

On August 15, 600 students will go back to school online!

Every principal looks forward to the first day of school when students return with fresh minds eager to learn and ready to work. But as students prepare to hit the books in the next couple of weeks, some of them won't have to take the bus to school, wander the halls looking for their classroom or search rows of desks to find their seat. **On August 15, 600 students will begin their education at Louisiana Connections Academy, the state's first public virtual school.**

Virtual schooling with Louisiana Connections Academy allows students to receive a top-notch public education online from the comfort of home. **Virtual education is an increasingly popular alternative to the traditional bricks and mortar classroom, and by 2015, 17 million pre-kindergarten through 12th grade students in the U.S. will get at least some of their education virtually, according to new research from Ambient Insight.** More than four million of these students will get their entire educations from full-time virtual schools like Louisiana Connections Academy.

So, what is online learning and how does it work?

Virtual public schooling is not homeschooling. Virtual public schools deliver public education to a student's home at no cost and offers state-certified teachers and a rigorous curriculum that correlates to state standards. High school graduates will earn TOPS scholarships. A Learning Coach, who is typically a parent, but also could be another family member or responsible adult caregiver, assists the student in day-to-day activities. The teacher works directly with both the student and Learning Coach to develop an individual learning plan, provide instruction and evaluate assignments.

Yet, virtual school students don't sit in front of a computer all day. The computer is a tool for teachers and parents to manage and track assignments, communicate (along with the phone) and deliver interactive curricular materials, but it is not the only tool students use. Students will complete many assignments "unplugged," and spend time reading textbooks, using workbooks, reading library books and doing hands-on experiments – just like a traditional school.

Virtual students at our school will have many opportunities to interact with each other. Like all kids, they choose to IM, text, or talk to each other on the phone, but Louisiana Connections Academy also will set up a number of field trips so students can get together as a group. Many virtual school students find that the flexibility of virtual education makes it possible to be involved in activities, such as sports and volunteering.

Connections Academy is a virtual school with a proven track record of delivering student academic achievement and high levels of parent and student satisfaction. It is accredited by AdvancED and offers a full-time program with certified and highly qualified teachers who will work with me here in Baton Rouge at our offices at 8281 Goodwood Blvd.

As a principal, I know every parent wants their child to receive the best education possible. It's a personal decision if virtual schooling is right for your student, but one thing I know for certain—all of my students at Louisiana Connections Academy will receive a quality education that is second to none. We can't wait for that opening bell!

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