

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Minutes of Meeting
2005 Regular Session
May 4, 2005

I. CALL TO ORDER

Representative Carl Crane, chairman of the House Committee on Education, called the meeting to order at 9:12 a.m. in Committee Room 1, in the State Capitol in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The secretary called the roll.

II. ROLL CALL

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Representative Carl Crane, Chairman
Representative Avon Honey, Vice Chairman
Representative Ernie Alexander
Representative Austin Badon
Representative Regina Barrow
Representative A.G. Crowe
Representative Hollis Downs
Representative Jim Fannin
Representative Hunter Greene
Representative Lelon Kenney
Representative Henry "Tank" Powell
Representative Mike Powell
Representative Harold Ritchie
Representative Jane Smith
Representative Don Trahan
Representative Tommy Wright

MEMBERS ABSENT:

NONE

III. STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:

Paul Jones, Research Analyst
Nancy Yelverton Jolly, Research Analyst
Jackie Snowden, Secretary
Brandy Snowden, Clerk
Beverly Vincent, Sergeant at Arms

During opening remarks, Representative Crane welcomed members back to the Capitol and recognized newly elected House members who had been appointed to the committee. The new members were Representative Regina Barrow and Representative Hunter Greene, both representing districts in Baton Rouge.

IV. DISCUSSION

House Bill No. 434 by Representative Crane

House Bill No. 434 creates the High School Redesign Commission and provides for the duties, responsibilities, and membership of the commission.

Representative Crane introduced Governor Kathleen Blanco to make remarks and explain to committee members that House Bill No. 434 places into statute provisions for the creation of the High School Redesign Commission. He noted that the bill charges the commission with specific objectives that are related to better preparing the state's high school students to do well in college and the job market after graduation from high school.

Governor Blanco informed members about a recent meeting of the National Governor's Association where high school redesign issues and concerns were discussed. She noted that at the conference, Mr. Dan Juneau, president of the Louisiana Association of Business and Industry (LABI), and Ms. Linda Johnson, member of the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) both participated in national discussions about what high schools should be doing in order to address the future needs of the workplace. The governor noted comments made by keynote speaker Bill Gates about the poor state of high schools throughout the country.

The governor noted that the legislation will codify and intensify current efforts attempting to strengthen the kind of education students are receiving in high schools. She explained that House Bill No. 434 will create the High School Redesign Commission in state law to raise awareness of current problems with students who are not being properly prepared and graduating with no basic skills. She said the redesign effort will develop statewide policies that encourage the establishment of courses that will focus on learning and college preparatory subjects. The governor pointed out how students often waste their senior year by taking only the bare minimum of courses and leave school early. She said the redesign initiative will seek to discourage this practice (the wasted senior year) and, in turn, reduce the dropout rate by encouraging students to remain in school and increase learning opportunities. She described to committee members examples of students she had met who are struggling because they dropped out of high school. She said every child who leaves school unprepared is sentenced

to a life of poverty. Governor Blanco said she saw high school redesign as an opportunity to develop strong, rigorous, and flexible high school systems offering a variety of productive paths to help students embrace the demands encountered after graduation.

Also speaking in support of House Bill No. 434 was State Superintendent Cecil Picard, representing BESE, 1201 North 3rd St., Baton Rouge, LA 70804, (225) 342-3602. Superintendent Picard stated that he supported the legislation, noting that it was time to think differently about high schools in the state. He said public schools are currently at a crossroads and putting the redesign concept into the statutes codifies it, allowing officials to do a better job of delivering programs to students. He noted that because many higher education institutions are raising standards, the well-being of students and courses being offered at the high school level need to be reassessed. Superintendent Picard pointed out that high school redesign was another area where Louisiana was making national strides and he praised the efforts of those who were putting the concept together.

Ms. Linda Johnson, BESE member representing the 8th congressional district, told committee members that one year ago, BESE decided that a high school redesign committee should be established. The committee, she explained, led by Ms. Glenny Lee Buquet, BESE president, reviewed several concepts that were being implemented in other states including early college entrance, opportunities to take college courses and earn credit while in high school, and dual enrollment programs. Ms. Johnson reasoned that placing the High School Redesign Commission into law will increase awareness of the concept, keep students in school, provide them with an excellent education, and provide a seamless movement into the world of work.

