Third-graders to learn Mandarin Chinese

8/10/2010
Salina Journal

By MICHAEL STRAND

Salina Journal

GYPSUM -- About 100 elementary school students in north-central Kansas, including third-graders at Southeast of Saline, will begin learning Mandarin Chinese this fall.

Monday night, the Southeast of Saline School Board approved the Mandarin program, funded by a three-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education.

Superintendent Justin Henry said the grant was specifically aimed at bringing Mandarin-language instruction to rural schools and will include fourth- and fifth-graders in the Herington School District.

The grant is one of just 31 nationwide and the only one in Kansas, Henry said.

Elementary school principal Sharlene Ramsey said the reason Southeast's third-graders will be in the program is that the school's two third-grade classes make extensive use of iPod Touch hand-held computers -- and the school plans on using various iPod applications as part of the foreign-language instruction.

Teaching the class will be Li Xin, who was hired by the Smoky Hill Education Service Center in late 2008 to teach classes across north-central Kansas, both in person and through distance learning.

Li will teach the classes in-person and using interactive television, and Ramsey said she expects the Southeast third-graders will spend lots of time working with their iPod lessons, in addition to that.

The plan, Ramsey said, is for the students to continue the classes in fourth and fifth grades, for a total of three years of learning.

And it won't just be language lessons; Li plans to cover Chinese math, teaching students about Chinese numbers and currency, as well as Chinese culture, legends, music and even Chinese-style physical education.