BY EDWARDS

$300 Million Education Plan Offered

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — A $300 million master education plan for the next 10 years, including such controversial items as lengthening the school day and mandatory kindergarten, has been unveiled by Gov. Edwin Edwards.

Another item in his so-called blueprint for education is a new merit pay plan for teachers that would allow them to make $30,000 a year after seven years through achievement in the classroom.

Telling reporters at a Wednesday news conference that education is the top priority in his administration, Edwards said he will need support from every segment in the state to make the plan work and to pull the state's sagging educational system up by the bootstraps.

“It provides a composite, long range goal for education in Louisiana,” he said. “I am not prepared to say that we can fund the entire program or implement it in this year but it is my intention to work with the Legislature to fund it as soon as possible on a staged basis.”

Nothing would start until 1985 because the plan needs fine tuning by a blue ribbon panel which has been working on the blueprint, Edwards said.

He said realizing that some items are controversial, he wants input and constructive criticism from everybody.

The plan is the culmination of months of meetings with educators, parents and other officials, he said.

The first items he wants pushed include mandatory kindergarten, lowering the student-teacher ratio and scrapping the present teacher merit pay program with a new one.

“It’s kind of a program to encourage teachers to increase their own educational qualifications in their own specific areas where they are teaching and to pay them based upon achievements as they move up in the career ladder,” he said of his own merit pay program.

Now, the state has the much-maligned Professional Improvements Program or PIPs in which teachers get an extra $2,000 to $2,600 for attending workshops, seminars, special classes or furthering their educations at universities.

Some of the courses have run the gamut from basketweaving to archery and lawmakers have complained because PIPs cost $100 million.

PIPs would be phased out over a period of time, said Edwards, but he added he didn’t know the mechanics at this time.

“We are not going to abruptly rip somebody out of the PIPs program,” he said. “The PIPs program was a meaningless program...While it had economic benefits for those teachers in it, I’ve yet to find anyone knowledgeable who felt the program had any effect whatsoever in actually making better teachers out of teachers.”

He said he would need the support of Education Superintendent Tom Clausen for the plan to work.

One of the items in the plan is to make Clausen’s elective job an appointive one.

Here are some of the other items in the lengthy plan:

— Create a task force on discipline to oversee the development of alternative school plans for students who have problems coping with a regular environment. Enforce the existing discipline code.

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- Recommend to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education that advanced courses be phased into the graduation requirements over a period of time.
- Establish a new student loan program and a new scholarship program.
- Make at least one-half day of kindergarten mandatory.
- Reduce the class size through the third grade by funding a student-teacher ratio of 22-1 and placing an aide in every classroom.
- Lengthen the school day to a 7-period day for secondary school students.
- Require prospective teachers to pass a standardized aptitude test prior to acceptance to teacher training programs.
- Require education students to complete a paid one-year internship which takes place after graduation and prior to certification to teach.
- Require local systems to develop plans for soliciting parent input for approval of a four-year course of study beginning with the middle school.
- Establish a career ladder plan of merit pay in which beginning pay should be $17,000 and have the potential to move to $30,000 at the end of seven years.