School Board Approves Mandatory Kindergarten

By JOHN ST. ORES
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The Lafayette Parish School Board last night voted to make kindergarten mandatory in all parish schools.

The policy change sets the entry level in Lafayette Parish schools at the kindergarten level instead of first grade.

Many kindergarten teachers attended an Executive Committee meeting earlier in the day, where the change was discussed in detail.

Dr. Raphael Baranco, Executive Committee chairman, seemed inclined to table the proposal during the committee's session. He said he wanted to postpone discussion until Superintendent of Schools Dr. Wayne Vasher returns from Michigan. Vasher was there due to a death in his family.

Baranco told committee members that tabling the proposal for two more weeks "would not make that much difference as far as the policy, but would allow for further discussion about its impact."

Agreed To Listen

However, he agreed to listen to one kindergarten teacher speak on behalf of kindergarten teachers parishwide.

Brenda Castille of Evangeline Elementary, reading from a letter to the Board signed by 72 teachers from 16 schools, said "the issue of compulsory kindergarten is very important to all of us because it will provide each teacher the authority to retain those children who are not ready for first grade."

"The cost of providing for additional kindergarten students would not appear to be a major issue since the majority of eligible are already attending kindergarten," she said.

According to recent statistics from Lafayette Parish school principals, only 24 children (1 percent) have not attended kindergarten for the 1983-84 school year. According to Castille, since this number is so low, kindergarten teachers do not foresee a financial problem in implementing a mandatory kindergarten program.

Preparatory School?

"I have suggested that the name might be changed from kindergarten to preparatory because people do seem to think that it's just a glorified babysitting service or just somewhere for parents to send their kids to spend the day. That is not the case, anymore, at all," District A Board member Colleen Andrus said.

She was greeted by applause when she added, "I think it's time that we consider kindergarten a real educational experience."

Board member Rosemary Hubbard moved that the proposal be accepted and was seconded by President Andrus. The motion passed without opposition to a rousing round of applause from the audience.

In other action, the Board:
- approved American Bank as its fiscal agent for a period of one year instead of the usual two given to its fiscal agents so that Board policies may be reviewed;
- accepted The Advertiser as its official journal;
- adopted the 1984-85 school calendar beginning Aug. 27 and ending June 3; and
- agreed not to take action on a zoning report by an outside team due July 18 until the Board's August meeting.