

### **PWHS offers video version of classroom instruction it believes will attract students throughout Wisconsin**

Port Washington High School wasn't alone a decade ago when it cut driver's education from its curriculum to save money, but it is now.

Two weeks ago, Port High became the first high school in Wisconsin to reintroduce the classroom portion of driver's ed in an online version open not just to its students but teenagers throughout the state.

Administrators say the class, which is certified by both the Wisconsin departments of Public Instruction and Transportation, is just as rigorous as its classroom predecessor, far more convenient and potentially profitable for a school district that is already marketing it to soon-to-be drivers.

"We designed this program to meet the needs of our students, but that said, there's potential for us to also capture a portion of the driver's-ed market in the state with this rigorous DPI and DOT-certified course," Jim Froemming, the district's director of business services, said. "It's a very attractive program, and we think it could also be lucrative for the district."

The district is charging \$129 for the course and splitting the revenue with the program's certified instructor, Scott Bretl, who developed the course.

Bretl owns the Port Washington-based driver's education franchise Just Drive, but his company is not involved in the online program. Instead, Bretl is employed by the School District to monitor and teach the course.

In Wisconsin, online driver's education classes must be offered by schools, which explains why Bretl approached the district with the idea of launching a web-based class.

Currently, only a technical college in southwest Wisconsin and a Cooperative Education Service Agency (CESA) offer online driver's education classes in Wisconsin.

Driver's education had been part of the school curriculum until nearly 10 years ago, when the Department of Public Instruction stopped reimbursing for the cost of the program. That prompted many school systems, including the Port-Saukville District, which was faced with a \$700,000 deficit at the time, to drop driver's education.

Now, the district's online version is being billed as a cost effective program that capitalizes on convenience.

Before the online class, students had to fit 30 hours of classroom instruction offered by a private provider into their schedules either after school or during the summer. They are able to take the online classes at any time and anywhere they have access to a computer and the

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Internet, although they will still have to complete the behind-the-wheel training, which is not offered by the district.

“Now that all high school students have Chromebooks, they can take driver's ed during their study halls,” Bretl said when the program was approved by the School Board in June.

But that's not to say the online course will be easier than the classroom alternative or that students will be able to whip through the 30-hour program in a day or two.

The course consists of 40 sessions that are at least 45 minutes long. Students can spend more than 45 minutes on each session — an advantage, administrator say, over the classroom alternative — but not less time.

Students can take only one course a day during the school year and two during the summer. That means that the course runs a minimum of six weeks during the school year and three weeks during the summer.

Each class consists of an overview presented in video form by an instructor, a public service announcement, reading assignment from the Wisconsin Motorists' Handbook and video with material that will be on a session quiz.

Each quiz, which students must pass in order to move to the next session, will consist of 15 multiple choice questions. If students fail the quiz, they will be allowed to retake it once before they are locked out of the program. Before they are allowed to continue, the instructor must speak with their parents.

A final test must be passed before students are given a course completion certificate and allowed to take behind-the-wheel instruction.

“This is not going to be an easy way of taking the classroom portion of driver's education, as this is going to take motivation and self-discipline,” Bretl says in a video introduction to the course.

The video features 14 Port Washington High School graduates, most of them law enforcement officers, who emphasize the seriousness of driving responsibly.

In the video, Bretl appears seated at a desk superimposed on the Port High football field and later at the Port Washington marina, and promises to feature other areas of Port and Saukville in his online lectures.

“I did this so it's not so boring watching me give these lectures,” he says.

The driver's education class can be accessed at [www.pwhsonlinedriversed.com](http://www.pwhsonlinedriversed.com) .

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