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

1991-92
499
STUDENTS

2001-05
2,795
STUDENTS

2015-16
4,528
STUDENTS

Immersion 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 Manou Elementary.


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

School Superintendent Dervan Lazard said he was approached only three months ago about bringing immersion programs to the parish and enthusiastically embraced the concept.

"I just see this as a great opportunity for the community," he said. "It is part of the cultural 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," he said.

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Pages 1 & 7
Section A
Columns 3 & 6

IMMERSION
Continued from page 1A

of Education John White:
Evangeline Parish will become the 11th parish in the state to offer French immersion education in an effort spearheaded by the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana. Students in French immersion programs spend from their day being instructed in French.

Immersion programs began in Louisiana in the 1990s and have grown from a few hundred students to more than 4,900 statewide, according to numbers from CODOFL.

The expansion into Evangeline Parish marks an increase in interest in the program from rural school districts and follows the launch of a new immersion program last year in Pointe Coupee Parish.

"We are excited that with more support from the state we can now offer this program to students who were not able to participate in the past," said CODOFL Executive Director Charles Larocque.

The recent news of successful expansion of the program across the state comes as CODOFL is regaining its footing after some struggles with lack of state funding and the administration of its programs.

"It was a program that was going to come to a scraping halt," said Steve L. TaPeter, D'Ville Platte, a French speaker and vocal supporter of French immersion.

Edwards said Wednesday that French language and culture is crucial in setting Louisiana apart from the rest of the nation.

"Cajun and Creole culture is alive and well in Louisiana.