Board approves longer school day

By LORI CHANDLER and KEITH MATULICH
Advocate staff writers

The East Baton Rouge Parish School Board approved Thursday a longer school day for high school teachers, increasing instructional time to five 60-minute periods beginning this fall.

Board members also approved a resolution agreeing to compensate teachers for the extra time and if funds are available.

The change in instructional time brings the board into compliance with the longer school day requirement adopted Thursday by the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

The current high school seven-period day — which includes five 50-minute periods for instruction, a sixth period for planning and a seventh for duty — was changed to a six-period day, which will consist of five 60-minute periods for instruction and a sixth for planning.

Board member Press Robinson offered a substitute motion that would exempt Scotlandville Magnet High School from the six-period day because he was concerned about the time needed because of the uniqueness of the middle school program and that remedial students would not have the time for electives.

In other action, the board rejected Arveson's recommendation that Ms. Donnie Faye Hull be named director of special education for parish schools.

The board's vote was 4-4, with board member Robert Crawford abstaining.

Crawford gave no reason for the abstention. Board members L.L. Hines, Robert Meador, T.H. Montgomery and Jim Talbot voted against Ms. Hull's appointment.

Hines said after the meeting that he voted against Ms. Hull because he "was not impressed with her qualifications as the person I want in that job."

But Hines said his main objection was with the school system's selection process, which only allows the board to select or reject one candidate and does not give it a list from which to choose.

"We are asked to react to the superintendent's recommendation," Hines said. "Under the present system, we can't interview a group of applicants."

Arveson gives the board's Personnel Services Committee a list of three names, said Hines, who is a member of that committee. Hines said he had talked with one other candidate, but had not talked to the third.

"It's not a good way to interview," he said. "After talking to three or four people, we may have decided that she (Ms. Hull) was the best candidate, but the way it is now, our only recourse is to vote no."

The Personnel Services Committee could play a larger role in determining who the school system hires, but currently it is limited because its role is poorly defined, Hines said.

He said he voted against another of Arveson's recommendations for a similar reason.

"In both cases, the candidates did not reach my expectations in the short interviews we had," he said. "The whole interview process should be changed."

Hines suggested that a better system could be devised by scheduling individual interviews with the committee or "bring them in two at a time."

"That way, we would know up front who the applicants are," he said.

Several middle school officials and teacher representatives spoke to the board, some in favor of a six-period day and some for a seven-period middle school day.

Myrtle Perkins, president of the East Baton Rouge Parish Association of Educators, said that even though 92 percent of teachers opposed the seven-period day, they were in it "and it's working," she said.

"The added burden of contact hours on a teacher will add to burnout," said (See CLASSES, 7B)