

Online high schools offer tailored, adaptive education

By Valerie McCullough | Monday, Feb. 2, 2009

Thousands of parents and students in Minnesota have joined the growing movement to online education. Their reasons vary, but their goal is the same: to ensure the best possible education for each individual child. Minnesota is one of nearly 45 states that now offer significant online learning opportunities, according to research by the North American Council for Online Learning.

You may not have considered online education for your high-schooler, and that's hardly surprising. Today's parents came through an education system that was much the same for a century. It's what they know.

But times are changing. Ten years from now, half of all high school classes will be online, according to Clayton Christensen, a Harvard Business School professor. Christensen made that prediction in his book, "Disrupting Class," written with Curtis W. Johnson, a longtime leader in Minnesota education policy and former chief of staff to Gov. Arne Carlson.

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Centered on the individual student

The result of the change to online learning, Christensen and Johnson wrote, will be an education system centered on the individual student, rather than the one-size-fits-all model of today. Teachers will be able to

tailor lessons to each individual student, customizing and adapting as the child progresses.

At Insight School of Minnesota, we serve a wide range of students: accelerated learners, children with physical or social disabilities, elite athletes and performers, single mothers, and working teens. Online high school can meet the needs of any student, including:

- Students whose work or family obligations require a flexible schedule
- High achievers who want to move faster than the rest of the class
- Students pursuing a career in music, athletics or the arts
- Students whose high schools don't offer the range of courses they need, such as Advanced Placement
- Children with autism, Asperger's or ADHD, who would benefit from a calmer learning environment
- Previously home-schooled students who want to continue learning with close parental involvement
- Students who are tired of the disruptions and lack of personal attention in today's classrooms
- Students concerned about their safety in school
- Students who have been bullied or subjected to negative peer pressure

The changing biological clock

Also worth considering is the changing biological clock of your teen-ager. During the teen years, changes in body chemistry compel young people to stay up later at night and sleep later in the morning. Studies have shown that teens who start the school day later are healthier, do better in school and have fewer car accidents. Your teen might actually be better off doing schoolwork at 11 p.m. instead of dragging himself out of bed to catch a bus and be learning algebra by 8 a.m.

Online high schools in Minnesota adhere to the same educational standards as traditional brick-and-mortar schools. All courses meet or exceed state educational standards and are taught by state-certified teachers.

Online students also get a high quality of student-teacher interaction. Teachers and students say that the online experience allows them to

interact longer and more frequently than in a traditional school setting. One teacher told us, "I'm an educator now, not a disciplinarian. At a brick-and-mortar school, I spent 50 percent of my time being a disciplinarian — bathroom passes, dress codes, paperwork. I'm more productive now."

Ongoing assessments

In addition, ongoing assessments and progress reports for each student are regularly made and reported to state education authorities.

Clubs, field trips and frequent activities — both online and off — give students the chance to socialize and build relationships with peers who share their interests.

The convenience and personalized attention of online learning has made it possible for students to reach their educational goals. What are your child's goals? Online high school could help them become reality.

Valerie McCullough is the executive director of Insight School of Minnesota. For more information, visit www.insightmn.net.

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