The House Appropriations Committee voted Tuesday to eliminate $10.7 million in remedial instruction funding from the state budget in place as an earlier decision to cut back state salary support for supervisors and administrators in the public schools.

The state now pays about $13 million a year for summer employment of principals and assistant principals, instructional supervisors, visiting teachers and other administrators.

The committee had proposed that the local systems pay the costs rather than the state but reversed its mind and voted to make other cuts instead.

As it wrestled with finding ways to draft a balanced budget, the committee heard from state Superintendent of Education Tom Clausen, who told the panel his department has "several hundred" too many employees that he could cut from the payroll if he were freed from Civil Service rules.

Since taking office in 1984, Clausen repeatedly has said he could cut the department employment by hundreds but has yet to identify what jobs he would.

Clausen claimed that former Superintendent Kelly Nix hired employees at high salaries who were just out of college and had little or no experience. When those employees were put under civil service, their salaries were frozen at the high levels, Clausen said.

Under civil service rules, so-called "red circle" employees with greater seniority would bump others more deserving of the jobs, Clausen said.

"All I have to do is have permission to do it and I'll have them to you by next month," Clausen said of those put on the payroll by Nix.

The committee was considering ways to trim education spending without having to touch the Minimum Foundation - the aid program that provides for basic education in the state's 66 school districts, including teacher salaries.

The Task Force on School Finance, a 40-member panel appointed by Clausen, recommended that state aid to private schools be cut first, followed by elimination of the remedial testing and compensatory education program.

The second recommendation brought an outcry from Rep. Joe DelPit, D-Baton Rouge, who accused the task force of being a "cowardly bunch" ready to "chop the heads off poor students.

Committee members later said that the state would continue to give $10 million in federal funding for remedial education programs.

But at the end of the day's hearings on education, the committee voted to cut $4.7 million from the compensatory (remedial testing and learning) program; $500,000 from special education teacher funding; $200,000 to provide the $400,000 budget in the department's Bureau of Reading; $900,000 of the $1.9 million budget in the Bureau of Accountability; $11 million by eliminating highway street crews; $500,000 in the Office of Traffic and Planning in the Department of Transportation and Development.

School superintendents rallied in support of keeping the Minimum Foundation Program at 100 percent. Any less would be "sending a message that we expect something less" from the school systems, said Raymond Arveson, superintendent of schools in East Baton Rouge Parish.

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