Panel backs $17 million in education plans

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A panel of the Board of Regents on Wednesday endorsed $17 million worth of higher education improvement programs to be financed from a special fund.

The budget for the so-called 8g program for the next school year closely tracks previous spending plans that allotted funds in four areas — research, enhancement of instructional programs, recruiting good graduate students and setting up endowed chairs for leading scholars.

The board’s executive committee followed the recommendations of outside consultants in awarding the bulk of the money from the program known officially as the Louisiana Education Quality Support Fund.

Some $6 million was set aside for enhancement, including 17 engineering projects totaling $2.3 million. Kerry Davidson, the board’s academics expert, said engineering attracted the most applications.

Grants also went to improve college programs in biology, health fields, agriculture and environmental sciences. The consultants examined 148 applications that sought $33 million in grants.

Of the 49 projects funded, the main Baton Rouge campus of LSU got 15; the LSU Agricultural Center in Baton Rouge received 10; Southern University in Baton Rouge received 6 and the University of Southwestern Louisiana in Lafayette, 5. The rest went to other public and private colleges in Louisiana.

The panel also approved $1.7 million for 34 new research projects.

The Baton Rouge campus of LSU received 13 research and development grants; Southern University, 1; and USL, 3.

Board member Gus Mijalis of Shreveport questioned why LSU got so many grants.

Davidson said the applications were ranked by consultants. He said the size of a university, or a school within a university, would be a factor in determining how many grants it could handle.

The committee also approved 21 projects for attracting superior graduate students to continue their studies at Louisiana universities.

The committee’s recommendations will be considered by the full board Thursday.