

## **Pope John's Virtual World**

Pope John XXIII High School is planning its tenth year as a member of the Virtual High School for the '08-'09 school year. From pioneers in online learning to experienced learners, Pope John students are going outside their campus in record numbers to connect with teachers and other students in twenty-seven states and twenty-four countries.

The Virtual High School offers over 200 courses in all disciplines, which tend to supplement, not replace, core courses. Basic Mandarin Chinese, Entrepreneurship, Preveterinary Medicine, Kindergarten Apprentice Teacher, Meteorology, Business and Personal Law, and DNA Technology are typical of the unique courses that enrich the curriculum. Standard, Honors, and AP levels make courses open to all students.

Senior Michael Dunn praises his VHS experience: "I've had the pleasure of taking two VHS classes throughout my high school career. There's an amazing variety of courses that you probably would never imagine taking in a high school, and the learning style is very time convenient. You are able to work at your own pace with weekly lessons and assignments."

"VHS classes are designed for the high school student," says Mrs. Mary MacNeil, Pope John's in-house virtual teacher and site coordinator. "Teachers complete a rigorous professional development training program, create attractive courses that meet and exceed national and local standards, and actively participate in their courses daily." In fact, the discussions, projects, and group activities fostered by the VHS model bring the students together in a comfortable, safe environment to master subject matter and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills that will aid in their success in higher education.

Advanced Placement courses supplement the curriculum with courses that are typically not in a school's curriculum. Mike Caron, a veteran VHS student, has added a challenging AP course to his rigorous schedule. "VHS gives me more opportunities to complete college-level courses than one can expect in the traditional school," says Mike.

VHS courses, without social barriers, enable students to freely share their thoughts with students and educators all over the world and increase their knowledge of collaborative online learning (e-learning) that will be a critical component of their college life and future careers.

Senior Alicia Rea says, "Over the past two years I have taken VHS courses which have been full of new experiences. Whether it is a teaching style that I am unfamiliar with or being in a class with a student from halfway around the world, the classes are a learning experience to be remembered. Besides exposure to a world outside of a single brick building, VHS helps students to develop skills that will assist them after graduation, the most valuable of which is self-motivation."

Mrs. Kathleen Donovan, President of Pope John, is delighted that "VHS expands our horizons. In a global world, it is exciting to foster cross-border friendships and the use of technology with a serious educational goal. Students today are tech savvy, and schools need to utilize this interest."