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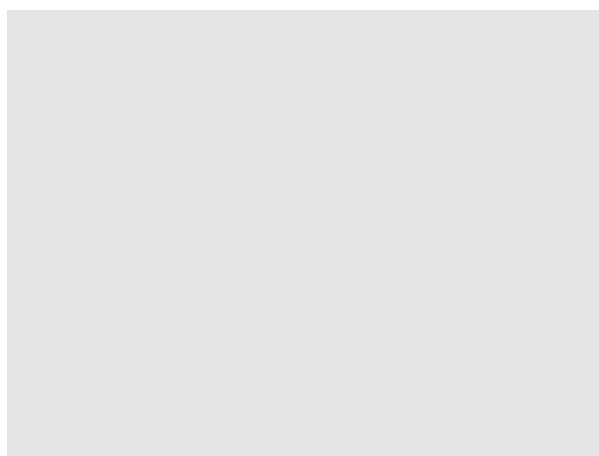
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Confucius Institute programs to continue under Simpson County Schools partnership

AARON MUDD amudd@bgdailynews.com 18 hrs ago



Jim Flynn

Chinese language and cultural education programs offered through the Confucius Institute will continue next year through an agreement with Simpson County Schools.

The deal was approved during the final days of Simpson County Schools Superintendent Jim Flynn's tenure before he retired. Flynn confirmed to the Daily News that the district's school board approved agreements related to the partnership during its board meeting Thursday.

Under the deal, Flynn said 24 new Chinese teachers and 19 returning teachers will teach in area schools. The agreement will also allow Simpson County Schools to retain the four Chinese teachers it currently employs, Flynn said.

Flynn's replacement, current Simpson County Schools Superintendent Tim Schlosser, did not immediately respond to a phone call seeking comment Monday morning.

Simpson County Schools has employed Chinese teachers through the Confucius Institute for nine years with good results, Flynn said. The CI's language and cultural programming enabled the district to offer its second language, following Spanish, Flynn said.

However, that was thrown into doubt after Western Kentucky University announced earlier this spring it would end its partnership with the Confucius Institute due to a conflict in federal funding for its separate Chinese Language Flagship Program.

With foreign language teachers hard to come by in more rural school districts, Flynn said districts have to get creative to expand their offerings.

“One of the things that we are tapping into more and more is finding these non-traditional pathways for finding teachers,” he said, describing the pipeline for new teachers in general as becoming “thinner and thinner.”

“I think we’re going to have to be more and more creative like that,” Flynn said.

On Thursday, Flynn said the district’s school board approved four agreements related to the partnership with the Confucius Institute. The first two were agreements with Confucius Institute Headquarters, also called Hanban, and North China Electric Power University, “because Hanban requires a higher ed partner,” in these arrangements, Flynn said.

The board also approved an agreement to transfer assets from WKU, including several Confucius Institute vehicles, curricular materials, office furniture and equipment and Chinese cultural artifacts.

The deal also gave the school district a fund balance of \$192,714.25 that Flynn said will be used to fund programming costs, such as expenses for bringing the teachers from China.

“Simpson County Schools will be the fiscal agent and provide kind of the financial oversight,” for the CI funds, Flynn said.

The board approved a fourth and final agreement with a “new entity” called BG Education Management Solutions Inc. Flynn described that organization as a nonprofit formed to administer Confucius Institute programs. That organization is headed up by Terrill Martin, who previously oversaw WKU’s Confucius Institute before the university discontinued its partnership.

After WKU announced it would end its partnership with its CI, Martin said he consulted with area school district superintendents and learned that “a lot of them were really disappointed,” Martin told the Daily News.

From there, he began reaching out several organizations to gauge interest in continuing the CI’s school programming.

Martin said 47 schools will continue receiving programming under the new partnership, but added that “it creates some opportunities for us to branch out” across the state or even outside it.

In April, WKU President Timothy Caboni announced the decision to discontinue the university’s partnership with the Confucius Institute, explaining a conflict with the university’s Chinese Flagship Program in a campuswide email. The Chinese Language Flagship program, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Defense, allows students to take Chinese language courses in addition to their major and minor coursework and pursue educational opportunities in China as well.



“Defense spending legislation passed in 2018 prohibits institutions from hosting Confucius Institutes if they receive U.S. Department of Defense funding for Chinese language programs,” Caboni wrote in the email at the time.

“Although many efforts have been made, WKU has been denied a waiver from the (Department of Defense) that would allow WKU to operate both the CI and the Chinese Flagship Program,” Caboni wrote.

In May, WKU spokesman Bob Skipper said the university was exploring its options to continue offering the program.

“We’re still looking for some way to keep this program alive,” WKU spokesman Bob Skipper said. “That’s an important outreach for us, but it’s not something that we can afford to take on all on our own.”

On Monday, Skipper said he had no immediate comment about the matter but that he was reaching out to the university’s provost and president for comment.

Asked whether the partnership could pose similar federal funding problems for Simpson County Schools, Flynn said the district learned that would not be an issue because the school district receives no Defense Department funding.

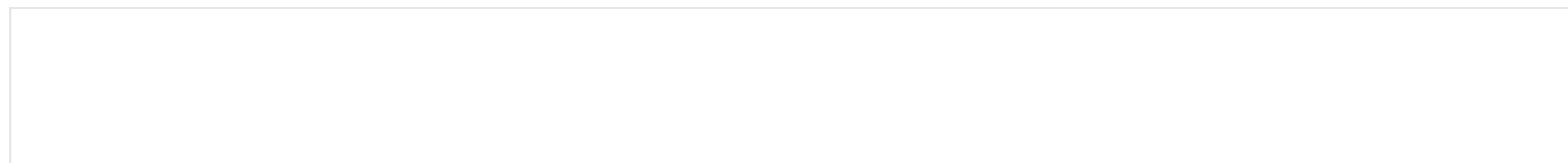
“We looked into that specifically,” he said, adding he also discussed the matter with Education Commissioner Wayne Lewis.

Flynn stressed the educational opportunities students in his district have had through the program over the last nine years, including one student who began learning about Chinese language and culture in elementary school and went on to study international business in college, with a focus on China.

For both local students and teachers from China, Flynn said, the program “opens up a window to other parts of the world that you wouldn’t understand otherwise.”

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MORE INFORMATION





WKU aims to still offer in-school programs after cutting ties with CI

Aaron Mudd

Education reporter. Covers education and related issues, focusing primarily on the Bowling Green and Warren County public school districts and Western Kentucky University.

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