Panel urges medical instruction

By STEPHEN J. DILL
Advocate staff writer

Lacking funds to develop a center for medical vocational education, the East Baton Rouge Parish school system may do the next best thing — beef up the program already in existence.

That was the decision reached Tuesday by the Instructional Services Committee of the East Baton Rouge Parish School Board.

The panel voted to recommend to the full board that the school system introduce medical vocational education at the ninth-grade level — a move that would add two more years to a supplemental curriculum that now begins in the 11th grade.

The only cost for implementing the expanded program would be $20,000 needed to hire one more teacher to handle the additional responsibilities, said Robert Hill, coordinator of vocational education.

The school system's current two-year program lets students bound for health-related professions get their feet wet in both specialized study at Belaire High School and practical experience at local clinics and hospitals.

The committee's new proposal, however, is an effort to improve the current study with the boiled-down essence of a more expensive formula for giving interested students an even bigger head start on their education.

An earlier plan would have allowed students to engage in supplemental courses at a new vocational education center created out of one of the area's high schools, probably either Tara, McKinley or Belaire, said Dr. Richard Atkins, a dentist among the committee's 30 field advisors.

The plan, however, would have cost at least $216,000 during its first year, and the School Board decided in February that the price tag was too high.

Under the committee's new proposal, the school system would develop a four-year curriculum — beginning in the 9th grade — to prepare students who want (See HEALTH, 4B)
to become doctors, nurses, dentists and hospital technicians for more advanced study in college.

“All students would go through the basic requirements for high school graduation,” said Hill, “but they would focus on a supplemental area so that they could get a running head start on others entering college.”

If students are not interested in going to college, they will have the option of applying for entry-level positions as orderlies, nurses aides and secretaries in area hospitals and clinics, said Dannie Tassin, one of the two registered nurses teaching at Belaire.

Students in the current two-year program now study anatomy, medical terminology, microbiology, first aid, basic medical skills and nutrition, Mrs. Tassins said.

“Our biggest problem is getting people to realize that the program exists,” she said.

Student interest and participation may be one of the limiting factors in implementing the program, Hill said.

Requirements for admission to the program are that students have a minimum 2.0 grade point average and good attendance records.

In other action, the committee voted to forward to the full board a report indicating that recent changes in federal instructions for desegregation had made it necessary to lift mandates that had been placed on the system in accordance with “special-focus clusters.”

Associate Superintendent Donald Hoover said the school system is operating under some outdated policies implemented in accordance with a school system arrangement by which parents could choose to send their children either to schools that would emphasize fundamental education or to schools that would allow students to progress at their own rates of ability.

But because the federal government has since nullified the cluster arrangement, such policies as the distribution of a special report card for schools allowing students to progress at their own rates should be relaxed, Hoover said.

The associate superintendent said removing the mandates would allow principals greater flexibility in determining the general directions of their schools.