



TESTIMONY OF  
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Elementary, and Secondary Education  
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Chairman Rokita, Ranking Member McCarthy and committee members, I am Holly Sagues from Florida Virtual School® (FLVS®). Thank you for inviting me to testify about Raising the Bar: How Education Innovation Can Improve Student Achievement. I have been with Florida Virtual School for 14 of the 15 years it has been serving students. My plan is to share with you our experiences and, more importantly, why we think innovation is transforming education.

I want to thank the Committee for taking the time to engage in thoughtful discussion about how we might continue to improve student achievement.

Florida Virtual School, the nation’s premier online public school district, serves Kindergarten – 12<sup>th</sup> grade public, private, and home educated students free of charge as part of the Florida public school system. FLVS is the only statewide Florida school district with five schools - three Part Time schools (Kindergarten – 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup>) and two Full Time schools (Kindergarten – 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup>).

During the 1996 school year, Orange County, Florida, piloted a “Web School” with five online courses. The Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) acted as the catalyst in initially encouraging a partnership between Orange and Alachua Counties. In November 1996, the FLDOE provided the two districts with a \$200,000 “Break the Mold” school grant to develop the Florida High School (FHS) project. Following an intensive six-month period of planning and development, FHS officially launched with seven staff members in 1997.

In 2000, the school changed its name to Florida Online High School and ultimately to Florida Virtual School (FLVS) in 2001. Originally operating as a recurring line item in Florida’s legislative budget, FLVS became fully funded via the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP) in the 2003-04 school year.

Also in the 2003-04 school year, FLVS initiated partnerships with Florida school districts in order to increase the capacity of students who could be served online through an in-state franchise program. For 2011-12, there were a total of 31 franchises which encompass 55 school districts. The in-state franchise program operates as an extension of FLVS. The franchise uses all of the FLVS systems, and the franchise staff is trained in FLVS policies and procedures. The continual growth pattern in student enrollments directly with FLVS and with in-state franchises is evidenced in both the program's success in providing educational choice to students and the need for e-learning.

From the \$200,000 grant in 1996, FLVS has grown to a budget of \$214 million (including the Health Insurance Fund) for the school year 2012-13 and has become the model for distance learning initiatives across the globe. FLVS is affiliated with all 67 Florida school districts, and also serves students in the remaining 49 states and in more than 65 countries worldwide.

The FLVS faculty, consisting of support staff, full-time instructors and adjuncts has increased to more than 2,000. All FLVS instructors are certified teachers in the state of Florida. In addition, 125 FLVS instructors now hold National Board Certification.

FLVS delivers more than 120 courses including core academics, credit recovery, electives, world languages, honors, and 16 Advanced Placement® (AP®) courses. Florida Virtual School is fully accredited by Southern Association of Colleges and Schools/AdvancEd. Core course curriculum is NCAA approved and all courses meet or exceed Florida Sunshine State and National Standards and are being converted to Common Core State Standards.

Driven by a performance-based funding model, FLVS only receives funding for students who successfully complete courses. In the 2011-12 school year more than 149,000 students successfully completed 314,593 half credits. To date, Florida Virtual School has served more than 600,000 students and more than 1.2 million half credits have been successfully completed.

Florida Virtual School has a strong focus on its core mission, which is to deliver a high quality, technology-based education that provides the skills and knowledge students need for success. FLVS was founded on the belief that every student is unique and learns at a different pace. Student advancement is based on demonstrated competency – not on “seat time” in a classroom. At FLVS, students work at their own pace and advance from one level to the next to achieve mastery of a subject. This allows for a student to accelerate their learning, or if needed, take more time to master the course.

With online learning, curriculum and scheduling choices are no longer limited to local school offerings or a student's zip code. Access is offered 24/7/365 from any place with Internet connection.

The delivery of instruction at FLVS is both exceptional and unique as instructors work one-on-one to personalize each student's learning experience. Students communicate with teachers regularly via phone, email, online chats, instant messaging, discussion forums, webcams, texting, and social networking sites.

As online education evolves, FLVS continues to lead the way with creativity and innovation. This year, a number of FLVS digital innovations have emerged including: eight supplemental mobile application products that align with FLVS courses, the development of phase II of the campus-wide mobile app called goFLVS and the new game-based SAT review app called Word Joust; a new story-based pilot middle school math course; and the launch of a new content tool called Octane, in collaboration with the Learning Management System provider UCompass, that launches key content from within course pages.

