The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education more or less decided how to spend a $17 million school improvement fund Tuesday in a chaotic meeting that frustrated educators seeking a share of the money for their schools. One board member compared the $17 million, "We thought we were competing for $17 million," complained Donald Hoover, associate superintendent of East Baton Rouge Parish schools. The parish submitted requests totaling $3.2 million, including proposals to bring computers to the classroom, help students with their homework and stress math skills. "We submitted 11 good, good projects that took a lot of time to develop," Hoover told the board. "Now I have to go back to my school board and tell them that our chances of being funded are practically nil." Another longtime backer of the 8g fund complained that the board still hasn't devised guidelines for deciding which programs deserve state financing. "Ya'll are going to have all the money spent before I get to know what your priorities are," said Jackie Ducote, vice president of the Louisiana Association of Business and Industry, who helped draft the law setting up the 8g fund. The board made plans to adopt rules before the remaining money is handed out, probably in May. The board also decided to keep $200,000 to administer the fund, which is financed by interest earned on a windfall oil and gas settlement that has been locked into a permanent savings account for educational improvement programs. The money is supposed to finance school improvement projects that the state can't afford during its current budget crunch. Last month the board approved spending most of its first 8g allotment of $8 million available to spend during the current semester. Board president Milton Hamel of Shreveport defended spending half the money on current projects before reviewing the long list of proposed projects for next school year. "The things we had this year are things that would be difficult to eliminate," Hamel said. For instance, the board recently required schools to offer foreign language instruction to elementary students. The board allotted $950,000 this semester — and on Tuesday approved $1.9 million for the next full school year — to employ teachers to fulfill that requirement. The board also approved $1 million to buy textbooks after learning that a $900,000 appropriation it made last month was used mostly to replace budget cuts in the $22 million general budget for textbooks for Louisiana public schools. Of that $900,000 appropriation, about $6,000 remains — enough to pay some freight charges for textbook delivery, said Frank Norris, director of instructional materials for the state Department of Education. Board members provided little substantiation for the specific proposals they approved. When asked how he derived the $1 million figure he proposed for textbooks, board member Jack Pellegrin of Houma said it came "right out of my head." The board spent much of the meeting debating parliamentary procedure and deciding whether to reconsider items already decided. Roll-call votes were interrupted several times so motions could be explained or debated. At one point, the meeting was so confusing that a board member voted against her own motion.