BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — State and local governments in Louisiana spent less per person on education last fiscal year than the average for 12 other southern states, said the director of a non-profit group that has issued a study this week on per capita spending.

But Louisiana's state and local governments spent more money per capita last fiscal year than any other Southern state, and more than the national average, according to figures released by The Public Affairs Research Council in Baton Rouge.

Council director Earl Ryan said the analysis will help legislators set priorities before a special budget session tentatively set for January.

"Louisiana has made everything a top priority and has been unable to focus on real priorities," Ryan said. "Government in Louisiana never learned to say no. But our revenue is unlikely to continue to carry this level of spending."

The council said state and local governments in Louisiana spent 30 percent of their money on local schools and higher education in fiscal 1983-84. Twelve other Southern states spent an average of 35.9 percent on education, it said.

Louisiana's overall per capita spending figure of $2,239, which included expenditures in 10 categories, including education, ranked it 19th among the 50 states. The Southern states' average was $1,718; the national average, $2,131.

As a proportion of total state and local spending, Louisiana spent significantly more for both transportation and interest on general debt. "And that is something the state has to deal with," Ryan said.

"On the average, Louisiana spends $1 million a day to repay debts. We have debt-financed at a much larger rate than other states."

Louisiana spent $176 per person last fiscal year, more than it spends on public safety, to retire bond issues.

No Southern state spends more to repay debts, the study said. Mississippi spent the least, $62 a person. Kentucky was in the No. 2 spot behind Louisiana with $141.

The study also showed Louisiana continued to lead most other states in its ratio of state and public employees to population.

But though government hires proportionately more people in Louisiana, it pays them less, even less than most other Southern states.

Average monthly earnings of a state or local government worker in Louisiana in 1984 were $1,456, or 18 percent lower than the national average. Louisiana's rank among the Southern states in average earnings was eighth for all state and local employees and ninth for non-education state and local employees.

The state placed 44th nationally in the amount it pays both non-education and all government employees. It ranks sixth in the South and 37th in the nation in the amount it pays those in education.

"There is a tradeoff between earnings and employment levels," the council study said. "With some exceptions, states with relatively low salaries and wages tend to have higher employment and vice versa. Louisiana fits this pattern.

"In 1984, the state's per capita state and local government employment was 114 percent of the national average, while the average monthly earnings of employees were only 82 percent of the national average."

The council, a 50-year-old non-profit research agency in Baton Rouge, based its analysis on new figures from the U.S. Census Bureau, Ryan said. The data do not include $687 million in state tax increases or across-the-board cuts in all state agencies.