Supporters of the latest plan to give Acadiana a system of community colleges picked up support from a Greater Lafayette Chamber of Commerce committee Wednesday.

Now those supporters, among them Reps. Jerry Luke LeBlanc and Sammy Theriot, are hoping Chamber of Commerce members will testify for the plan in House Education Committee hearings next week.

The Lafayette Chamber’s adult education committee voted Wednesday to endorse the plan that would add academic courses to the offerings at three Acadiana technical schools - Lafayette Regional Technical Institute, T.H. Harris Technical Institute in Opelousas, and Teche Area Technical Institute in New Iberia.

“It’s all based on the fact that people in Acadiana aren’t being served,” said LeBlanc, D-Lafayette. “There’s a better way.”

LeBlanc and James Caillier, president of the Board of Trustees for State Colleges and Universities, said they’re expecting opposition.

They said opponents may include the opposition from officials who fear that the technical schools will be eliminated, which they deny; from others worried about the enrollment and financial impact on Louisiana State University and two-year LSU-Eunice; and from regional interests.

“It’s all coming down to a question of market share,” LeBlanc said. “That’s a sad commentary on our educational system.”

LeBlanc and Caillier said Louisiana trails men up to the college level in basic subjects. He said that would help the university by allowing it to institute a selective admissions policy and focus on research.

But he and LeBlanc said the system isn’t being created simply to help USL.

“It was done not through political motivations, but because the (Acadiana legislative) delegation wanted to do the right thing,” LeBlanc said.

The annual price tag on a year of schooling at a community college is about $2,000, compared to $3,400 at a university and $4,800 at a technical school.

Community colleges would also make Acadiana more attractive to relocating businesses, the supporters said.

Dailey Berard, chief executive officer of Unifab and a member of the Chamber committee, supported the community college system because he hopes the schools will train the workers.

Berard says his company loses millions in new business because he can’t find enough skilled workers.

“It’s very discouraging for the businesses that are here ...,” he said. “(Business like Berard’s) all have a common problem. We cannot grow in this state.”