K12’s online learning similar to “brick and mortar schools”

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A K12 Inc. education might look different, but it’s not that different from “brick and mortar schools,” according to one of the company’s teachers.

“We’re a fully online school,” said Summer Shelton, a middle school science teacher at Tennessee Virtual Academy. “We’re state-certified teachers. We teach standards that hit SPIs (State Performance Indicators). We have access to K12’s curricula, which is similar to Eagleton Elementary’s teachers having access to McGraw-Hill.”

Shelton, who has been teaching for about 10 years, started teaching at Eagleton Elementary School. She served as an interim teacher from January 2003 to May 2003.

Shelton later taught two years in the Czech Republic. She taught at a British private school.

“K12 offers a world-class curriculum,” she said. “It rivals the British national curriculum I used overseas. It’s deep, dynamic and rich. Tennessee’s curricula is linear whereas the British national curriculum spirals. They might cover something three times throughout the year. They pick something up then move on to something else. They’ll later teach the content more in-depth, put it down and pick it back up. I’ve found it (spiraling) to be incredibly successful, because children sometimes need the big picture before they can fully understand something.”

The company’s curricula spirals, as well, Shelton said. “Students can go back and watch videos whenever they want.”

In addition to the curricula, students are able to move at an “appropriate pace,” she said. However, online learning is geared for certain students.

“Most families have never thought whether their children are good matches for a school,” Shelton said. “They’ve always sent their children to their zoned school. Our ideal student is someone who has a adult who can be there full time with them. Some families hire someone to oversee, and others have a family member who works with them. It’s not going to be feasible for some families.”

Students should be committed and disciplined, she said. “We move students toward the mastery setting. They’re not going to move forward until they’ve mastered content. That’s a lot different than what they’re used to doing.”

Pupils should also be punctional, Shelton said. “They must put in 6½-hour days. They also don’t get snow days, which some students didn’t like this year as some of their age peers got to play in the
Expectations same for educators

“As educators, our expectation are pretty much the same,” she said. “We seek to individualize each child’s education as much as possible.”

Educators check their email, document student attendance and start class, Shelton said. They teach almost all day.

Advanced students might finish their fourth-grade math curriculum by March and start their fifth-grade math curriculum, she said. “It’s more difficult to do that in a brick and mortar school.”

Shelton has experienced success with other schoolchildren, including a student who is autistic. The boy has exhibited increased grades and increased self-esteem while in her class.

“His parents have told me that their neighbors have noticed a difference,” Shelton said. “They think that it’s due to the fact that they’ve eliminated school stresses from his life. Our school isn’t certainly targeted at special needs students, but we’ve seen successes, such as that one.”

Open family support center in June

K12, which was founded in 2000 and headquartered in Herndon, Va., provides technology-based academic services and curricula to school districts, schools, educators and students across the nation. The company’s accredited programs are used by more than 2,000 public school districts and tens of thousands of students globally, servicing blended and online schools that provide students with highly individualized learning programs through a combination of online courses and teacher-led instruction.

In March, K12 announced it would locate its Family Support Campus at Tyson Centre Building next to McGhee Tyson Airport in Alcoa. It plans to initially hire 300 employees at the new campus and make a capital investment of more than $2.4 million within years.

Currently, K12 employs 140 educators throughout the state.

The Family Support Campus, which is expected to start operations in June, will serve families who are exploring new educational options and programs for their children. Employees will answer questions about the company’s academic programs, build relationships, offer demonstrations and provide assistance to families who choose to enroll.