Education Department to oppose move to transfer funds

By JOHN LaPLANTE
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The Department of Education will oppose a move by the Edwards administration to transfer a large block of the department's federal funds to the rival Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

The switch, which involves $17.85 million in federal aid for vocational programs, may complicate an already heated battle between the board and the department for control of the state's vo-tech system.

Earlier this year, for instance, the board had to go to the Legislature to demand its share of federal vo-tech money because the department refused to release the funds.

The state operating budget bill, introduced in the Legislature by the governor's floor leaders Tuesday, would transfer federal vo-tech aid from the department's budget to the board's.

Budget director Ralph Perriman said the governor's office is not taking sides in the board-department dispute. He said a recent change in federal law requires that the board be the official recipient of the funds.

"The law is clear, very clear," Perriman said. "We do not believe that federal law requires it to be switched around." said Anne Stewart, Education Superintendent. "Tom Clausen's associate superintendent for management and finance.

Stewart said the federal funds properly belong under the jurisdiction of Clausen's department. She said the Clausen administration will take its case to the Legislature if the Edwards administration doesn't voluntarily change the bill.

"We will request that the budget be properly structured," Stewart said.

Board president Claire Landry of Arabi said she didn't request that the money be transferred, but she said she favors the switch.

Giving the board first crack at how the money will be spent may give the board greater power to enact its proposed new management system for the state's 52 public trade schools, Landry said.

Traditionally, the board and the department have shared responsibility for vocational education.

However, the board recently declared itself the administrator, as well as the policymaker, of the vo-tech system.

Clausen, blaming the board for poor management of the vo-tech system, has announced plans to file legislation giving his department full control of the system.

Last year the department refused to release $70,000 in federal vocational funds that the board had been using to employ a vo-tech adviser. Department officials said the money could be better spent elsewhere.

The board complained to the governor's office and to the Joint Legislative Committee on the Budget, which ordered the department to hand over the money.

The board and the department have clashed on a number of issues since Clausen took over the department last year.

The Edwards administration's operating budget for fiscal 1985-86, as detailed in the general appropriations bill filed with the Legislature, proposes spending about $66 million to operate state trade schools.

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make, and I'm the general," he said. But he stressed that the Legislature will make the final decision, with or without Steimel's support.

"He can't get one vote for the package that isn't already committed to it. I can't get one vote for the package that isn't already committed to it," Edwards said.

"What we need to do... is try to get the public behind the package," he said. As his latest proof of Edwards' lack of resolve, Steimel quoted the lead author on most of the governor's package, Rep. Raymond Laborde, D-Marshallsville, as saying that the merit pay bills can't pass without major changes to "make them more palatable."

Edwards said that it's unfair to accuse me of vacillating because some members of the Legislature disagrees with me.

"I'm governor, and I speak my own mind," Edwards said