFP and courses for which students may earn credit toward high school graduation must be listed in the *Course Code Directory*.
- The *Course Code Directory*, which is incorporated into rule, also states that districts must use course numbers and official abbreviated titles as listed in this directory on permanent records and report cards. Honors courses have different numbers and short titles than the related general courses. All FLVS courses are based on the state standards and are listed in the *Course Code Directory*. Thus, they are the same courses offered in traditional public schools.
- **SBE Rule 6A-1.09941, FAC**, requires that credits earned and offered for acceptance shall be based on official transcripts and shall be accepted at face value, subject to validation if required by the receiving school’s accreditation.
- Florida Virtual School is regionally accredited by **Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS)**. When schools are accredited by SACS, they agree to accept credits from other SACS-accredited or regionally-accredited schools at face value.

Therefore, for students’ permanent records, FLVS transfer credits should be treated as other transfer credits for courses listed in the *Course Code Directory* and/or from regionally-accredited Florida public schools.

The methodology for the grade point average (GPA) calculations to determine class rank and valedictorian or salutatorian status is determined at the district level. FLVS credits should be addressed in the same manner as other transfer credits from regionally-

accredited Florida public schools. District and school policies regarding the determination of class rank and academic honors should be addressed with the student before the student takes the FLVS course.

13. Can adult students enroll in FLVS courses?

No. Adult students cannot enroll in FLVS courses. However, FLVS has collaborated with the **Florida Adult and Technical Distance Education Consortium (FATDEC)** on some courses for adult students. The public school districts, community colleges, and technical centers in this consortium are working together to deliver curriculum in a web-based environment for adult education and career technical programs in Florida's secondary and postsecondary public institutions. The following website has additional information about this consortium and which districts are members: <http://www.fatdec.com>.

14. What statutes address FLVS as a school choice option?

Numerous statutes address FLVS as a school choice option for parents, students and school districts. These are listed as follows:

Section 1002.20(6), F.S., regarding K12 student and parent rights includes the Florida Virtual School as an option for parental choice.

Section 1002.37(3)(c), F.S., clearly states that districts may not limit student access to courses offered by the Florida Virtual School.

Section 1001.42(17)(a), F.S., includes as a duty of the district school board the requirement to adopt procedures to inform the general public of the educational programs, needs, and objectives of public education, including the educational opportunities available through the Florida Virtual School.

Section 1001.42(23), F.S., lists a duty of the district school board to provide students with access to enroll in courses available through the Florida Virtual School and to award credit for successful completion. It also stipulates that access shall be available to students during or after the school day and during summer school enrollment.

Section 1003.02(1)(i), F.S., requires school boards to notify parents at the beginning of the school year about acceleration mechanisms, including the opportunity and benefits of Florida Virtual School courses.

Section 1003.03(3)(b), F.S., relating to maximum class size requirements provides, as an implementation option, the adoption of policies to encourage students to take courses from the Florida Virtual School.

Section 1000.04(4), F.S., designates the Florida Virtual School as a component of the delivery of public education within Florida's K-20 education system.

Section 1007.27(1), F.S., states that it is the intent of the Legislature that a variety of articulated acceleration mechanisms be available to public secondary and postsecondary students and lists the Florida Virtual School as one of those acceleration options.

Thank you for your assistance and dedication in providing a variety of education opportunities and options for your students. For further information, please contact Sally Roberts at (850) 245-0509, or visit the following website: www.floridaschoolchoice.org/Information/Virtual_Schools/.

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