BESE gives cold shoulder to Clausen plan

By JOHN LaPLANTE
Capitol news bureau

Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education gave a cool reception Thursday to Education Superintendent Tom Clausen’s plan for the state to take over and expand a locally run program for improving classroom instruction.

A committee of the board instead voted to request that the state continue funding the local professional development centers in north Louisiana, and that more centers be established in south Louisiana.

Deputy Superintendent D.G. Joseph briefed the committee on Clausen’s proposal to merge the current centers into a network of regional educational centers that would be managed by a supervisor in Baton Rouge.

Joseph said the plan would increase the effectiveness of the program and make it available to teachers all over the state.

But several board members said they feared creation of a new state bureaucracy to replace a local program that has been highly praised in the education community.

“As long as we can take care of our own problems, we don’t need Big Daddy coming in and telling us what to do,” said John Bertrand, a board member and superintendent of schools in Acadia Parish.

The issue involves professional development centers that are located in three cities in north Louisiana. They are funded by the state but

(See BESE, 9B)

BESE

(Continued from 1B)

managed by a board composed of school officials from the parishes that they serve.

The centers provide a variety of services, such as training teachers, providing specialized books and processing aud-tutorial aids used by teachers in preparing classes. Local officials decide which services will be offered.

Joseph said Clausen’s program would be more efficient because it would also encompass the Special Program to Upgrade Reading — SPUR, a program that stresses the importance of high quality reading as a basis for all learning.

He said SPUR could be expanded to cover all phases of the school curriculum, not just reading.

However, Lanny Johnson, superintendent of schools in Tensas Parish, said he doesn’t want to expand SPUR. And he said all 21 superintendents in northeast Louisiana recently voted to continue the professional development center in his area.

“We’re very pleased in north Louisiana for what the professional development centers have done for us,” Johnson said. “We call on them constantly.”

Board member Felician Fourrier said Clausen’s plan goes against the philosophy that “nothing should be done at a higher level that can be done at a lower level.”

“The success of the PDC’s is well recognized,” he said, noting the old adage that “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”

Several other board members made similar comments.

The committee voted to urge the Legislature to continue and expand the centers this year. The committee also voted to receive the Clausen plan for discussion at a future meeting.