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Virtual Virginia Unveils Innovative Spanish Courses ***Series Based on Spanish Program Developed by Groton School Dean***

Superintendent of Public Instruction Patricia I. Wright unveiled the prototype for a series of innovative online Spanish courses today before educators and students at Highland High School in Monterey.

The new virtual courses — Beginning Spanish, Intermediate Spanish and Advanced Spanish — will be available this fall through the Virginia Department of Education’s Virtual Virginia online learning program. The courses are based on the nationally recognized Breaking the Spanish Barrier series developed by John Conner, a long-time teacher and current dean of faculty at Groton School in Massachusetts.

“These new Spanish courses are a great example of how Virtual Virginia is expanding instructional opportunities for students in small, rural school divisions,” Wright said. “Students in every division, regardless of how small, regardless of how remote, have access to an array of quality online courses, including — beginning this fall — Spanish courses modeled on how world languages are taught in one of America’s most prestigious schools.”

Highland County has fewer than 210 students of all grades and is unable to support in-person world language instruction. “Virtual Virginia is a critical component of our instructional program,” division superintendent William Crawford said. “Our students are looking forward to being among the first to take these new Spanish courses.”

Like Conner’s Breaking the Spanish Barrier series, the Virtual Virginia Spanish courses will emphasize language fundamentals — structure, grammar, vocabulary and culture — in an engaging, step-by-step process. Students will begin by learning simple, everyday phrases and work toward fluency through lessons that replicate informal, one-on-one conversations between the teacher and the student. Interactive content will include audio and video clips of native speakers from Spanish-speaking countries.

“Virginia has a reputation for offering the very best online education in the nation, and I was honored to be asked to develop a Spanish online curriculum for students in the commonwealth,” Conner said. “My Breaking the Spanish Barrier series will come to life this fall as an online program in a way that will help students know that they can master a new language.”

Virtual Virginia and Conner also are collaborating on a set of French courses and a set of English courses for Spanish speakers. These online courses are expected to launch by 2015-2016.

Registration for all 2014-2015 Virtual Virginia courses began on April 1. Students interested in Beginning Spanish, Intermediate Spanish and Advanced Spanish — or any other Virtual Virginia course — should contact their school counselor. School counselors enroll students in courses using Virtual Virginia’s online registration system.

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