Summer program offers ESL help
Sessions give students more practice time

BY MARSHA SILLS
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Fabiola Arellano remembers the day she stepped off the bus onto the campus of Edgar Martin Middle School to begin fifth grade and the confusion and fear that followed.

"This teacher was trying to speak to us, and I didn’t know what anyone was saying," said Arellano, now 23. "We got to our ESL (English as a second language) classroom, and the teacher and assistant were so welcoming."

A bilingual assistant working in the class helped her learn words and how to pronounce them in English.

"In that first week, I remember that I learned how to say 'My name is Fabiola' and 'Bathroom?'" she reminisced with a laugh.

Arellano said her old assistant and teachers like Janie Ellison, now the school district’s English as a second language coordinator, inspired her to become a teacher.

While she’s in college, Arellano works with the school system as a bilingual assistant at her old middle school, Edgar Martin.

This summer, she’s working with foreign-born students who, like her, arrive in the United States speaking little to no English. She’s assisting during the school system’s summer enrichment program for ESL students.

"I want to help these kids have the support I had," said Arellano, who was born in Mexico.

More than 1,200 students born in 49 different countries who speak a total of 37 different languages enrolled in Lafayette Parish schools in the 2013-14 school year.

The majority — 74 percent of them — speak Spanish, followed by Vietnamese and Arabic as the most spoken languages. Many don’t know enough English to be able to... See ESL, page 6B
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understand and communicate well with their teachers and classmates.

The federal government provides school districts with funds to pay for programs, supplies and technology specifically designed to serve the needs of ESL students. The school district receives about $153,000 annually, and the biggest share of that funding is used for the ESL summer program, Ellison said.

The summer program targets students who score low on the English Language Development Assessment, which tests proficiency in listening, speaking, reading and writing. This summer, 75 students in grades preschool through 12 are in the session.

The four-week program, held at Broadmoor Elementary, allows students to work more on speaking and writing in the language through creative exercises based on a theme of learning about aquatic life.

In a class for incoming kindergartners, students worked on coloring sheets with facts and pictures about sea creatures.

Katie Baccus, of Carencro, quizzed students on the colors they selected and asked for the name of the animal they were focused on coloring.

Baccus is a teacher practitioner and intern working with ESL teacher JoAnn Carey, one of five ESL teachers in the summer session.

“What color is she coloring her starfish?” Baccus asked one young girl.

Elizabeth DeWitt, who teaches ESL students at Lafayette High School, has about a dozen high school-aged students in her summer school class. Some students enroll without transcripts, meaning there’s no record of the courses they’ve taken or how well they’ve performed in subjects while in school in their home countries.

“They’re trying to learn English and meet the same requirements of other students,” DeWitt said.

The summer session is an opportunity for the students to practice the language in a more laid-back environment, she said. Since Lafayette High is the sole high school for ESL in the district, DeWitt will see her students again in August.

“It’s a very creative outlet to play with the language and build relationships between the teacher and student,” she said.

As of April, the school system enrolled 1,223 ESL-identified students, but only 603 took advantage of ESL programs, such as placement in a classroom with an ESL teacher and the support of a bilingual assistant.

The other half waive placement because ESL services are provided at only a few schools in the district, meaning students have long bus rides if they don’t live near the designated schools.

The ESL classes are offered at Broadmoor and Ridge elementaries, Edgar Martin Middle School and Lafayette High. Students receive extra support learning English from an ESL teacher at the schools.

In English language arts classes, some ESL teachers may co-teach with the English language arts teacher to help the ESL students as needed.

Bilingual assistants also provide students additional support, working one-on-one on literacy skills.

“The bilingual assistants aren’t there to translate but are skilled in understanding what a student is experiencing learning a second language,” said Nicole Boudreaux, the school system’s world language specialist.

The School Board has been asked to provide $660,000 in funding to open more ESL classrooms at Carencro Heights Elementary to reach more students who need services.

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ESL class at Carencro Heights Elementary in the 2013-14 school year because of the concentration of Spanish-speakers living in the area working on local horse farms, Boudreaux said.

The funding would pay for six ESL teachers, six bilingual assistants and a bilingual clerical assistant. In an ESL classroom, the teacher also has native English speakers.

Boudreaux said she realizes the request comes at a bad time, with the district facing a more than $22 million shortfall to its $272 million general fund. However, she said, the alternative is costlier.

“When they refuse services, they’re placed in a class where everyone speaks English fine and the teacher does not have training to deal with a student who doesn’t speak English,” Boudreaux said. “If we don’t get the money, then we have more and more kids slipping through the cracks.”

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