

HARDIN COUNTY SCHOOLS

Title I Program

Rebecca French-Secretary/Bookkeeper

Janet Druen-Coordinator of Volunteers

65 W. A. Jenkins Road - Elizabethtown, KY 42701-8452

Phone: (270) 769-8800

FAX: (270) 769-8907

Nannette Johnston, Superintendent

Professional Development

Debbie Suiter-PD Specialist

James D. Phillips, Director of Professional Development and Title I Services

E-Mail: James.Phillips@Hardin.kyschools.us

March 21, 2008

Dr. Bill Blokker, President-CEO
Literacy First Process
3109 150th Place SE
Mill Creek, WA 98012

Dear Dr. Blokker:

I wanted to take this opportunity to share with you our successes with the Literacy First Process in the Hardin County Schools. We began the Literacy First Process in six of our elementary schools at the beginning of the 2001-2002 school year. The next year we added an additional elementary school to total seven of our eleven elementary schools involved in the Literacy First Process. We began the Literacy First Process in three of our secondary schools at the beginning of the 2005-2006 school year with two schools doing intensive reading and two schools doing content area reading. This year we added three additional secondary schools for a total of five secondary schools doing intensive reading and a total of four secondary schools doing content area reading. We are looking at adding an additional secondary school for the 2007-2008 school year. Our elementary schools continue to thrive under Literacy First.

Our district has had a long commitment to improving literacy instruction in our schools. Being involved in the Literacy First Process has allowed our district to move ahead in the area of reading. Since the beginning of Literacy First in our district, we have seen elementary school reading scores improve more than ten points on our state assessment in reading. We have seen our middle school reading scores improve more than nine point on our state assessment in reading, remembering that our middle schools have only been involved in Literacy First for three years. We have seen our high school reading scores improve more than 24 points on our state assessment, remembering that our high schools have only been involved in Literacy First for three years also. We are truly seeing a closing of the achievement gap for our students and these gains in reading on the state assessment are truly a testament to that fact.

The Literacy First Process has allowed our district to focus on best practices for reading instruction. While our elementary teachers have always been willing to try many instructional strategies to improve reading we have probably seen the most professional growth in our middle and high schools that are involved in the content area reading component. We are in the process of developing a training and overview videotape of our secondary schools. As I have been working on editing the footage for this videotape, I have been amazed to find content area teachers using walls that teach, using word sorts, and using literacy centers to enhance their classroom instruction. Our teachers can truly "talk the talk" about literacy now and this has been impressive.

"Helping Children Succeed"
An Equal Opportunity Educational Institution

I could not end this letter with also telling you about the successes in our intensive reading classes at all levels. Every elementary school can attest to the fact that approximately 92% of their kindergarten students leave kindergarten on grade level. As students move from grade level to grade level, teachers continue to see success with these students. As students move from elementary school to middle school, we have had comments from middle school teachers that their students seem to be better prepared. Three years ago when we began working on intensive reading at the high school level, we targeted those students that were reading at least two years behind their peers. The success of our intensive reading program in Literacy First at the high school level has been phenomenal. After three years, we are now having parents request that their children be placed in intensive reading classes. Students enrolled in our intensive reading classes at the high school are now requesting to do book studies by a particular author because they like the themes that certain authors use in their stories. These students are presenting reader's theater activities to their parents during parent meetings at the high school. Also, these students are now enthusiastic about reading and are volunteering to read in their regular classes and this is a major milestone.

It has been my pleasure to be the district lead for our Literacy First Initiative. After seven years of involvement, I actually live and breath Literacy First every day. This year several of our schools are going through accreditation visits and site teams have been impressed and have noted the success of Literacy First in our schools. Earlier this year, our board of education held roundtable discussions with each high school and their feeder schools. At each roundtable discussion, Literacy First was brought up by the schools as a process that has made a difference in their students, their teachers and their test scores.

I just wanted to share with you some of our successes with the Literacy First Process. Over the past seven years, I have had the opportunity to work with some superb individuals in your Literacy First Consultants. We have established friendships that will last a lifetime. They are probably some of the most professional educators that I have ever encountered in my twenty-nine year in the field of education.

Sincerely,

James D. Phillips

James D. Phillips
Director of Professional Development and Title I Services
Hardin County Schools

JDP:bf

cc - File