Belgians, French Send Instructors

Baton Rouge - Belgium has joined France and Quebec in providing associate teachers for French instruction in Louisiana's elementary grades.

Gathered here for a week's intensive briefing before assignment to schools in all parts of the state, this year's foreign contingent of 275 associate teachers is the biggest since the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (CODOFIL) started to import teaching assistance personnel in 1970 as part of the State's drive towards bilingualism. The group numbered 218 last year.

Belgium has sent ten associate teachers for its first year of participation in the program and Quebec, now in its second year, has provided 70. Of the 195 from France, 38 have returned to Louisiana after finishing their first or second contract.

Strong Feeling

"This contract renewal by 38 associate teachers is indicative of the strong feeling these young people have for this part of the world and for the program", CODOFIL Chairman James Domengeaux said. "It is also indicative of the good rapport the associate teachers have with the local population."

Domengeaux said the importation of associate teachers is a necessary but temporary measure pending the certification of a sufficient number of homegrown elementary French teachers to fill the need created by Louisiana's decision to seek its place in an ever more complex world by building bilingualism from kindergarten through college.

"This ambitious but realistic program, unique in the U.S., will give to the Louisiana child an edge over his unilingual fellow American in the fierce economic, cultural, educational and diplomatic world that is shaping up," Domengeaux said. "The foresight of the Governor, the State Superintendent of Education, and the House and Senate in appropriating the funds necessary to this program has to be commended."

Serious Endeavor

Domengeaux said the program is nobody's "pet project" but a serious, thought-out and long-term endeavor backed by the parents, Legislature, Administration and State Board of Education which approved the measures necessary to make the program work.

An independent evaluation study made by Ghini and Associates, New Orleans, for the State Department of Education was quoted by Domengeaux as saying that the program "is a very sizable, educational project with vast socio-economic implications; its educational worth is undeniable; its impact on the educational community remarkable."

The CODOFIL Chairman said selection methods are perfected from year to year and that the present group of associate teachers is of very high quality. He said the applicants are carefully screened at home by local and Louisiana educational authorities before departure.

Through Year

Domengeaux called on the local population to welcome these young people "not only upon their arrival but all through the school year."

Thirty-six teachers are assigned to Lafayette Parish. "They have left their homes and families to bring to your children the great gift of language," he said. "May they have in return the gift of friendship and sympathy during their stay here."

Thirty-five parishes, involving 70,000 students, will participate in the bilingual programs this year. The participating parishes are: Acadia; Avoyelles; Beauregard; Catahoula; City of Bogalusa; Claiborne; Concordia; East Baton Rouge; East Feliciana; Evangeline; Iberia; Iberville; Jackson; Jefferson; Jefferson Davis; Lafayette; Lafourche; LaSalle; Livingston; Morehouse; Natchitoches; Orleans; Ouachita; Rapides; Saint-James; Saint John; Saint Landry; Saint Martin; Saint Mary; Tangipahoa; Tensas; Terrebonne; Union; Vermilion; Winn.

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