Education reform group, CABL merge

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Education for a New Louisiana, a group that staged a media blitz to publicize the need for school reform, has merged with the Council for a Better Louisiana, another organization dedicated to improving Louisiana government. CABL will retain Education for a New Louisiana as a committee devoted to "raising public awareness" about the need for improving education, CABL executive director Winston Day said Monday.

"Education for a New Louisiana has achieved a great deal since we organized it earlier this year," said Baton Rouge banker Charles W. McCoy, chairman of the group. However, those of us involved in ENL believe much more can be accomplished by joining forces with CABL."

McCoy's group raised money to run newspaper and radio and television ads to drum up support for education reforms, particularly for an appointed superintendent, which will take effect when the current elected superintendent's term expires.

The united group will "fight for education improvements in Louisiana and protect the gains made during last summer's session of the Legislature, particularly obtaining and protecting the $6 Trust Fund for Education," the leaders of the two groups said in a press release. Lawmakers, anticipating hundreds of millions of dollars in revenues from the proposed settlement of an oil revenue dispute with the federal government, set up a trust fund that would allot most of the money to education programs.

Gov. Edwin Edwards recently said he is considering rearranging how the money will be spent. Congress recently delayed action on the settlement, and Day said he does not expect Gov. Edwards to propose an $6 billion in the upcoming special session of the Legislature.

But "we're going to be prepared to try to keep the money for education if legislation is filed that would alter the fund," Day said.

Day said CABL also will continue to obtain money to enact several education programs that were passed, but not funded, by the Legislature, including a training academy for school administrators and an apprenticeship program for teachers.

The group also will work on proposals for teacher pay raises tied in some way to teacher performance. Lawyers, the governor and special interest groups have various proposals, although none of them have been enacted.

CABL also is studying whether the state needs a single board to govern higher education, rather than the current boards, and whether state trade schools should be governed by a separate board. Trade schools now are managed by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, which also sets policies for public schools.