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Uruguayan teachers share their culture

Exchange program promotes unity

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ERLANGER -

Two Uruguayan teachers are visiting A.J. Lindeman Elementary for two weeks to help strengthen the Erlanger-Elsmere School District's language programs.

Mandy Tejera, 46, of Montevideo, and Cecilia Rodriguez-Santana, 28, of Salto, are here as part of a program sponsored by Northern Kentucky University and a U.S. Department of Education teacher-exchange program.

"We feel that international educators can strengthen local school districts, especially those districts and schools having language-immersion programs, such as Lindeman," said Mary Rozier, an assistant professor at NKU involved in the program. "Additionally, the opportunity to work with international educators is a benefit to everyone involved as they interact with the teachers, students, parents, community persons, and NKU faculty and staff. This is a win-win situation."

Lindeman has 51 of the district's approximately 100 students whose first language is not English, according to Daniele Novak, one of the school's two English as a Second Language teachers. She estimates about half of these students were born in the U.S. and most have been in the U.S. three years or more.

This is Tejera's and Rodriguez-Santana's first visit to the United States. One thing they've learned is that whether from the plains of Uruguay or suburban Northern Kentucky, students are the same.

"There are different realities but with the same challenge," said Tejera. "That is diversity - how to deal with it and how to integrate children into society for their own benefit."

"Our children are reflective, active, creative and many of them fortunate to have economic resources," said Rodriguez-Santana. "Children from the U.S. are respectful toward cultural diversity and very hard-working."

The teachers will follow up with feedback to the school and also take home lessons learned here.

Rozier, along with Dr. Gay Washburn, applied for the Department of Education grant and organized the exchange. She said the university encourages students to do their student teaching abroad, and she hopes this visit will spark further interest.

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