These innovations and successes throughout the year did not go unnoticed. Based on Algebra I end-of-course assessment data released by the Florida Department of Education, FLVS students outperformed the state by 15 percent in Achievement Levels 3, 4, and 5. The recently released 2012 Advanced Placement Exam results revealed that FLVS students outperformed the state of Florida in overall averages by 14 percent and global overall averages by 2 percent. In the Advanced Placement courses, FLVS serves every kind of student imaginable; yet, the completion rates remain one of the highest in the industry, proving that a wide variety of students can succeed with individualization, personal care, and a flexible pace.

Also this year, alongside UCompass, FLVS was awarded a Silver IMS Learning Impact Award; Pam Birtolo, Chief Officer of Education Transformation for FLVS, was inducted into the United States Distance Learning Association (USDLA) Hall of Fame; and FLVS was named a Learning 100! organization for its focus on professional learning and development. In addition, Julie Young, President and CEO for FLVS, accepted two educational awards: the 2012 Dr. Carlo Rodriguez School Choice Award and the Florida Diversity Council's Multicultural Leadership Award. These awards and honors truly validate how Florida Virtual School lives its mission and vision every single day.

The legislative landscape continues to help shape virtual learning. Effective July 2012, not only is Florida Virtual School able to provide the Full Time option to Kindergarten through 6th grade students, but FLVS is now able to provide these students part-time offerings as well. In addition, FLVS Full Time students are now eligible to participate in interscholastic extracurricular activities at the public school to which the student would be assigned to according to district policies. In June 2013, FLVS will be able to grant diplomas, for the first time, to students graduating from FLVS Full Time. Furthermore, our FLVS Global division, by legislative mandate, may license FLVS courses to schools across the country and around the world. Revenue generated from these endeavors is invested back into improving educational outcomes for Florida students through research and development of courses. It is this legislation and others that provide to students the needed options and access to choose online learning before entering middle or high school.

Students come to FLVS for a variety of different reasons such as to better their grade, accelerate to graduate on time or to get ahead, to take a course not offered at the school such as Advanced Placement courses, to learn at their own pace, or to balance extracurricular activities.

Florida Virtual School students come from all walks of life. FLVS students are public, private or charter school students; medically homebound students; homeschool students; student athletes; student performers; working students; and students of families in the military or with international commitments.

Students that have attended or are currently attending Florida Virtual School include:

- Aly Raisman, an Olympic gold medalist in gymnastics at the 2012 Summer Olympics.
- Lexi Thompson, the youngest-ever female winner of an LPGA tournament.
- “Little Gator” Noah Cornman, who tours the United States racing his Bandolero race car at speeds near 70 miles per hour.
- Luke Marks, ranked 16<sup>th</sup> among all surfers in *Surfer* magazine’s “Hot 100” feature, which highlights the best young surfers on the planet.
- Bailey Madison Hotte, an actress who starred with Billy Crystal and Bette Midler in the movie “Parental Guidance.”
- Ashley De La Rosa, a finalist on “The Voice” season two.
- Shannon Magrane, a finalist on “American Idol” last season.
- Laura McKeeman, Miss Florida 2012.
- Zach Marks, the creator of GromSocial.com, a social networking site for kids by kids.
- Bailey Reese, founder/president of HeroHugs.org.
- Willow Tuffano, who collected and sold other people’s trash, saved her money, and purchased her first house at the age of 14.
- Brendan Santidriam, a young autistic man who loves movies, placed third in the 2012 Florida Department of Education’s statewide Literacy Public Service Announcement contest.
- Aditi Hota, recognized as “The Best and Brightest Student” in Leon County, FL, is a thriving junior at Harvard University majoring in mathematics.
- Drew Willis, a student who struggled in school for some time before being diagnosed with a brain tumor, is doing well and thriving in his FLVS online learning environment.

As one FLVS student stated, “Mine is not your typical classroom, it’s a door to the world.” Not only does the quality of education received through FLVS prepare students for success after they’ve completed their studies, the flexibility and innovative class delivery provides students the opportunity to launch their dreams while still pursuing their education – achieving success in both.

The Florida Virtual School commitment is that the student is at the center of every decision made. This is not just a line on a piece of paper. This is what the entire FLVS team lives and breathes every day.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony. I look forward to fielding any questions you may have on this topic

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