CLAUSEN SAYS
'Tougher Standards May Not Work'

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Tougher graduation standards can't be expected to work very well without an upgrading of elementary classrooms, the state's next education superintendent told a Lafayette crowd of more than 850 yesterday.

Superintendent-elect Tom Clausen was in town for the first general session of the 47th annual Louisiana School Boards Association convention.

He talked of mandating kindergarten enrollment, lowering pupil teacher ratios in grades one through three, and enforcing more classroom discipline, while Gov. Dave Treen urged the LSBA to see that the Professional Improvement Program (PIPS) is continued and that state education relies less on federal funding.

Also speaking to the school boards group was Senate president Sammy Nunez.

ANOTHER MEETING, PERHAPS

"I applaud BESE on its stand," Clausen told the convention. "But I'm not sure it can work. I think they went too fast."

Treen said more state reliance is needed.

"It would be folly; it would be against the long-range thrust of public education, to rely more on the federal government," he said. He claimed federal appropriations come too slowly and "there's no such thing as financial support without control."

But even state funding will not come easy, Nunez said later.

Louisiana has a "very severe, very serious cash flow problem," resulting most from declining oil and gas revenues, he said.

Nunez spoke of still conflicting statements on whether the state has a deficit and if so, how big it is. Still, he said, "The Legislature has made a strong commitment to education... Even in the face of problems, we will reaffirm our commitment to retain programs."

The state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education voted last week to require stricter curricula of Louisiana public high school students who want diplomas.

The academic rewrite is expected to take effect with those students entering the 9th grade in September.

Clausen said he would prefer a plan in which tougher standards are phased in gradually and time is given to "monitor each parish."

"Maybe between now and April (when BESE takes a final vote on the matter) we can get together," he added, drawing applause from the huge crowd.

"I have no problem with testing, or with teacher evaluation," he said. "I was opposed to the cut-off rate for the NTE (National Teachers' Examination). I was just against the way it was implemented, and the cut-off rate for it."

"I can't see why a state with the lowest literacy rate has the highest cut-off rate on the NTE."

Possible Solutions

Clausen talked of needs for "more directed communication and coordination" between educators, school board members, other public officials and parents.

"We're having to work together in a political battlefield where the only casualties are children," he said, amidst rousing applause. "We have some incompetent teachers and we can get them out."

Clausen spoke specifically of proposals for a principal's academy to inform school principals about their powers and duties as far as personnel and school discipline are concerned.

His point on cooperation had also been made by Treen.

"While all people recognize the value of good quality education, a lot of people don't take the trouble to become knowledgeable about the problems of education," the governor said.

He admitted the PIPS program started