Le Chang (from left), Jing Hu, Danyu Liao and Lida Jiang check out an Internet site Thursday at Carl Stewart Middle School in Conway. The tour will teach Mandarin Chinese at Arkansas high schools.
11 to serve up lessons from China

Educators from afar get in-state training as school year nears

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ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

As a young girl, Paige Morpew felt like a Chinese princess when her cousin dressed her in a traditional red Chinese dress and arranged her hair Beijing-opsa style. Not knowing the Chinese language, Morpew was fascinated with her Chinese cousin's culture and tried to connect with her by playing dress up.

Years later, Morpew was one of the few Hot Springs students selected to take Mandarin Chinese classes from a teacher who had come from China in an initiative between the Arkansas Department of Education Chinese Teacher Program and the University of Central Arkansas/汉风汉文化研究所以及

Morpew, a junior at Hot Springs High School, took three years of Mandarin Chinese and grew close to her teacher, Jie Min of Beijing, who Morpew says was like an older sister to her. Min helped Morpew train for the Chinese Bridge Language Competition in which Morpew took first place in Arkansas and second place in the national competition held in Houston.

"I really looked up to my teacher, and she pushed me really hard to study," Morpew said.

Min returned to Beijing in June after her teaching stint in Arkansas was over. Now, a new group of Chinese teachers is in Arkansas ready to inspire students to learn a foreign language that the government and international businesses, including Walmart, prize in their employees.

The 11 teachers, all women, were interviewed in China in December by some Arkansas educational leaders for the opportunity to teach in this country. See CHINA, Page 2B.

China

* Continued from Page 1B America. This opportunity will give the women a leg up in the Chinese job market, which favors men, said Barbara Culpepper, who runs the Arkansas Department of Education Chinese Teacher Program and interviewed the teachers.

"If we are going to keep our students competitive on a national and international level, we have to offer them the tools to do so," Culpepper said.

The 11 will teach Mandarin Chinese and its culture to students at high schools in North Little Rock, Mena, Little Rock, Cabot, Hot Springs, Beebe, Conway, Bentonville, and at the Arkansas School for Mathematics, Science and the Arts in Hot Springs, and multiple schools in the Batesville, Cross County, and Harrison school districts.

There are also three additional teachers — one in Wynne and two teaching distance-learning courses at the Northwest Arkansas Educational Cooperative. They are entering their second year of teaching Mandarin Chinese through the program.

The first batch of Chinese teachers arrived in Arkansas in 2008 under a contract between the state Education Department and the Hanban, which is the Office of Chinese Language Council International.

Most of the new teachers — who all hold master’s degrees in teaching Chinese as a second language — had never been to America before this month.

During the training program, they learned about different types of learning, teaching and note-taking.

They received lessons about the visual learner, the auditory learner and the kinesthetic learner. Then the training program instructor taught them various methods to approaching in-class activities — the jigsaw and partner techniques, for instance.

The Chinese teachers scratched down notes from PowerPoint. In China, classes are conducted only one way — a teacher lectures and students take notes without asking questions.

"Our students in China are very quiet. They obey the rules, listen to the teacher, take notes and study hard for exams," said Yanxin Liu of Taiyuan, who will teach in Hot Springs. "But here, the students and the teachers are maybe more interactive and the teachers will provide more activities and projects for students to do."

Morpew said her former teacher, Min, taught one of the best interactive classes she has taken during her education. Min had many games and fun learning methods, Morpew said.

Her favorite activity was when Min taught students how to play chess. The students labeled chess pieces in Chinese and then learned how each chess piece received its name. Then they played the game while asking one another questions in Chinese.

The Chinese Bridge Language Competition had fun ways to learn about the Chinese language and culture, too, Morpew said.

For the talent portion of the competition, Morpew performed a puppet show in Chinese starring a Chinese dragon and herself arguing over who was more Chinese.

"I want there to be more appreciation in both worlds of the Chinese and American cultures," Morpew said. "We are so different. But how can we help each other and work toward a better goal?"

The new teachers will report to their respective school districts this week.

A school district that offers Chinese is forward-thinking," Culpepper said. "This will give our students an edge."
Xian Le (from left) and Haixia Wang visit with fellow teachers Andrea Hathcoat and Nathan Holloway during a break Thursday at Carl Stewart Middle School in Conway.