Bilingual Program Started In Schools In St. Martin

ST. MARTINVILLE — The St. Martin Parish School Board, under a grant from the federal government, has developed a bilingual educational program proposed for five years which has been put into effect for the 1970-71 school season.

Mrs. Hazel Delahoussaye, director of the bilingual program outlined the philosophy and objectives of the new program.

Pilot Program
Recent studies and research in the language development have shown children learn best in their mother tongue and that reading readiness develops first in a language which is controlled orally. For these reasons, the bilingual education program is a pilot program in two schools of the parish. Under this program, French is taught as a first language to French-speaking students and as a second language to English-speaking students.

A main focus of the project is to enhance the self-image of the French-speaking child through a schoolwide and communitywide respect for his language. It is expected that children will learn through both languages, becoming fully educated bilinguals who are mutually respectful of cultural differences.

French will be used as a medium of instruction for French-dominant children, whereas the English-dominant children will acquire an oral command of French. During the first year of the project, it is expected that the French-speaking children will demonstrate readiness to read in French and the English-speaking children will have acquired listening and speaking skills needed to begin reading French the following year.

Achievement
At the end of the five years in the project, the French-speaking child can expect to have matched his English-speaking peer in curricular and extracurricular activities and achievements, in addition to being able to read and write French. The English-speaking child will have acquired fluency in French and will have reached a level of literacy in French comparable to that of his French-speaking peer, while continuing his educational achievement in English at a normal rate.

Long range goals of the program are to build a community respect for an appreciation of cultural differences and to help develop an informed knowledge and pride in the French-speaking child's cultural roots.

Children who are participating in this project are selected kindergarten and first grade classes at the Parks Primary and Breaux Bridge Primary Schools. The six classroom teachers of the bilingual program are Mrs. Claudette Patin, Mrs. Claudia Domingue, Mrs. Rebecca Bracken, Mrs. Clara Alexander, Mrs. Rita Mae Lewis, and Miss Leotha Thibodeaux. To teach French as a first and second language in these classes are two specialist teachers of French in Louisiana — Miss Gayle Calais and Mrs. Jane Comeaux, working as team teachers with the classroom teachers. Assisting in the program are two assistant teachers from France, Hughes Cuny and Jose Antoine Frances.

Teacher Aides
Five teacher aides from the parish, native speakers of French, are working with the professional teachers: They are Mrs. Mae Nargassons, Mrs. Juanita Joseph, Mrs. Genevieve Guidry, Mrs. Jeannette Patin and Mrs. Grace Castille.

Administrators of the pilot program report that there is great enthusiasm for the program and that it has had wonderful support from the parents of the children, people of the community, and principals of the participating school, Mr. James Babin and Mr. Peter H. LeBlanc.

Three of the bilingual classroom teachers participated in a cultural exchange program with the Canadian government this past summer. Mrs. Lewis, Mrs. Alexander, and Mrs. Thibodeaux attended Januere College, located near Quebec.

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