Education plan might lack funding

By SCOTT DYER and DOUG MYERS

Gov. Edwin Edwards released his educational agenda Tuesday, but admitted he may have a hard time funding it.

“I’m not all that optimistic because of the status of the budget,” Edwards said.

The Edwards administration budget — which was also released Tuesday — does not include funding for all the planks of the governor’s education platform.

Acting state Superintendent of Education Raymond Arveson said the plan, if funded, would provide a needed lift to Louisiana’s education system.

“If we were to implement these, I sincerely believe that we would move Louisiana education and... Louisiana students way, way up,” Arveson said Tuesday. “I think these are reachable. I think these are attainable goals. Very definitely.”

Edwards’ agenda includes a $40 million increase in public school funding, increased aid to at-risk students, college scholarships for the top students at each Louisiana high school and increased financial aid for middle class college students.

Perhaps the biggest stumbling block in the package is a $40 million increase in funding for public elementary and secondary schools that is included in Edwards’ proposed budget, but must still gain the approval of state lawmakers in a financially strapped year.

Other planks of the agenda that may have difficulty obtaining funding include an expansion of education programs to allow access for all at-risk 4-year-olds in the state and a broadening of alcohol and drug abuse prevention programs, particularly in the elementary grades.

On the college level, Edwards may have difficulty obtaining money for a proposed increase from $3 million to $5 million in financial assistance to middle-income families who do not qualify for other aid.

Another program that may face an uphill battle obtaining funding is a proposal to grant free college tuition for the top 5 percent of every Louisiana high school graduating class by 1994.