Commission Urges Increased Push in State's Foreign Language Education

To remedy what the President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies called a "scandalous incompetence" in foreign languages in America, Louisiana's Commission on French as a Second Language today urged increased emphasis on foreign language education.

Among proposals presented in Baton Rouge are maximum instruction in elementary school, a requirement of two years of foreign language in high school to replace the present elective status and a foreign language college entrance requirement.

Another proposal is the increasing certification requirements of foreign language education majors to include a one-year study abroad. The Commission stressed the importance of oral and written communication skills over literary analysis among the 51 recommendations of its report titled "Louisiana's French Language Instruction: Appraisal and Recommendations."

The report was presented to Gov. David Treen, Senate President Samuel Nunez, Speaker of the House John Hainkile and State Education Superintendent J. Kelly Nix by Dr. Cecil Taylor, chairman of the Commission and Chancellor Emeritus of Louisiana State University. He was joined by other members of the Commission.

Human Resource

"Louisiana is in a favored position to strengthen its prosperity by developing the great human resource available through the French language natively spoken by a quarter of its population," Treen said. "This resource should be developed through our educational system."

Taylor said that with improved and widespread proficiency in French and other languages, Louisianans stand to gain a more important role in meeting today's demands in the areas of diplomacy, business and related fields. "We today stand in a privileged position to develop our bilingual population as one of the state's most important resources."

"A catastrophic deficiency in Louisiana's French education is the lack of continuity and articulation in the curriculum throughout the whole school system," said James Domengeaux, chairman of the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (COPOFIL) and Commission member. "French instruction must start in the elementary grades and continue through university in a continuous, progressive, well-articulated manner to achieve oral fluency and written competency."

The Commission was created by the legislature in the 1980 regular session to study French instruction in Louisiana at all levels of education.

The report called for a continued study to reverse the "intolerable decrease" in high school and university foreign language enrollment. The Commission strongly urged the use of radio and television for foreign language instruction in the classroom when productive and feasible, and that radio and commercial cable television stations be encouraged to transmit programs in the French language and to use to the greatest extent local French-speaking talent.

It is the first time a body studying education in Louisiana includes representatives of all educational entities in the state. The Commission received more than 100 briefs at four public hearings, including at the Commission's request, a joint communication from France, Belgium and Quebec. A 15-member task force assisted the Commission.

Other Commission members are: Sen. Armand Brinkhaus Jr., Senate Standing Committee on Education; Dr. William Arceneaux, commissioner of higher education; Eugene Gouraud, Board of Trustees of State Colleges and Universities; Rep. Jimmy Long, chairman House Standing Committee.

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Committee on Education: Mrs. Ruth Miller, LSU Board of Supervisors; J. Kelly Nix; Dr. Claire Landry, State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education; Martin Roy, School Board Association; and Dr. Elizabeth Zimmerman, State Parish Superintendents Association.