

IN CLASS ONLINE

Center Grove blending of virtual, traditional teaching gives students freedom, responsibility

When Karen Hovanec gets an email from a student in her online Spanish class, she is ready to fire back troubleshooting techniques or remind them of the process to submit an assignment or load a video on their iPad.

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Some of Hovanec's Spanish I students haven't taken an online class before, so for now most of their questions have more to do with computers, tablets and the Internet than the foreign language they're studying. When students can't get videos or reading

assignments to load on their school-issued iPads, she tries to respond within a few hours to walk them through how to find what they need.

If there's a problem with the software or device, she sometimes creates new lessons and materials. "Occasionally I've had some kids actually ask some Spanish questions," she said.

About 180 Center Grove High School students took online courses for eight weeks over the summer. This

school year, about 170 students — or about 7 percent of the high school — are signed up for either online courses or blended courses, which combine traditional and online lessons.

School officials have been working to find and solve problems and glitches, such as videos that won't load on the iPads, and are gathering data to see how well students are doing, online coordinator Joanna Ray said.

Teachers can see how often students sign on to their courses, whether it's once a day or once a week, and how often they participate in online discussions and forums.

As school officials gather more of that information they'll be able to see if the number of times students sign in and participate in the courses affects their final grades. They also will be able to help students plan their time and work ahead, Ray said.

Parents can use that information to know the best way to help their children in the online courses,

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Web courses nothing new for freshman

For one Center Grove High School freshman, school almost always has involved a computer and an Internet connection.

A teacher who could answer questions was necessary. Classmates were not.

Grace Smith started taking online courses as an elementary school student, and most included Power-Point-style slides she could review with her mother and assignments and quizzes she could complete by herself.

She's attended the Hoosier Academy, which offers a mix of online and traditional courses, and Our Lady of the Greenwood Catholic School. As she's gotten older, she's taken more traditional courses, where she learned and worked with 20 other students led by one teacher.

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INTERNET OPPORTUNITIES

Here's a look at the online and blended courses being offered at Center Grove High School this school year:

Online courses: Astronomy, Spanish I, U.S. Government, Economics, Creative Writing

Blended courses: Spanish I, Probability and Statistics

72

Students taking online courses

98

Students taking blended courses

\$25

Cost per semester

From top: Center Grove High School freshman Grace Smith, 14, works on her iPad in the school's media center during Spanish class. Center Grove High School students in Karen Hovanec's blended learning Spanish class work on their iPads in the media center.





SCOTT ROBERSON | DAILY JOURNAL

Center Grove High School students in Karen Hovanec's Spanish class spend half their time in the classroom and the other in the media center working online.

● Online

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which many have never taken, Ray said.

"We don't want (parents) to be in the dark," Ray said.

Teachers started designing the online courses last year, before they knew Center Grove would purchase iPads for all high school students. That became a problem at the start of the school year. Some of Hovanec's lessons used the program Flash, which is used to create highly visual and interactive programs, but it doesn't work with iPads.

Hovanec quickly created additional lessons for students or had them use computers in the media center for Flash-based lessons.

"I don't know if I've gotten better with the technology or I just know what to anticipate, maybe," she said.

Center Grove found a solution to the problem with a server that teachers and students can use to get Flash working on their iPads, technology director Julie Bohnenkamp said. With more experience using the iPads, teachers will know how students can and can't use the devices to complete assignments, she said.

During the summer, teachers in online courses had to stay reachable all day, every day and were expected to respond to students' questions within 24 hours. Teachers have to stay just as available during the school year, on top of their work to plan lessons and grade assignments in traditional classes.

Hovanec has prepared herself for interruptions from her evenings grading assignments from students in her online course calling or emailing questions.

"I don't know if I've gotten better with the technology or I just know what to anticipate, maybe."

Center Grove High School teacher Karen Hovanec
On teaching online classes

"I'm going to have days like that, and that's OK. As long as every day's not like that," she said.

Hovanec taught Center Grove's online health course during the summer, and this is her first time teaching a foreign language to students she won't see in class. That was initially a concern for her; but by using audio and video recording in assignments, she'll actually have more chances to hear her students speak Spanish, she said.

She also created knowledge checks — assessments that aren't graded, but that require students to review vocabulary and other grammar lessons from the course. And she can provide extra help for students who need it, she said.

At the end of the school year, Hovanec will be able to evaluate the online and blended Spanish I course based on how well students can recall the vocabulary they've been taught.

"It's putting a lot of trust in kids, that they're going to be responsible for their learning," she said. "And I think a lot of kids are ready for that, and they don't need their hand held and they work on their own. And that's the kind of kid that's going to thrive in that environment."

"And some kids maybe aren't quite ready, and we'll have some bumps in the road and have to work it out. But in the end I think they're going to be better learners from this experience."

● Freshman

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But the classes she preferred were those that let her work by herself at her own pace, finding help when she needed it.

"Online is just something that really works well for me. You don't have to worry about not hearing something right, you can always go back and see what you've learned. And if you're sick, you don't miss a lesson," she said.

The Bargersville teen enrolled at Center Grove High School this year so she could take part in the school's early-college program, which allows students to earn college credits and an associate's degree by the time they graduate. Most of Smith's courses this year are in a classroom, but she's taking Spanish I online.

Some of her classmates are taking an online course for the first time and learning to study and do assignments on iPads or laptops, but she is comfortable with everything she's doing.

"I know how to go about doing the coursework and what the teacher's expectations are for me and how I'm supposed to act during that class period — which is quietly," she said.

Smith has always preferred taking her favorite courses in math and science online. She learns more from courses that give her the responsibility of reading, discovering and retaining information on her own, instead of being given the information by a teacher, and she prefers working by herself rather than in groups.

"I learn really well individually. I tend to like working independently but also have a teacher that can help me through different stuff," Smith said.

She also likes having control over her own time.

The 24 Center Grove students taking Spanish I online have class time throughout the school day to view presentations and complete homework, but they also can work on other assignments, Smith and Spanish I teacher Karen Hovanec said. So if students have homework from another course or a test to study for, they can do that, as long as their Spanish work is completed by its due date.

"I like the option of being able to have a class where it's basically like another study hall that I can fall back on," Smith said.