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Repeat after me: Class preps teachers

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HIGHLAND HEIGHTS - Northern Kentucky University is helping to put secondary foreign language education on the fast track in Kentucky.

This summer it is hosting 18 people from six countries who have decided to teach in the Commonwealth. Although they are fluent in the language they want to teach, they don't meet the qualifications to become educators in Kentucky. The six-week program is the equivalent of five graduate courses.

"The normal route would be to have an undergraduate degree with a major in education with content courses in the language they want to teach," said program director Gay Washburn. "With this group we have a couple of people who have an undergraduate in the language but don't have the education courses."

Other participants are native speakers who would like to teach but are also lacking education courses.

Christine Hutchins of Louisville majored in Chinese in college and lived for a year in Taipei. She currently teaches privately and at Louisville's Spaulding University, but without education courses she is unable to teach in public schools.

"What it does is it gives us the background in education that we don't have," Hutchins said. "We'll work in an education culture where they'll use a lot of terminology that a lot of us are not familiar with."

Sam Beiting has finished his first year teaching Spanish at Covington Catholic High School. Private schools are under different rules for teacher certification. Beiting majored in Spanish at Centre College, but was told the education background would be good long-term for his career.

"In speaking with my principal when he first hired me, he said that if I decided to pursue teaching Spanish as a career it was something we would have to address," Beiting said. "I enjoyed Spanish and teaching where I was. This program fit perfectly and allowed me to achieve that certification in a short period of time."

The cost of the courses is paid by an Improving Education Quality grant. The grant will also pay for six follow-up courses for the participants over the next year.

"It's intense with a high volume of material in a short period of time," Beiting said.

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