Edwards asks business input on education

By MARSHA SHULER
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Gov. Edwin Edwards called on top state business leaders Tuesday to help develop solutions to the state’s chronic education problems.

“We want your help. We want to know from you what we can do in the educational system that will make a better work person for you,” Edwards told some 70 executives gathered for a special education summit for business leaders.

“What are you experiencing in the workplace when you are interviewing people who have come out of our colleges and high schools?” Edwards asked.

“What are the problems? Where has education failed? What did we do wrong in bringing this person to you unprepared to handle your business?”

Edwards asked the business leaders to come up with a series of recommendations and work in a government-business partnership to make the state’s educational system turn out a better product.

Meanwhile, Edwards said his administration has not yet decided what education recommendations will be backed from a much-touted report prepared by a special committee that worked in the weeks before he took office.

CONTINUED FROM 4C

“We are not ready to come forward with a list of recommendations,” Edwards said in an impromptu news conference following his brief address.

He said he has not finished going through the report. But he said “at the proper time” the recommendations will be written in a form for everybody to see so there will be no misunderstanding about what direction we are going in.”

In his speech, he indicated there must be emphasis on early childhood development, continuing education and education tailored to job necessity.

Edwards said the input of business leaders is important because they see first-hand every day the end result of the state’s educational system.

“Fusing education with business and government. . . that’s why I’m here,” Edwards said. “If we, together, can’t come up with the right kind of program to make it work, then there are no people in Louisiana that can do it. We can’t go to the uneducated or the unproductive. . . heavens, we’re the people who are supposed to have succeeded.”

Edwards also told the business leaders to take heart, that Louisiana is not alone in its problems.

He said Louisiana has not been singled out by some power who “condemned us to some kind of special hell.”

Edwards said that in other states teen-age girls have babies, prisoners return to prison, graduation rates are low and there are too many children in classrooms.

And he warned that the problems won’t be solved overnight.

“We have got to recognize and come to grips with reality. Nothing is going to be visibly achieved in one or two days or even in one year. This is a long process,” Edwards said. “It’s not going to happen even when I’m governor, whether that be four or eight years.”

C.W. “Chuck” McCoy, retired chairman of Premier Bancorp, served as chairman of the summit meeting.