BEFORE COMMITTEE

Edwards Pushes Education Package

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — Gov. Edwin Edwards is trying to push his $23 million education package, which is having problems in the House.

He boosted the package Thursday at a hearing of the House Education Committee and admitted that two of the some dozen bills will be rejected.

One would make the elected superintendent of education an official appointed by the governor and the other would require parents to send their children to kindergarten.

"I don't think there are the votes but sooner or later it's going to happen," Edwards said of the appointive superintendent bill.

"Forget Edwin Edwards. I would just as soon that the next governor appoint the superintendent," he said.

"I do not believe two systems where you have an elected superintendent and an elected board is a good one. We are the only state in the nation with such a system."

Edwards predicted a major confrontation between the elected superintendent and the mostly-elected Board of Elementary and Secondary Education in the future. He said he was not singling out Superintendent Tom Clausen.

He said he realized that people like to elect their officials but if told that the dual system is hurting education because of politics between the superintendent and B.E.S.E., they would opt for his bill.

"Forget Edwin Edwards. I cannot believe that someone with the wisdom and trust of the people to get elected as governor of this state would choose anyone but the best for such an important job," he said.

"I don't think we can pass that either," he said when asked by Rep. Jesse Deen of Bossier Parish about requiring parents to send children to kindergarten.

He said the Legislature might pass a bill that offers kindergarten to all children in all school districts.

Edwards said he has high hopes for the remainder of the package which would cost $23 million, including two bills that the House so far has balked at passing.

One would set up a teacher intern program and the other would pay schools $300 for each student making at least a 3 on the advancement test.

The highest possible score is 5.

"This package is not an end to the issue," he said. "It will not solve all of the problems in Louisiana. But it's the least we can do to provide a new atmosphere in education."

He noted that his package is strongly supported by the Public Affairs Research Council and the Louisiana Association of Business and Industry. Organized labor favors most of it, he added.

Of the two bills in trouble in the House, Rep. Kathleen Blanco of Lafayette said the problem is with the money. "That's the bottom line," she said, especially at a time when teachers are demanding a pay raise.

"The money is already allocated in the budget to be presented next week," said Edwards. "The $23 million would provide only a 1 percent pay raise for teachers...We may or may not be able to do something for the teachers this year, but we can do something about this (the education package)."

Several of the bills in the package already have been cleared by the House committee and by the full House.