

Newpoint Tampa charter school will stress technology

By [Jessica Vander Velde](#), Times Staff Writer
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Teacher Laurel Beach guides a student on the Photoshop program in her technology class at Newpoint Bay charter school in Panama City.



[Newpoint Schools]

VALRICO — Picture a school without textbooks where students attend class only four days a week.

Each pupil has her own computer. At lunch, teens hang out in a lounge. The walls sport warm shades of yellow and red. And the floors? A mix of hardwood and coffee-color carpet.

Very little about Newpoint Tampa, a charter school scheduled to open in Valrico this fall, is traditional.

Everything adds to the philosophy of "school for the 21st century," said Carla Lovett, the director of the first Newpoint school, which opened in Panama City last year. "We're trying to use the technology people in the world are using today," she said. "We want to make high school like the real world."

Last week, parents gathered at a meeting to hear more about the school, which will open to ninth- and 10th-graders in August. Next year, school officials plan to add 11th grade, and the following year 12th. The school is on the north side of State Road 60, just west of the Valrico post office.

Make no mistake, Lovett told parents at the meeting, the school isn't just for teens who like technology. Almost every career requires computer use.

Newpoint also aims to prepare students for the self-paced schedule of college. Students will use Apex Learning programs, which is an Internet-based curriculum that replaces textbooks. Apex offers a variety of courses, from advanced placement classes to remedial programs.

Apex eliminates the need for traditional-style lecturing. Instead, the teachers will lead small-group discussions and pull aside individuals, Lovett said. Students can work at their own pace, provided they finish their lessons by the due date.

The school also seeks to prepare students for the workplace through once-a-week internships at local businesses. They're unpaid and mostly clerical work, but they'll give the students four years of experience in a business that could develop into a career, Lovett said.

Parents peppered Lovett with questions at last week's meeting. They wanted to know about sports offerings, FCAT preparation, driver's education courses and if administrators would block inappropriate Internet sites. Of course, school leaders said to the last question.

Lovett assured parents and teens that although the school is cutting-edge, it will still feature traditional offerings such as yearbooks, prom, student government and clubs. Students also will shut down the computers for group projects and science experiments. The teens at the meeting took special pleasure in hearing Lovett's description of lunch. In Panama City, school officials cater lunch each day, using restaurants including Firehouse Subs and CiCi's Pizza.

At the end of the meeting, several parents filled out applications. Others said they planned to go home and think about it.

Jessica Vander Velde can be reached at jvandervelde@sptimes.com or (813) 661-2443.