Louisiana Association of Business and Industry president Dan Juneau, (no address given), (225) 928-5316, presented statistics to committee members describing the low rankings of American high school graduates (16th out of 20) when compared to other industrialized nations. He pointed out that of 40 nations surveyed in an international education assessment, American 15-year-old students ranked 22nd in science; 27th in math; and 29th in problem solving skills. He added that nationwide only 71% of ninth graders graduate on time and only 50% of black and Latino students graduate at all. Mr. Juneau noted further that one third of all college freshmen are immediately placed into remedial courses; one out of four students enrolled in a four-year college and half who are enrolled in community colleges fail to return after their first year; and only 18% of high school freshmen will make it through high school, enter college, and earn a two-year or four-year degree on time. He stated that this is the scenario that exists while at least 60% of the jobs in today's labor market require some postsecondary education. Mr. Juneau reasoned that a better job of educating the future workforce must be done to meet the challenges of the modern world of work. He noted as well that one of the recommendations from the education summit he attended with Governor Blanco was strong support for increased rigor in

high school curricula. He stated that he agreed with the recommendation as it is necessary if Louisiana's high schools graduates are to find meaningful employment in tomorrow's workforce. He urged that a more challenging curriculum be developed; that teachers be trained to teach at a higher level; and that more be done to raise the level of student competence and skills attainment if the achievement gap is to be closed with other nations. He commended House Bill No. 434 as a good first step in the redesign process for high schools.

Dr. Joseph Savoie commended the governor for her leadership in proposing the redesign initiative. He noted that it is consistent with the efforts she has been involved in with adult literacy and workforce competitiveness. Dr. Savoie also thanked BESE member Linda Johnson for her leadership and commended BESE for supporting the initiative. He committed the full support of Louisiana's colleges and universities to the efforts. Dr. Savoie stated that all issues in the area must be addressed including improving the high school completion rate and reaching out to adults with no high school credentials to bring them up to a level where they can be more productive. Dr. Savoie singled out alignment of high school students, dual enrollment, and strong partnerships between state colleges and universities and high schools as ways to improve the future success of more Louisiana citizens. He recommended that House Bill No. 434 be reported favorably.

Representative Crane asked committee members to witness the cooperation of all facets of education in the state in supporting the bill and working together. He noted the work of K-12, higher education, and economic development.

Representative Crane opened the floor for questions from committee members.

Representative Wright commended Superintendent Picard for his remarks about the need to look at high schools differently and studying the possibility of expanding to year-round school years. He stated that these ideas were refreshing and suggested that the possibility of offering alternative high school diplomas also be studied.

Representative Crowe expressed concern about the Tuition Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS) and making sure that all students have the opportunity to be taught by qualified teachers. Representative Crane pointed out that each student in the state has an opportunity to take all of the core course requirements for TOPS through a variety of means (distance learning, the virtual classrooms, etc.). Dr. Savoie added that significant progress has been made in decreasing the number of uncertified teachers in classrooms and efforts will continue. He noted that aggressive efforts were underway, and the number has been cut by 40%. Dr. Savoie indicated, however, that there was much more work to be done.

Representative Crane interjected that the Blue Ribbon Commission on Teacher Quality had been working hard to confront the problem and improve teacher quality.

Representative Honey commended all parties for their efforts to bring the high school redesign concept forward. He also expressed concern about the academic struggles experienced by boys. Representative Honey asked that attention be devoted to the issue as the redesign commission is developed.

Representative Jane Smith also commended the group for remaining on track and continuing efforts to pursue high school redesign, even when there is a change in administration. She, too, asked for a thorough study on diploma options, saying she was pleased that the issue will be a part of redesign discussions.

Dr. Savoie commented that the primary reason that major education reforms do not reach their promised goals is because the reform only has a life span of four or eight years; following whoever might be the highest elected official at the time. He stated that education was not a four- or eight-year reform process but was generational, starting with pre-K. He observed the positive actions and responses of Governor Blanco and her efforts to encourage education officials to elevate reform initiatives.

Representative Fannin also commended those who have begun working to promote the issue and expressed a desire to see the work continue expeditiously. He expressed a desire to have the voices of small business and large business owners heard in the process, given the fact that many of them will hire the individual who is a product of the educational system. Representative Fannin expressed concern that more members of the business community were not members of the commission. He asked that the composition of the commission include more representatives from the business community.

Dr. Savoie and Ms. Johnson noted that the composition of several task forces included persons from the business community and assured committee members that provisions have been made for their direct input.

Representative Downs noted problems in his area with identifying enough semi-skilled and low-skilled employees for jobs that are currently available. He stated that several companies want to hire more workers and expand but cannot find the workers. Representative Downs cautioned that the companies might have to leave the state because of the problem.

Representative Trahan asked that the value of the co-curricula – band, football, Future Business Leaders of America, Future Farmers of America, etc. – not be forgotten; especially for at-risk students.

