The administration is still pursuing Gov. Buddy Roemer’s dream of putting computers in all elementary schools in Louisiana.

However, Roemer recently chose not to include the state’s half of the $34.5 million project in his 1991-92 proposed budget.

The House Education Committee, nevertheless, will discuss the enabling legislation, HB1898, on Thursday, even if funds thus far have not been made available to make computer labs available for kindergarten and first grade classes in public schools and in some private schools.

Roemer’s education adviser, Claudia Fowler, said the administration will pursue the funding, if the House and Senate approve the measure, later because the budget is tight this year.

The proposal is part of Roemer’s package of “what he wants to be done,” Fowler said.

Last year, the Legislature halted Roemer’s attempts to get the program instituted statewide because one vendor — IBM — would have gotten the state contract under the Roemer plan.

It was later amended so that other vendors could have participated, but that, too, failed to muster enough support before the 1990 session ended.

“That was not done out of trying to monopolize,” Fowler said. “That was just the way it had come about in terms of IBM agreeing to put up half the cost if we could get matching funds.”

Even so, Fowler and state Superintendent of Education Wilmer Cody said the proposed law, drafted by the Department of Education, does not focus on giving one vendor the state business.

Under the plan, the state would provide a primary grade computer lab with software in every elementary school for kindergarten and first grade students.

In addition, the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education would establish a committee to review software and hardware proposals from various companies. The committee would consist of three public school teachers, three public school principals, three public school central office staff members and three representatives of state-approved private schools.

After the committee reviews the proposals and makes recommendations, BESE would give local school systems at least two hardware and software packages to study and select for their respective district, Cody said.

Schools with less than 117 students would not be eligible to participate in the program unless BESE approves them.

If approved and financed, the program will “provide equity” because it would give every child a “good start on learning to use technology for learning himself, which has been demonstrated to be effective,” Cody said.

In addition, Cody said the lower level computer labs will enhance the beginning of children’s reading and writing skills.

“It improves the learning of kids, but it also gives all the people an equal start on learning how to use computer software for learning purposes,” Cody said.

House Committee Chairman Jimmy Long, D-Natchitoches, sponsored the bill on behalf of Cody and the Department of Education.