BESE rescinds opposition to home school law

By JOHN LapLANGE
Capitol News Bureau

A stand against the law that allows children to attend schools not regulated by the state was rescinded Thursday by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Board members said they were deluged with complaints about it since their January meeting when they voiced opposition to the law. The vote to cancel the earlier motion was unanimous.

The Legislature recently allowed schools with as few as one student — including parent-taught home schools — to attend school without government interference as long as they accept no government funds.

"There's no way in the world I was trying to do away with Christian schools," said board member David Sintiere of New Orleans, a Roman Catholic brother-and-parochial school educator.

"I'm not changing my vote. I never did want to do away with home study programs," Sintiere said Thursday in favoring the motion to rescind the earlier action.

Sintiere said he received 90 calls from private school officials and parents who complained about the January vote, but he said they misunderstood it. He blamed faulty news reports for causing confusion among the public on the board's stand.

According to minutes of the January meeting, board members:

"...directed that the Board support the position of the Louisiana Association of Child Welfare and Attendance Personnel to repeal the home study law pending the response from the Attorney General's Office as requested in the motion above."

Only board member Jesse Bankston of Baton Rouge was recorded as voting no.

(See SCHOOLS, Page 8-B)

Schools

(Continued from Page 1-B)

Bankston had argued that many parents run excellent home schools for their children.

The other motion referred to was a request by the board for a legal opinion on whether school attendance laws recently adopted by the Legislature conflict with the traditional law requiring school-age students to attend school.

Only the Legislature could repeal or modify the home study law, but the board administers the law and its position on education laws is taken seriously by lawmakers.

Two parents who are making use of the home study law said most of the board members they talked to thought they were voting to seek repeal of the law last month, but apparently changed their minds in the face of pressure from parents and leaders of unregulated schools.

Kathi Edward of Baker and June Conley of Baton Rouge said they contacted board members to complain about the January action because they feared the laws might be repealed with the board's support.

Attendance officers oppose the law because, although they say some parents are doing a good job teaching their children at home or in small neighborhood schools, they fear that uncaring parents who traditionally keep their children out of school might use the law to legalize their irremediably.

At least one attendance officer has reported that children known to be spending their days on shrimp boats are escaping the compulsory attendance law because their parents claim they are attending an unregulated home school.