Future education will become more

By KATY SMITH
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Getting future taxes for education passed will become more difficult as the population gets older, according to an expert on Louisiana's educational future.

Ironically, however, that older population will still have a vested interest in public education although they have less direct contact with schools, said Gary M. Lavergne, director of the Professional Development Center.

“We have got to make public education a civic responsibility rather than a parental responsibility and we have to put our money where our mouth is,” Lavergne told parents at the “Bridges to Understanding II” educational forum Monday.

“The investment must come first,” he said. “If we don’t use it to improve our children’s curriculums and our retirement because it depends on the productivity of our children.”

Lavergne will repeat his talk titled “The Lottery and Planning for Our Children’s Future” tonight at the second night of the forum held at Lafayette High School and sponsored by the Lafayette Parish School System. The forum, which begins at 6:30 p.m., also

Parish to just build an elementary school in Maurice to replace one which burned to the ground 10 years before.

Parents attending his session represented only a quarter of the nation’s adult population, those with children in school, Lavergne said. They are also the people least likely to vote in elections on Saturdays, one of the few times they have with their families, he added.

A quality education is no longer a moral issue but an economic necessity, Lavergne said. The workforce is becoming increasingly black and Hispanic. Of those groups, 33.4 percent of the blacks and more than 20 percent of the Hispanics live below the poverty line, he added.

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“IT is an economic necessity to improve the standard of living for those two minority groups,” Lavergne said. “Public education is the only answer to all these problems and we need to see that all Americans have an access to a quality education.”

In some ways, that is becoming more difficult as the typical American “Leave it to Beaver” household is disappearing, Lavergne continued. In 1955, 60 percent of the households had one income earned by the father and mother stayed home to raise two or more children. By 1985, only 7 percent of American households fit that description, said the former teacher.

“Teachers are better off assuming that a child in their class is living with one parent, and when they get home there is no one there to tell him to do something simple like homework,” Lavergne said.

In 1954, half of the households will be headed by one parent, and, if both parents are present, they will each hold down a full-time job, he said.

Parents must also be aware that children can’t be trained for today’s technology which changing faster than they can learn it, Lavergne said.

“It is very, very important to make sure that when your child leaves school he knows how to think and learn,” Lavergne told the parents. “The best way to do it is by training their minds.”

Turn simple problems like a drip pipe into a problem solving exercise, even with young children, he said. “Don’t be afraid to give them a massive amount of information and expect him to decipher it,” the father of three said.

“Let’s stop training the hands, train the minds and then the hands come later,” he said.

The job market is also changing as heavy industry is using more robots and computers as a financial necessity, Lavergne said. “No company can afford not to get into this,” he said.

With changing technology, people who are able to learn and retrainable will be in demand. Lavergne added.