Charter school created for pupils not enrolled locally.

Sehreana Domingue
sdomingue@theadvertiser.com

For about three-and-a-half hours a day, Brandon Owens, 10, stops missing his friends, his school and his home in the Slidell area.

Brandon sat at a table Tuesday in an upstairs ballroom in the Lafayette Convention Center cutting out fall leaves and gluing them to brown construction paper. The student is one of about 60 attending classes at a makeshift charter school in the Cajundome for pupils displaced by Hurricane Katrina.

"I like being in school," Brandon said. "It helps me do the things I want to do in life."

The Cajundome still houses about 891 people. The Lafayette Parish School Board, which has taken in about 3,000 students impacted by the storm, is again working to assist evacuees who are constantly moving around looking for family members, seeking jobs or trying to decide what to do and where to go. The first day of the charter school was Monday.

"As people come in and out, we are set up for those youngsters in transition," said Keith Bartlett, a displaced New Orleans school district administrator.

Parents just arriving in Lafayette Parish and housed in the Cajundome did not have the opportunity to register for school, he said.

"We have three teachers and paraprofessionals," Bartlett said. "Everybody is certified."

Students in kindergarten to fourth grade go to school from 8 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., and fifth grade through high school-age students go to school from noon to 3:30 p.m.

With small-group instruction in math and English, the students are getting the help they need to prepare for high-stakes testing in March, he said.

See CAJUNDOME on Page 6A

Continued from Page 1A

Cajundome classroom fills need

"If we didn't have the quality of teachers we have, it wouldn't be working," Bartlett said.

One of those workers is Joyce McLin. Her New Orleans East home has been severely damaged by Hurricane Katrina, and her job in the St. Bernard Parish School District is gone for the school year, with much of the parish still under water.

"A lot of the kids are from the parish I left from," said McLin, the charter school disciplinarian. "I came here because a lot of our students were here."

Maya Tilquit, 9, said the school is not like Harriet Tubman Elementary in New Orleans.

"It is OK," she said in a quiet voice. "I like doing math ... I miss being at home."

The students rotate to reading, math and art lessons.

"I really miss being at my house," said Jacquel Tyler, 9.

The students are even receiving tutoring assistance, thanks to Greg Davis, executive director of the Lafayette Cajundome.

"We have people in the population who have college degrees who have volunteered to help them," he said.

Displaced students will receive free tutoring Mondays through Thursdays from other displaced adults, Davis said.

"We have a daycare center that has been received very well," he said. "Well, we have become somewhat of a community here in the Cajundome, and we want to provide the same kind of things that are provided in a community."