

BCHS pen pals from France come to city for two-week stay

BRISTOL -- Twenty-three students from the town of La Queue Lez Yvelines, France have made their way across the Atlantic Ocean for a two-week stay with their pen pals from Bristol Central High School.

"For most of my students this is the first time they have been to the United States," said Gael Manescau, one of the teachers making the trip with the students. "We are studying the American way of life."

He added that his students have begun to notice that life in Bristol is much different from that in La Queue Lez Yvelines -- a town about 30 miles outside Paris. He said the two differ in just about everything from the layout of the city to the type of food, but most of all in the daily life at school.

According to Manescau, the typical school day in France is eight hours, from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., as opposed to the six-hour, 20 minute days at BCHS. In France, the students are required to attend class Saturdays as well.

The shorter time in school is something the students are not protesting, he added.

At 9:15 a.m. Tuesday, the students boarded a bus for a brief tour of the city. The first stop was the American Clock and Watch Museum, followed by the New England Carousel Museum.

The students were greeted by city officials, Greater Bristol Chamber of Commerce members and members of the Board of Education's central office for a luncheon and official welcoming at the carousel museum.

Mayor William Stortz distributed pins representing a key to the city to each student. Superintendent of Schools Michael J. Wasta also welcomed the students and even gave them a quasi-homework assignment. He asked the students to give him their feedback on how the Bristol school stacks up against the one in their homeland.

Manescau said it is not his school's first visit to the city, as students made a previous stop in 2004.

"It's good to be here again," he said. "I only wish that we could come back here every year to be with our American friends."

Dorothy Ravielle, BCHS world language department coordinator, added the Central community is happy to host them once again.

"There is a real excitement in the building when the kids arrive in the morning. It's really exciting for the whole school," Ravielle said. "This is really an exchange of educational philosophies and learning about different cultures."

According to Ravielle, both sets of students are getting along very well making for another successful exchange.

She added she has tentative plans to take the Central students to France next school year.

The French students' short time in the United States will not all be spent hitting the books at Central. The group has plans on making trips to New York City, Boston and the University of Connecticut before leaving April 6.

Manescau said the trip is too short, as "all my students really enjoy it here."

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