French 'Priority' Sought by CODOFIL Chairman

By TRENT ANGERS

EUNICE, La. — The fight to preserve and expand Louisiana's French language cannot succeed unless the state educators give high priority to French education, according to Domengeaux, chairman of the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana.

Domengeaux made the statement Saturday before a group of 300 here at the third annual statewide CODOFIL convention.

The group also heard a CODOFIL member suggest that the Louisiana Legislature set up a committee to explore ways and means to better implement legislative Act 408, which authorized the creation of a French education program at all school levels.

During his speech, Domengeaux said that English-French bilingualism in Louisiana is a valuable asset to the state. It is an asset that cannot be developed unless educators give high priority to French education programs.

"If educators are not behind this movement we may as well fold up our tent and go home," he said.

He said following the Civil War educators did all possible to smother the French language in this state. Teachers punished pupils for speaking French on the school grounds 30 years ago he noted.

The CODOFIL chairman had praise for the educators of some parishes which have French education programs in their schools.

The movement to preserve and expand the French language depends heavily on grass roots support, he said, adding that the language must become the language of the people, not just the upper class.

"The national interest of this country requires the development of our communicative capacity," he said, and Louisianans have an opportunity to become international leaders because of their developing bilingualism.

Domengeaux mentioned that people in commerce are beginning to realize that their products sell more readily when they use French language advertising.

Following Domengeaux's presentation, a panel discussed the effectiveness of the legislative act which cleared the way for a French education program in the state's high schools. Panel members agreed that the act could have "more teeth."

Dr. Carlos Fandol, president of the Louisiana Foreign Language Teachers Association, said, "I'm not impressed that enough principals are attempting to beat the 1972 deadline for trying to set up French programs in their schools."

In many parishes, especially in the northeastern part of the state, the problem is not progress in expanding the French language but survival of the language, Fandol said.

Mrs. Inez Estes, professor of foreign languages at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, suggested that CODOFIL concentrate on convincing school administrators of the worth of the French education program.

State Rep. Joseph Coreil of Mamou expressed optimism that the 1973 legislature would increase the appropriation to CODOFIL due to the success of current French education programs.

Homer Dyess, state supervisor of foreign languages for the State Department of Education, explained that Act 406 provided the ways and Act 409 provided the means for French education programs throughout the state. Act 408 authorized French programs in schools while 409 created CODOFIL, the state agency for the preservation and extension of French language and culture.

In other activities, groups of students and teachers discussed international student and teachers exchanges that took place between Louisiana and France, Quebec and Guadeloupe this past summer. The consensus was that the exchanges were helpful in improving the quality and fluency of their French.