



September 24, 2009

Brownsburg honored as Confucius Classroom

District becomes nation's 5th to land Confucius Classroom

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Emily Haley enrolled in Brownsburg's first Chinese language elective course almost on a whim.

Four years later, the 16-year-old sophomore can speak the language fluently and read and write it and has become captivated by the Chinese culture.

"I will take AP Chinese next year and independent study as a senior for more one-on-one work," she said. "I took it in the beginning because no one else knew it. Now, I'm interested in everything China has to offer."

That kind of enthusiasm from an American is exactly what the Hanban -- the Office of Chinese Language Council International of the Ministry of Education of People's Republic of China -- is looking for and also is part of the reason that Brownsburg Schools became the fifth school district in the country to receive a prestigious designation from the Far East nation.

Brownsburg was selected last week to be a Confucius Classroom by the Hanban. Once requirements for the designation are established, Brownsburg will become one of only 60 or so school districts worldwide to get that recognition.

The Confucius Classroom in Brownsburg will work with the Confucius Institute in Indianapolis and other partners, including International School of Indiana -- another local school to recently receive the designation -- to promote Chinese language and culture.

The goal is to increase the teaching of Chinese throughout Central Indiana, extend Chinese-related networking opportunities to local organizations and increase opportunities for students and teachers to interact with and learn from their peers in China.

Brownsburg already met many of the requirements for a Confucius Classroom before ever receiving the designation. The district's Chinese program began four years ago at the middle school level. After two years, the program was expanded to two elementary schools -- Cardinal and Reagan -- and as well as the high school.

Three visiting teachers from China spent the past school year in Brownsburg teaching Mandarin -- the most common language used in China -- and helped develop the Chinese language curriculum districtwide.

The elementary-level program focuses primarily on the culture, which also is sprinkled into the curriculum in the upper levels, said Guoping Ren, one of the teachers who helped get the elective established four years ago.

"Our program is very unique in the U.S. because of its completeness," Ren said. "We have developed five levels, including the creation of an AP program. Very few programs in this country have all that and have expanded it into the elementary level."

Ren described the Confucius Classroom designation as an honor and an amazing opportunity for the district. He said the Hanban provides financial support that will allow the district to expand its exchange efforts for students and teachers.

Haley believes opportunities will increase awareness and interest among her classmates and younger students.

"This class has made me more open to other ideas, and that world standards are different all over," she said. "It is quite an honor for our school to get this recognition from China."
