

# Mandarin Program set to begin at Tarwater

BY MEGHAN MCCOY

A waiting list has already begun for kindergarten students enrolling in the Mandarin Program, a newly established two-and-a-half hour dual-immersion program, set to begin this month, at Tarwater Elementary School.

"This is the first time I have ever done something like this in my career," Principal Jeff Hensley says. "It is kind of neat, and hopefully we will have 50 little 5 year olds ready to roll, more if that doesn't work out."

While working with Arizona State University's Confucius Institute, Hensley says he was told that a waiting list for the program would not come until the second year.

"Once people understood what we were doing, and we had a few parent info nights last year, people were on board very rapidly," he says.

Hensley says the program's planning began during the early part of last year. The idea hatched after speaking with the principal at Hamilton High School and learning they had a Mandarin teacher. While the two principals shared a cup of coffee, the idea to offer a Mandarin Program for kindergarten through 12th grade was born.

"We were able to hire the teacher halfway through last year," he explains of Ying Shao.

Shao, a resident of Chandler since 2003, began her teaching career in China at a university. She worked with special needs children for four years at the Kyrene School District after moving to the States. She says she went back to school to obtain her special needs certification, as well as her elementary education certification.

"I like to work with kids," she says.

Hensley says they chose Mandarin for the program because the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Defense released what the critical languages are going to be over the next 20 years. Mandarin was marked No. 2, behind Arabic. He says

Arizona does a couple billion dollars worth of trade with China, and because his location is close to the Price Road technology and business corridor that does international business, he and his parent clientele saw a need to include the language in the curriculum.

"I believe most of them will work with international companies and the government, and they will see the benefit of Mandarin," Shao says.

This school year, Shao will go into two classrooms for two and a half hours a day to work with the students.

"I want to make the curriculum fun," she says. "I'm very excited."

Shao says she has prepared a curriculum that includes songs about nature, body parts and counting numbers, as well as activities.

"When they sing the song, they do action," she says. "They use their hands and their body moves to do the action with the song."

The students will also learn 50 simple characters. She says the students will be combining two simple characters together to form a new character by the end of the year.

The kindergarten students will also work on beginning oral and writing proficiency.

Shao says she wants parents to know that children will begin to show results after four or five years of taking Mandarin because it's a challenging language.

"They will see their kids' progress," she says.

Throughout the process of hiring a Chinese teacher for the position, Hensley learned that it is difficult for them to become certified. To teach kindergarten or preschool, he says, teachers need to have an early childhood endorsement certificate.

Hensley, as well as his superiors, are on a state committee to try and make some changes for the Mandarin immersion process because of the difficulty to get those teachers certified.



**CHINESE NEW YEAR:** A kindergarten class at Tarwater Elementary School celebrated the Chinese New Year with English teacher Courtney Veeder, who is one of two teachers that will be working with the Mandarin Program this year. Submitted photo

Because the Chandler Unified School District has been so supportive, Hensley was able to hire first-grade Chinese teacher Yidan Xu. The program will be implemented during the 2015-2016 school year.

"We will be adding a grade level every year until we get to sixth grade," he says, adding that their goal is to have students taking college credit for their classes starting their freshman year.

Hensley says his goal is to find teachers that have stability and are here in the country for a number of years.

"My community is used to stability," he says. "That is really important to me, that long term commitment."

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