Kindergarten Bill Approved In Senate

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — Kindergarten attendance for preschoolers could soon be mandatory in Louisiana under a bill approved 30-4 Tuesday by state senators.

The senators also briefly discussed the question of whether high school athletes should be required to make a C average in order to be eligible to play on athletic teams. But they didn’t make a decision.

The House already has approved the kindergarten measure. But the House version simply required every school in the state that teaches first grade to offer kindergarten classes as well. For students, the classes remained an option instead of a requirement.

The Senate Education Committee added amendments making half-day-long classes of public or private kindergarten mandatory for any child who will enter first grade in a Louisiana public school.

Sen. Cecil Picard of Maurice, who has been handling Edwards’ education bills in the Senate, fared less well with some other measures.

One bill was designed to simply make sure parents or guardians see a list of the classes their youngsters in high school are taking. But that measure had been quietly amended in a Senate committee by Sen. Foster Campbell of Elm Grove, who tacked on a provision requiring high school students to make a C average in order to participate in athletics.

The amendment, which would phase in the grade plan by slightly raising grade average requirements over five years, didn’t sit well with Sen. Don Kelly of Natchitoches, who said he has been contacted by opponents of the bill.

The Senate already had approved another Campbell bill raising grade requirements, but that bill has run into trouble in a House committee. It is being hotly opposed by the Louisiana High School Athletic Association.

Picard agreed to delay action on the amended bill until Wednesday. Edwards has endorsed Campbell’s plan.

Picard also had problems with a measure increasing the number of college hours a teacher must take to be eligible for paid sabbatical leave.

He wanted to raise the requirements from six hours to nine hours for those taking graduate courses and from 10 hours to 12 hours for those taking undergraduate courses. But Sen. Dennis Bagnères of New Orleans amended the bill to keep current requirements as they are. Picard then decided against acting on the measure.

Picard also convinced the Senate to reject House amendments tacked on to another major piece of Edwards education legislation. One bill would create a commission to study a proposed merit pay plan for teachers. Picard wants two members of the commission to come from the Louisiana Parent Teacher Association. The House had said the superintendent of education could choose two members from among those recommended by the PTA.

Differences between the House and Senate versions of the so-called “career ladder commission” bill must be ironed out in a conference committee consisting of three members from each chamber. Then each chamber must vote on whatever compromise is reached.