School Attendance A Must

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On Sept. 1 this year over 28,000 students will enter the halls of public, parochial and private schools in Lafayette Parish in response to the ringing in of a new school year.

But of these 23,000 youngsters, about 10 per cent, even as they walk through the doors, are potential dropouts and therefore subjects of concern for the parish school board's Office of Attendance and Census. The job of this branch of the school board is to see that children are taking advantage of educational opportunities afforded them through the parish school system.

It is not just a matter of attendance, however. The picture of the truant officer sneaking up on the old swimming hole and nabbing hockey-playing culprits is as old as yesterday's newspaper.

In his position as supervisor of attendance and census, Nat R. Gisclair, and his supervisor of child welfare and attendance Dudley E. Duhon, and three home-school coordinators are more concerned with the reasons behind absences.

When these are discovered and corrected then the child is more likely to return to school.

A Serious Matter

The job of keeping almost 3,000 students in school against their own or parents' wishes is not an easy one but the compulsory attendance law is taken "very seriously" in this parish, Duhon says.

Except for people who have just moved into the parish, the school board has records of every child who should be registered in schools. If he isn't, then Duhon and the three coordinators set out to determine why.

The coordinators, all former teachers in parish schools, and natives of Lafayette Parish, are John J. Mouton, Louis C. Benjamin and Chester Baudoin. Mouton, formerly a teacher of French and Spanish at Paul Breaux High School, received his bachelor and master of education degrees from the University of Toledo. He has taught in the parish 13 years.

Benjamin received his bachelor of science degree from Southern University in physical education and has three years' experience.

Baudoin, a 1955 graduate of USL, received his masters degree from Sam Houston State College. He is a certified visiting teacher and has 30 hours graduate work beyond the masters degree.

Among the objectives they seek to obtain are to establish closer home-school communication; to interpret home conditions of students to school counselors, teachers and principals; and to improve attendance.

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