BENSE postpones graduation test

By JOHN LaPLANTE
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Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education have postponed plans for a high school graduation test — a test that was supposed to guarantee that schools are teaching tougher courses required by the board last year.

The Legislature failed to approve any money to develop the test, Department of Education official Clarence Ledoux told the board's academic policymaking committee Tuesday.

The committee, which has been talking about the test almost every month for more than a year, voted to delete the item from its agenda "until they give us some money," as board member Felician Fourrier of Baton Rouge put it.

"There's no reason to do anything" until funds are available, Fourrier said.

Last year the board voted to require all students to pass a basic skills/functional literacy test before they receive a high school diploma.

The test was adopted at the same time the board added several tough courses to the list of subjects that all students must pass to graduate.

At the time, board members said the test would set a statewide standard for graduation and prevent local school officials from watering down the tougher courses.

Earlier this year, a Department of Education official warned the board that the first course affected by the new requirements — Algebra I, which usually is taken by ninth graders — was being watered down in some school systems so more students could pass it.

The new graduation requirements took effect for students entering ninth grade last fall. Those students were supposed to take the graduation test in the spring of 1987, when they are in 11th grade. Students who failed could take the test again in 12th grade.

Ledoux said the money to develop the graduation test was placed in his proposed budget last year, but it was not approved by the Legislature. He said further budget cuts have left him with barely enough money to handle other testing programs required by state law.

He said his agency may be trimmed further next year.

Even if money were made available immediately, the test would be delayed at least a year, Ledoux said.

At the earliest, he said, he could develop a test and use it in selected schools by the spring of 1987. That means the test might be ready for use by all 11th-graders in the spring of 1988. Those students are now in ninth grade.

Even that schedule "would be pushing it," Ledoux said.

Board member Jesse Bankston of Baton Rouge said the board has made its policy, but it has no authority to finance it.

"As soon as we get funds, we'll implement it," Bankston said.