By KAREN DIDIER
Capitol news bureau

High school students would have to pass a specific test before being allowed to graduate if a bill the House Education Committee approved Wednesday becomes law.

The 11th-grade exit test is being developed by a committee of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education and is now about 90 percent complete, BESE Executive Director Jim Meza said.

HB 449, by Rep. B.F. O'Neal, R-Shreveport, would not go into effect until BESE has accepted the test for implementation. Meza said the test probably will be piloted in 1988 and implemented in 1989.

The board already has adopted as a policy the use of the test as a graduation requirement, but putting it into law gives it more weight, O'Neal said.

BESE would develop a cutoff score students would have to achieve in order to graduate. Meza said students would take the test in the spring of their junior year. If they fail, they would take remedial classes in the summer and retake the test at the start of their senior year, he said. Senior students could again take the test in the spring with the junior students if they are still having problems passing it, Meza said.

"The idea is not to eliminate students but to identify those who have not learned critical content," Meza said.

"It's not just a test, it's a program," he said, adding that competency testing already is being done at a number of other grade levels.

Students would be tested in English, math, science and social studies, said Clarence Ledoux, director of the Bureau of Research and Accountability in the State Department of Education.

The test would be a criterion reference test, meaning it will include only those items that are included in curriculums at all schools as required by the state's accountability law, Ledoux said.

O'Neal said the test would "give meaning to a diploma," and build confidence among the general public that the public school system is educating students.

Rep. Naomi Warren, D-New Orleans, tried to remove the testing requirement as a prerequisite for graduation, saying students in some schools do not have the necessary materials to ensure that they are learning the same information as students in other schools.

She said some inner city schools don't have enough textbooks and other teaching materials.

"There's no money for remediation and we haven't seen this test yet," Warren said. "... Until we make that total committment ... to have students bare all of the burden of that is unconscionable."

The bill was amended to say that all schools would get the textbooks and materials necessary to insure that students will...