St. Martin School Board leery

Surrogate parent program OK’d

By GAYNELL TERRELL
Staff Writer

BREAUX BRIDGE — The St. Martin Parish School Board has agreed to participate in a surrogate parent program with a state child welfare agency, even though three board members voiced strong objections over the matter.

The program will assign surrogate parents to assist foster children with learning disabilities.

Francis Breaux, school system special services director, said the aim of the program is to provide those children who need special educational programs with an unbiased individual to help the child choose the proper school program to best suit his needs.

The surrogate parent program will be operated in cooperation with the Family Services Division of the state Office of Human Development and will affect about six foster children and 15 adult volunteers in St. Martin Parish.

Mrs. Breaux will work with Fred Zeringue of OHD to locate and educate adult volunteers who will be the children’s state-appointed foster parents.

BOARD MEMBERS Clifford Hebert, Roland Hebert and Paulma Johnson voiced lengthy objections to the program, even though they were repeatedly reminded by Mrs. Breaux that the school system is bound by state law to implement it.

Roland Hebert said he wanted to include the development office in the resolution to adopt the program so that “all the liability won’t be on our shoulders.”

“I see ourselves getting into an area where we’re not ready to accept responsibility, ready to act on this,” Hebert said.

Johnson also said he was afraid that a child who selected the wrong program would file charges against the school board, claiming he knew of a case where a child with a hearing disability went through the school system with his problem undetected.

“If it was my child, I’d look to sue somebody,” he added.

But according to Zeringue, the state will retain the final responsibility for the child. He added that it is to the child’s advantage to have someone other than the state or school system to advise him on educational matters.

WHILE THE state will make the recommendation for the selection of surrogate parents and the school board will approve the recommendation, Zeringue verified that his agency will have the final legal say-so in the matter.

Zeringue explained that the school board is involved because of its educational expertise, which will be used to train the surrogate parents.

“Well just because it’s mandated it don’t mean we got to go along with it,” Hebert retorted.

The measure passed with only Johnson abstaining.