**French Connections**

Immiscion education program expands into Evangeline Parish

Students and teachers applaud Gov. John Bel Edwards as he speaks Wednesday at Ville Platte High School for the launch of French immersion programs beginning in the 2017-18 school year at Ville Platte Elementary and Mamou Elementary.

By Richard Burgess

Evangeline Parish, an area rich in Cajun and Creole history, will become the state’s two newest French immersion education programs.

State and local officials on Wednesday announced the expansion of the French immersion into the parish with programs starting this fall at Ville Platte Elementary and Mamou Elementary.


**Vive La France**

The number of students in French immersion classes continues to rise.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2017-18</td>
<td>4,528</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016-17</td>
<td>2,795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015-16</td>
<td>499</td>
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**IMMERSION**

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...from our food to your last name,” he told a crowd of students and community members packed into a auditorium at Ville Platte High School.

The expansion of the immersion programs into Evangeline Parish came together quickly.

School Superintendent Dorcas Lazard said she was approached only three minutes ago about bringing immersion programs to the parish and enthusiastically embraced the concept.

“I just saw this as a great opportunity for the community,” she said. “It’s part of the culture and fabric of this parish.”

Lazard said the immersion programs will begin with kindergarten and first grade and expand through eighth grade as the first classes progress.

“This is the first step in a long journey,” she said.