

Ohio students learn Chinese with help from grants

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — Central Ohio students are learning Chinese through a program that's supported by the Chinese government and raised concerns in other parts of the United States.

The Columbus Dispatch reports the Gahanna-Jefferson school district and Columbus School for Girls each received a \$30,000 grant from a nonprofit group called Hanban, which is sponsored by China's government. It connects the students to dozens of U.S. schools in the Confucius Class network promoting cultural exchange with China. Schools in the network also can host guest teachers paid for by the Chinese government.

The setup raised concerns in areas such as Los Angeles, where opponents pushed for schools not to use textbooks from the nonprofit and argued students would be taught communist ideology, but school officials in central Ohio say

they haven't heard such complaints and that Chinese officials don't influence what they teach.



Ping Wu, the Chinese instructor at the Columbus School for Girls, said in an e-mail to the newspaper that "it would be wrong to assume that Americans are suddenly going to turn into cheerleaders for the Chinese government

on account of having received a few free Mandarin lessons."

Some say the important point isn't how it's funded but that students are learning the language of a country to which Ohio has economic ties.

"Out of the 50 states, Ohio is the eighth-largest in exports to China," said Christopher Farrar, director of the K-12 Chinese Flagship Program at Ohio State University, which helps develop Chinese language courses for schools across the state. Students who become fluent could be assets to Ohio businesses, Farrar said.

More districts in the state have started teaching Chinese in recent years. Last year, 117 schools or districts offered Chinese courses, up from just eight in 2005, according to the newspaper.

"My thought is that Chinese is going to be a skill that a lot of kids don't have yet," said Dona Montgomery, whose fourth-grade daughter takes Chinese at Jefferson Elementary School near Columbus. "They'll kind of be on the top of that."

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