Bilingual Program May Get New Life

The bilingual education program in Lafayette Parish, currently operating at a bare-bones level, may get a new lease on life next year.

Program director Jackie Philips told the Federal Programs Committee of the Lafayette Parish School Board yesterday that federal administrators have given their approval to the hiring of Louisiana teachers to teach French in the program.

In the past, the government has preferred teachers from France and Belgium for the courses because they were more fluent in the French language. The practice has iritated several Louisiana teachers of French who were unable to make use of their language skills. The use of foreign teachers has also caused problems when replacements were needed on short notice.

Only two schools in the parish, one public (Woodvale) and one parochial (St. Paul or Holy Family), currently offer the bilingual program. Three teachers and three aides are employed in the schools.

Amid complaints about the program, the committee voted to continue with it next year.

Mrs. Phillips noted that the French teachers and the English teachers have difficulty coordinating their classes as they tend to duplicate subjects. The bilingual program offers lessons in language arts, math and social living, taught in French.

John Broussard, principal of Woodvale, told the committee, "To be pointblank, my teachers would prefer not to have the program," adding that the classes take away from class time in other subjects. Broussard said he cannot find a teacher willing to teach the classes, "but if the board says we'll continue with the program I'll find a teacher."

He went on to explain that "with all the accountability, the teachers are feeling a lot of pressure" to upgrade classroom teaching, and the bilingual program detracts from that class time. "The main thing is the time element. We have a five-and-a-half-hour program and this would make it a four-and-a-half-hour program."

He stressed that he has "nothing but good things to say about the teachers" in the bilingual program, and that they conduct the classes well.

School Board member Danny Aucoin remarked that if the teachers were unwilling to participate in the classes, and the parents want the classes, then it may be necessary to move the teachers to other schools and find teachers who are willing to cooperate.

He was countered by boardman Lloyd Faulk who said, "I think we've moved our children and teachers around enough. We ought to leave them alone."

Before the vote to continue the program, boardman Stanley Andrus criticized the "little programs" which detract from class time which he feels should be devoted to "the basics."