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'March Madness' takes on new meaning for students at TRECA Digital Academy

MARION — "March Madness" has a meaning all its own for students and teachers across Ohio: the month of the often-dreaded state-mandated tests.

TRECA Digital Academy, the state's only non-profit online K-12 education program, is no exception.

Its definition of "March Madness," however, is a little off the beaten path — literally.

At TDA, "March Madness" means establishing 68 test sites in 75 of Ohio's 88 counties for its 725 students who are required to take them between now and March 24.

What makes mandated testing especially challenging for TDA — or any online school — is the fact that its students must take their tests not at home from where they go to school. Rather, they must travel to a "state approved" test site, utilizing paper and pencils, another oddity for online students accustomed to using computer white boards, teacher-supervised "chat" rooms, iPods, Internet resources, and other technology that replaces textbooks, pens and paper.

TDA education officials have worked with local communities across Ohio to establish test sites in public libraries, educational service centers, at elementary, middle and high schools — even a church and hotel banquet room — making convenience a priority for TDA students and their families.

TDA students take all of their courses

New Concord among sites

TRECA Digital Academy Test Sites in the TDA Southeast (1) Ohio Region:

- TDA Regional Office (Tuscarawas-Carroll-Harrison ESC), New Philadelphia
- Coshocton Library, Coshocton
- Holmes County Library, Millersburg
- Public Library of Mt. Vernon, Mt. Vernon
- John Glenn High School, New Concord
- East Muskingum Middle School, New Concord
- Larry Miller Intermediate School, New Concord
- Malvern Public Library, Malvern
- Louisville Public Library, Louisville

online, utilizing the latest computer technology. To register for these tests, TDA students log in to their electronic grade book, then use online maps to pick the location that's closest to their home.

According to Haven Shelton, TDA dean of the K-8 Education Pathway, at least 80 certified teachers, administrators and other TDA staffers are traveling to test sites across the state, serving as proctors or classroom

monitors, reading tests to those needing that service, and making arrangements for special needs students.

"This is a monumental task of gigantic proportions," noted Shelton, who taught at Wooster City Schools for 12 years before joining TDA. "Our teachers, staff and parents have truly gone the extra mile. We're making it happen for our children."

"Making it happen" means everything from reminding students of their test time, to delivering and returning sealed tests, even providing a transportation service for students if needed.

"We understand that 'things' come up," adds Elaine Horn, TDA dean of the Career & Technical Education pathway which serves high school students. "Many of these students must take five Ohio Graduation Tests and travel to test sites on five different days. Their daily schedules often include day jobs and other responsibilities, so we have to work around these obstacles. If the car breaks down or the student gets sick, we have people in our home office who will do whatever it takes to make sure our students are tested. It's our focus for the month of March."

Currently, 2,380 students are enrolled or take classes through TRECA Digital Academy. For more information, visit www.tdaonline.org