

French visitors get a taste of Bristol high school life

BRISTOL -- Excitement and anticipation loomed both inside and outside the bus, from one culture to another. Bristol Central High School students waited outside their school Tuesday evening, while students from La-Queue-les-Yvelines in France (about 30 miles from Paris) anxiously awaited inside a motor coach that arrived in Newark.

When the French exchange students finally arrived at BCHS, they were welcomed with a sign written in French in front of the school, and a parking lot full of students, parents and teachers. All carried signs with their names on them, so they could find their host student.

Teacher Dorothy Raviele said that within 10 minutes all the students had found their hosts and were on the road to their homes.

Gaël Manescau, an English teacher from France, said the French students really felt welcome when they saw the students from BCHS applauding that they had finally arrived.

"They were all so excited, and very impressed," he said.

Of the 29 students who traveled to Bristol for the 10-day stay, Manescau estimated that 25 of them had never been to the United States before.

"I had told them that everything would be very different, so I don't think they really knew what to expect upon their arrival," he said.

The French students shadowed their American counterparts Wednesday, experiencing firsthand what it's like to be an American high school student.

Raviele said some noticeable differences discussed included the technology of computer-aided compositions in the music rooms. Sylvie Sentis, a Spanish teacher from France, said music isn't an option at the French students' school.

"Our high schools are strictly for academics and a few activities, but we don't have many of the same classes and activities that American students have," she said.

Raviele said some of the other students were impressed with the theater and the auto shop. The teachers from France noticed that the number of students in classrooms at BCHS was significantly lower than where they teach.

"We generally have about 35-37 students per class," Manescau said.

The students from both schools will participate in a number of trips during the exchange. During lunch today, the students are having a luncheon with the mayor and a tour of Bristol. Friday, they'll travel to New York City, where they'll visit the Statue of Liberty, the United Nations and the South Street Seaport.

Jess Preleski, 17, is a senior at BCHS. Her family is hosting 15-year-old student Marine Dufraise. Both girls agreed that meeting was pretty exciting, although on occasion, communication can be a bit tough.

"It's definitely the common, everyday things that we seem to have a problem with," Preleski said. "Neither school is taught slang, so I think that's the most difficult part," she said.

They'll have plenty of time to teach each other. The students who came to Bristol this year will host the Bristol students in France next year.