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## Mounds View schools go online

The courses would still require 20 to 40 percent classroom work.

By **NORMAN DRAPER**, Star Tribune

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Mounds View high schools will take one step further into the computer age next year.

The district plans to offer several online classes to juniors and seniors. Students who have registered for those classes will spend 60 to 80 percent of their course time on the computer, either at home or in a computer lab at Mounds View High School in Arden Hills and Irondale High School in New Brighton. Classroom time will be arranged by the instructor and might take the form of a once-a-week seminar, said RoAnne Elliott, Mounds View schools director of curriculum and instruction. Elliott calls the online courses "hybrid" because they combine classroom and online study.

"The teacher might say, 'If I've got 30 kids in this hybrid course, instead of meeting all of them, I'm going to break the class into smaller groups, or meet all at the same time,'" Elliott said. "You can have a day where the

teacher can meet with individual students, or small groups of students."

Courses that will be offered online include advanced placement computer science, advanced placement government and politics, advanced placement microeconomics, world mythology, multivariable calculus, sociology, upper level Spanish, health and physical education, she said.

Across the district, about 350 students have registered for the courses next year, Elliott said.

Last year, 8,000 Minnesota students -- 1 percent of the state's total -- were enrolled in part-time or full-time online learning programs. Nationwide, online learning is a \$300-million-a-year industry that is growing by 30 percent a year .

For Mounds View, it's not a matter of saving money; it's about ushering students into a new learning experience.

"I think the main thing is we're trying to move into the 21st century," Elliott said. "We want to give [the students] the opportunity to do this kind of learning."

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There are other factors involved as well.

"One of the things we're trying to do is provide flexibility for kids if they feel like their schedule is crunched, or they want to take additional courses," Elliott said.

It's up to the teachers to decide how online courses will be conducted. Not only will the course work be available online. Teachers also can load questions, documents and assignments onto the programs, Elliott said.

Putting the coursework online created additional expenses for the district, mainly for teachers who spent additional time developing the curriculum.

And Elliott said parents and teachers have been warned that online learning isn't for all students.

"It takes quite a bit of independence," she said. "If you're somebody who needs quite a lot of teacher supervision, this might not be the right thing for you."

On the other hand, Elliott said, one district teacher who has done some online teaching said it can help pry shy students out of their shells. "She found that people who typically did not respond in the classroom responded

like crazy online."

District officials had been thinking about starting online course work for some time but were prodded into action when Elliott read an article about a similar program in Bloomington, accompanied by a photograph of a student doing his online homework at a coffee shop.

"What that gave us was somebody close by we could talk to," she said.

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