The financial contribution of parents of nonpublic school children to the education of Louisiana’s elementary and high school students has risen sharply again as the operating cost of public education in the state nears $2 billion annually, the Louisiana Federation of Education, Citizens for Educational Freedom, said today.

Figures that will be published in several weeks by the State Department of Education will show that expenditures for public schools rose $235,000,000 to a total of $1,792,803,231 during the last school year, according to Kirby J. Ducote, CEF executive director.

At the same time, he said, the number of students in public schools dropped from 788,366 in 1979-80 to 773,549 in 1981-82, boosting the statewide per pupil cost over the $2000 mark for the first time ever.

Ducote said parents paying for both public schools through taxes and nonpublic schools through tuition save Louisiana taxpayers a minimum of $275,000,000 annually based upon the mounting per pupil cost of educating students in public schools.

Over a 10-year period total cost of public schools have risen from $675,512,987 in 1971-72 to the 1980-81 figure of $1,792,803,231, Ducote said, adding:

"At the present rate of escalation, the operating cost of public schools in Louisiana will be more than $2 billion annually during the next school year."

Over the same 10-year period of time used for financial comparison, he said, the total number of students in public schools has dropped by 62,834, from 836,453 in 1971-72 to 773,549 in 1980-81.

"Nonpublic schools showed a decline of 4500 students over the same period, dropping from 157,169 to 152,455 students over the decade," Ducote said. "But the fact that the nonpublic schools still educated 152,455 students in 1980-81 is extremely good news for Louisiana's taxpayers."

"If the 152,000 students in nonpublic schools were in public schools, the bill for operation of public education at the elementary and high school level would have been $317,868,675 higher during the 1980-81 school year."

"Even if you deduct from the tax savings figures all of the various aids received by children in nonpublic schools, their parents or the nonpublic schools, the parents of children in tuition schools still save taxpayers some $275,000,000 annually in school operating cost to say nothing of capital outlay."

Emile Comar, vice-president of CEF in Louisiana and a member of the national CEF board, said "the state of Louisiana and the nonpublic school sector have had good working relationships over the years and the cooperation is improving."

"The Louisiana Legislature," he said, "has been sympathetic to the plight of nonpublic school parents who are supporting public schools at a continuing higher level and, at the same time, paying increased tuition to keep nonpublic schools going."

"Their contribution to the state's educational program and to the state's economy cannot be overlooked."

CEF said the following are the 1980-81 cost per pupil in the metropolitan areas of the state, where there is the largest concentration of both public and nonpublic school children:

Orleans, $2095; Jefferson, $2289; East Baton Rouge, $2193; Caddo, $2227; Lafayette, $2530; Rapides, $2047; Ouachita, $1551; and Calcasieu, $3110.

Ducote said that two informal polls were made last year of Catholic schools on the one hand and independent nonpublic schools on the other to determine the cost per pupil in nonpublic schools.

The average annual per pupil operating cost in the Catholic schools surveyed, he said, was $900 in 1980-81 and the average in the independents ranged from $800 to $1500, according to the type of school.

At the close of the 1970's, Louisiana ranked fifth among the states in the percentage of students in nonpublic schools — behind Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey and Wisconsin. And at the same time, public school enrollment in Louisiana was the 18th largest in the nation.