St. Martin Board Okays Plan To Provide Surrogate Parents

BREAUX BRIDGE — Members of the St. Martin Parish School Board reluctantly agreed here recently to get into the business of assigning surrogate parents.

Board members had hesitated also at an earlier meeting, and tabled the item that requires that children who do not have parents or whose parents cannot be found, must be assigned surrogate parents by the board.

Frances Breaux, Special Services Supervisor for the board, told members that it would only involve five or six children a year. She will be working with Fred Zerangue, with the Louisiana Department of Family Services, on the project that is federally and state mandated.

“Is it right that we undertake this?” questioned Boardman Cliff Hebert, who had also voiced opposition on the subject at the previous meeting.

Breaux said that the training of the surrogate parents was strictly for educational purposes, such as signing for evaluations. The program will not cost the board any money.

Zerangue told the board that the state will recommend the parent and it will be a matter of assigning a child to a presently-licensed home. He said the Louisiana Foster Parent Association has approved the program for the past three years.

“We can carry it out, but it doesn’t mean it’s right for us,” Hebert said, pointing out that the schools receive no money, but the foster parents receive money from the state.

Breaux said she could not proceed with the program until the board gave its approval. “All parishes in the state are obligated to do this,” she added.

“We feel this is affecting education and that this is more along the state’s expertise rather than the school board,” said Board President Roland Hebert.

“We would make the referral as the surrogate parent and the school board would make the approval,” Zerangue assured members.

“Why doesn’t your office run the whole show and we’ll loan you our expertise?” asked Cliff Hebert.

“We’re going into an area that we’re not ready to assume responsibility for,” agreed Roland Hebert. “We’re stretching the system to include foster parents.”

“Just because it’s mandated, it doesn’t mean we have to go along with it,” added Cliff Hebert. “We may be assuming some liability.”

“We’re trying to protect the child,” said Superintendent Burton Dupuis. “There were too many agencies getting involved. It’s all for the welfare of the child.”

Breaux and Zerangue said 99 percent of the surrogate parents will also be the child’s foster parents.