

CENTER GROVE BEGINS ONLINE COURSES



WHAT'S OFFERED?

Courses being offered this summer:

- Health and wellness
- U.S. government
- Economics
- Biology I
- Visual communications
- Astronomy
- Information and communications technology
- Senior composition
- Probability and statistics

Total number of students enrolled in the online courses: 181

COMING UP

Here are the online courses that will be offered online during the school year:

- Spanish I
- U.S. government
- Economics
- Creative writing

Blended courses

Center Grove also will offer two blended courses, which combine online and traditional classroom lessons. Those courses are:

- Spanish I
- Probability and statistics

Number of students signed up for the online and blended courses offered during the school year: 250

Web of lessons

Pupils can learn from their laptops

By TOM LANGE
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Nearly 200 Center Grove High School students have started summer school, but they don't have to go to the school building.

They don't even have to get out of bed.

The students can take courses such as health

and wellness, U.S. government, economics and senior composition online, meaning they can work anywhere with an Internet connection.

They have eight weeks to complete all of their assignments and tests, and if they have questions they can email, instant message or video conference with their teachers, who are on call until the class is finished.

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Internet option lets students work ahead

By TOM LANGE
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Two Center Grove students who wanted more room for other classes or to graduate early are experimenting with online courses.

Megan Henderson and Sydney Brink are among the first students to enroll in Center Grove's online global campus. Henderson, a sophomore, signed up for health and wellness so that she can take an etymology



SCOTT ROBERSON / DAILY JOURNAL

Center Grove senior Sydney Brink, top, is taking statistics and probability online using Center Grove's global campus.

class next fall, which she thinks will better prepare her to take the SAT exam. Brink, a senior,

wants to graduate after the fall semester, which is why she's

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Learn

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The goal of creating online courses was to provide students more freedom in their daily schedules. With online courses, students don't have to take all of their courses in a classroom at the high school.

Other local school districts, including Clark-Pleasant schools, have started developing online courses, but Center Grove is the first to start enrolling students. A total of 181 students signed up for the summer online courses.

A group of Center Grove teachers started developing online courses about 10 months ago, and of the 17 they began creating nine were launched earlier this month. Next school year, Center Grove will also offer

four online courses and two blended courses, which combine online and traditional classroom lessons, and 250 students are signed up for those classes.

The online courses are open to all incoming freshmen through seniors, and the students enrolled each paid a \$25 technology fee, online coordinator Joanna Ray said.

The growth of Center Grove's online program will depend largely on word-of-mouth and the interest of students, Ray said.

Because few Center Grove students have taken online or blended courses, they may be hesitant to enroll in them. But next year all of Center Grove's students will be given iPads that they'll use in each of their classes. And as students get more comfortable using the devices in class and as they hear about the courses from their classmates

they might become more comfortable enrolling in the online courses, Ray said.

For now, the online courses are open only to Center Grove students, and Ray will be surveying them at the end of the summer about what worked and what could be improved. And if the number of students interested in taking the online courses grows, then Center Grove could start looking to partner with other school districts and offering the online courses to their students as well, Ray said.

The cost of the online courses to non-Center Grove students hasn't been determined.

"We really did want to make sure we were giving our students first priority, but we definitely, for year two, want to focus on partnerships with other school districts," Ray said.

Teachers designing the courses

had to re-create their lessons for the Internet — it wasn't enough to post worksheets and reading assignments online; they had to create interactive lessons for students. Teachers also had to build checkpoints into the assignments so that students could easily provide feedback about whether they understood the lessons being taught.

The online courses allow students to work at their own pace, but teachers can't see if they understand what's being taught the same way they can with students in a traditional classroom. So they had to find ways to ensure students were keeping up, Ray said.

Students who critiqued the online lessons as they were being developed during the school year liked the graphics and online videos, but their biggest concern was that instructions would be

clear and that teachers would be reachable if students had questions.

"More than anything, they want to know they're still going to have that relationship with their teacher that they would have in a face-to-face classroom," Ray said.

In the first week of class, students who had questions could call their teachers, but most of the communication between teachers and students will be through email, instant messaging and video conferencing. Teachers will have virtual office hours, or specific times when their students can ask questions online, and they're also required to respond to any questions within 24 hours, Ray said.

So if a student emails their teacher about a question on a health assignment Saturday

morning, they should expect an answer by the next day.

"When you're teaching online, you are on call. It's an eight-week job, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. That's just the nature of online teaching," Ray said.

Before signing up for the online courses, the students also met with guidance counselors who spoke with them about how they would have to work to successfully complete the courses. The students also completed personality profiles to get them thinking about their work habits, such as whether they worked ahead or procrastinated, and how those habits might mesh with online lessons.

"Even if they've never been an online learner before, we wanted to give them all of the support possible to make sure they were going to be successful," Ray said.

● Option

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taking statistics and probability online.

After Brink graduates, she wants to spend next spring working and taking college courses before going to Bloomington to attend Indiana University. And whatever courses she takes next spring will likely be online, she said.

Brink initially worried about taking a math course online. She knew she wouldn't be able to get immediate answers to her questions by simply raising her hand.

The online courses also include new assignments for the students, such as recording their voices over photos and uploading them for class discussions. Henderson was concerned about how well the technology would work.

But after a week of online lessons, neither student had problems understanding their lessons, contacting their teachers or participating in online forums with other Center Grove students.

Center Grove teachers who designed the online courses had to create interactive assignments students could complete online, but they also had to find a way to create and lead discussions even though the teachers and students would never be in the same place at the same time. For Henderson's health class, that meant creating online forums where students had to write responses to questions,

ONLINE LEARNERS

Sydney Brink

School: Center Grove High School

Grade: Senior

Online course: Statistics and probability

Why she's taking an online course:

She wants to graduate at the end of the fall semester

Megan Henderson

Grade: Sophomore

School: Center Grove High School

Online course: Health and wellness

Why she's taking the course online:

Wants to free up her fall schedule so she can take a course in etymology, which she hopes will help prepare her for the SAT

such as why teens turn to drug, alcohol and tobacco use.

While Henderson isn't in class to hear her peers' thoughts face-to-face, writing in the forum gives her more time to think about, write and edit her answers, she said.

"Online you really had to think about what you were going to say, make sure it sounded right and make sure you proved your point," she said.

Brink can complete online lessons at her own pace. So far she's working about two days ahead of the online course's schedule, and she knows if she gets stuck on a lesson she'll be able to speak with her teacher by phone, online or arrange a time to meet with her in person.

"You're not dictated by other people in the class," she said.