BESE rejects plan to fail 3rd-graders

Capitol news bureau

The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education has again rejected a proposal to require third-graders to repeat the grade if they fail their state reading test.

Board member Felician Fourrier of Baton Rouge proposed the tougher promotion rules because, he said, students who don’t learn crucial reading skills by the end of third grade may fall hopelessly behind in higher grades.

“What we are trying to do is prevent dropouts from schools because students have not made the transition they are required to make,” Fourrier said.

Public school students in second through fifth grades take a state test each year to gauge their success in math and language skills. Those who fail either test must be offered extra instruction to make up their deficiencies.

Many students who fail the tests are promoted to the next grade anyway. Last year, for instance, at least 37 percent of Louisiana third-graders who failed one or both of the tests were passed to fourth grade.

Fourrier wants to omit the remedial instruction for third-graders who fail the language part of the test and instead require them to repeat the grade.

The board already only requires students to score 75 percent correct to pass the test, which gauges only “the minimum, the bare essentials” taught in each grade, he said.

The board voted 7-3 against Fourrier’s motion. The board had tied 4-4 on a similar motion last month.

Opponents of the proposed rule said school officials are better able to judge whether each student is capable of handling the next grade, regardless of their performance on the state test.

“In most cases it does a student more good to repeat,” said Board member John Bertrand of Crowley. “However, I don’t want to shackle any student for one year to repeat a grade based on one test.”

The basic skills test is not infallible, he said.