

Helmsburg's Recent Successes

By David Shaffer

We are very proud of the recent academic successes at Helmsburg Elementary School as they have moved from the level of a Title I School designated as on Improvement status to their recent Indiana Department of Education grade of "A", the highest rating awarded by the DOE under Public Law 221.

This past week we were notified by the DOE that Helmsburg was being considered by the state for National Title I Distinguished Schools Recognition in the Category of Highest Academic Achievement. Although we were not selected by the reviewers for this honor, only 8 schools met the improvement criteria necessary for consideration. Criteria to be considered included: Exemplary Progress in Student Achievement, meeting Adequate Yearly Progress in 2009-10 and 2010-11, and have a Free and Reduced Lunch population of over 35%.

It is important to consider the factors that have led to Helmsburg's improvement. First and foremost, our students have worked very hard to prepare for the ISTEP+ testing program and they have worked very hard to improve their test scores. To accomplish this type of improvement students have to commit to do their daily work on a regular basis because true learning takes place with an ongoing year after year effort by all of the participants in the learning process.

Our Teachers and our Principal, Mrs. Kelli Bruner have been the driving force in this effort. When the school was placed on school improvement status, our staff at Helmsburg committed to raising their efforts and improving their achievement throughout the school year. The curriculum initiatives within Brown County Schools in English/Language Arts and Mathematics have received heavy emphasis throughout the recent years. Students who had fallen behind received extra time during and beyond the school day in the subjects in which skills were lacking. During the school day we utilized a remediation tutor who worked with students who had previously not passed the ISTEP+ test.

This effort by our staff was bolstered by volunteer tutoring from the Brown County Literacy Coalition. Dedicated adults from the Coalition have committed many days and many hours to working with students who needed extra help. The Literacy Coalition volunteer tutors worked with boys and girls who were struggling. Our students, our staff, and our Administration are extremely grateful for this type of community support which transcends the normal boundaries of charitable volunteerism.

Our Balanced Literacy curriculum had its beginning a number of years ago at Helmsburg. We think that this accomplishment verifies the District's commitment to this program which is designed to enhance reading, writing, and grammatical skills.

Parental involvement is certainly an important factor in school achievement whether that achievement be as an individual or as a collective school group. Our Helmsburg Community has worked with their/our children to emphasize student achievement. At our recent Parent Teacher Conferences, held through October, parents of every child had a conference with their teachers.

State Representative Eric Koch recently visited Helmsburg to celebrate our successes. Mr. Koch observed classrooms, met some of our students and teachers, and discussed the school's accomplishments with Mrs. Bruner. It is motivational for our students and our staff to receive recognition of their efforts from Representative Koch. We appreciate his interest and the time given from his busy schedule to visit our school.

When there are successes such as these, many factors and people play a role. We thank all of the stakeholders mentioned in this column and others who have played a part in Helmsburg's improvement. We appreciate what everyone has done to accomplish the achievements and we look forward to their ongoing efforts.