

Teaching ANYTIME

Online classes mean constant connection

Teachers leading Center Grove's online classes this summer have accepted a reality of Internet learning: They can never step away from their email.

Never:
Nearly 200 Center Grove High School students are taking nine courses, such as health and statistics, online this summer. If they have questions, teachers must answer them within 24 hours.

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Because students can work on the courses wherever and whenever they want, teachers Heather Hart and Karen Hovanec know to expect questions about how to complete assignments or how to access online video or reading assignments at 7 a.m. or 2 a.m.

But if students want answers to their questions, they also have to quickly learn how to clearly articulate what they're asking — taking an online course means they no longer can show a worksheet to their teacher and simply say "Help."

Learning how to communicate effectively through email takes practice for teachers and students. That's why in the month since the online courses started, Hart has emailed or messaged with her students 142 times and counting.

Teaching the online courses also means the teachers have to find new ways to be sure students do their own work. When she was experimenting with an early version of her online course last year, Hart found that some digital assignments made it easier for students to cheat.

"Now, in the online world, with the push of a button, they can share their file with somebody. And they don't have to be in the same room with each other (to cheat) anymore," she said.

Hart and Hovanec helped design Center Grove's online courses, and the lack of in-person interaction

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Pictured: Heather Hart interacts with her online statistics class on her iPad outside Center Grove High School.



WHAT COURSES ARE OFFERED?

Center Grove launched nine online courses this summer for incoming freshmen through incoming seniors. Here are some of the details:



■ 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 high school students enrolled in the online courses: 181

■ Here are the online courses that will be offered during the school year:
Spanish I
U.S. government
Economics
Creative writing

■ 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

● Teaching

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meant they had to create different kinds of assignments and grade differently so they could be sure students understood the statistics and health lessons they were being taught. They're still getting used to not seeing their students face-to-face but want to continue using the courses next school year.

"I'm excited," Hovanec said. "I hate to use the word groundbreaking, but that's kind of what I'm hoping for."

Always available

Hovanec started teaching the online health course for the first time a month ago. Hart, who also created a new, traditional senior-level trigonometry and statistics course last year, designed the online version of the statistics course at the same time.

Hart used the online version of the statistics course with her students last year. The students still came to Hart's classroom, which meant she was always available to answer questions about the program or assignments in person. But other than that, the students could complete the course at their own pace using laptops.

"I knew that they were probably going to have to take an online course in their higher education experience and thought this would be good preparation for them, to be

"Teachers just have to think a little differently about how we assess kids with those factors."

**Center Grove High School
teacher Heather Hart**
On online classes

exposed to this kind of thing," Hart said.

Center Grove's teachers designed the courses with instructional videos that they created themselves or found on educational websites and with discussion threads meant to keep students engaged. Teachers also created the courses with interactive assignments, such as requiring students to record audio of themselves explaining a lesson's concepts as a way of proving they understand what's being taught.

The teachers also had to make themselves available at almost anytime in case students had questions about any of the lessons, assignments or course programming.

When Hart receives emails from students at 2 a.m., she's not expected to reply immediately; but she and Hovanec try to respond to students as fast as they can so that students can get their questions answered and move on. Hart also makes time at least once a week for office hours at Center Grove High School so that she can answer students' questions in person. But most of her conversations with students happen online.

"I'm really teaching 24/7," she said.

Because the students don't have much individual time with their teachers, students also have to be sure they're communicating clearly about their questions. When Hart teaches students in person, students can show her what they've tried to do to solve a problem and she follows along to see where they got lost. But when students write emails saying they don't understand a lesson, they need to be able to articulate what the problem is before Hart can help.

Identifying cheaters

Sometimes that means Hart and her students trade multiple emails on the same subject. But that process also helps develop students' communication skills, she said.

"They're going to have to do this in their future education for sure," Hart said.

As Center Grove decides whether to expand the number of online courses offered, one consideration teachers and school officials will have to make is how to keep better track of students who are cheating, Hart said.

Hart first noticed students were cheating with the online courses last semester when multiple students submitted assignments that had the same wrong answers, as well as identical mistakes in the work leading up to those answers. Students who had exactly the same technical problems on assignment files they turned in

also gave themselves away, she said.

Students can cheat more easily in math courses because assignments usually have just one correct answer, both teachers said. Part of the reason Hovanec hasn't had problems with students cheating in her online health course is because most of students' assignments are personalized essays or videos, meaning they can't be easily copied and emailed to others.

And that's why Hart is looking for more assignments where students can personalize their work, such as selecting the numbers used for some of the statistics problems they're solving themselves. And assignments that require students to record audio of themselves explaining how a problem was solved or the point of a lesson also make cheating more difficult, Hart said.

"Teachers just have to think a little differently about how we assess kids with those factors," she said.

Both teachers want to continue working with the online courses, as they believe the number of students taking the courses over time will rise. Center Grove will offer four online and two blended courses, which combine online and traditional lessons, this school year; and Hovanec, who is also a certified Spanish teacher, will teach Spanish I entirely online.

"It's going to be an adventure," she said.