Representative Crane announced that there was an amendment at the desk and asked Ms. Nancy Jolly, committee legislative analyst, to present it. The amendment relative to proposed law commission membership listing that includes four representatives from business, civic, or community organizations to be appointed by the governor, specifies that such representatives shall be from business, civic, labor, or community organizations. Representative Crane moved that the amendment be adopted. There was no objection, and the amendment was adopted by a vote of 15 yeas and 0 nays. Representatives Ernie Alexander, Badon, Barrow, Crane, Crowe, Downs, Fannin, Greene, Kenney, Mike Powell, Tank Powell, Ritchie, Jane Smith, Trahan, and Wright voted yea.

Other supporters of the legislation who testified included Ms. Assata Olugbala, citizen, 5043 Press Dr., New Orleans, LA 70126, (504)282-4496 and Ms. Heidi Daniels, a member of the Orleans Parish School Board, 3510 General De Gaulle, New Orleans, LA 70114, (504)304-5735. Ms. Olugbala observed that the constant concentration on readiness for the job market is a small portion of what children should be taught. She stated that a child who is fully educated should possess the complete capacity for critical and analytical thinking with the ability to meet and cope with the challenges of life, not just a discussion on how they will obtain employment. Ms. Daniels reported to members that Orleans Parish was at the top in the area of students who take advanced placement courses and expedite entering and finishing college. She reported as well the large number of students who were dual enrolled, who leave high school ready to engage in the world of work.

Also supporting House Bill No. 434 was Mr. Steve Monaghan, representing the Louisiana Federation of Teachers, 9623 Brookline Ave., Baton Rouge, LA 70809, (225) 923-1037 or (800) 634-5089, and Mr. Cliff Friedman, representing the Louisiana School Boards Association, 7912 Summa Ave., Baton Rouge, LA 70809, (225) 769-6191.

Present to provide information if requested were Ms. Donna Nola-Gainey and Ms. Debi Faucette, representing BESE, 1201 N. 3rd St., Baton Rouge, LA 70804, (225) 342-3602.

Representative Tank Powell moved that House Bill No. 434 be reported with amendments. There was no objection, and House Bill No. 434 was reported with amendments by a vote of 16 yeas and 0 nays. Representatives Ernie Alexander, Badon, Barrow, Crane, Crowe, Downs, Fannin, Greene, Honey, Kenney, Mike Powell, Tank Powell, Ritchie, Jane Smith, Trahan, and Wright voted yea.

House Bill No. 775 by Representative Barrow

House Bill No. 775 provides for an exemption from tuition charges imposed by Louisiana public colleges and universities for certain students serving in the Louisiana National Guard pursuant to reenlistment agreements.

Representative Barrow, in explaining her first legislative instrument, stated that the bill will allow soldiers who reenlist in the Louisiana National Guard to be exempt from tuition fees imposed by state public colleges and universities. She explained to committee members that the bill will serve as an incentive and encouragement to previously trained soldiers to reenlist in the guard. Representative Barrow reported that the Board of Regents, the National Guard officers, and Governor Blanco support the legislation.

Speaking in support of the legislation, Governor Blanco stated that with the current pressures of activation and extended deployments, the guard needs help in retaining soldiers. She noted that current law provides for tuition waivers for guard members when they first enlist. House Bill No. 775 would waive tuition at state public colleges or universities for five separate years or until the guard member earns an associate degree or higher. The governor said the bill extends the free tuition waiver to guard members who agree to reenlist in the guard for six years. She said the bill will help to keep in the guard soldiers with training and experience, and keep some of the best, brightest, and dedicated in Louisiana pursuing an education while they serve. The governor introduced Louisiana secretary of veterans' affairs, General Hunt Downer, to make additional remarks.

General Downer opened his testimony by noting the federal and state mission of the Louisiana National Guard. He said the guard's state mission placed it under the direct command, control, and chain of command of the governor as the commander-in-chief. General Downer explained that the guard's dual mission makes it responsible for emergency preparedness and homeland security. He said these broad duties provide an additional incentive to keep and retain qualified and trained citizen soldiers who are members of the guard. General Downer said officials are attempting to keep a 75% retention rate in light of a decrease in the number of persons who are enlisted members of the service components – active, regular, national guard, and reserves. He noted that House Bill No. 775 provides for the additional educational benefit as long as they are members in good standing.

Representative Crane asked committee analyst Ms. Nancy Jolly to present an amendment. The amendment adds proposed law provision limiting eligibility for the tuition waiver to students serving in the guard pursuant to a six-year re-enlistment agreement rather than pursuant to a reenlistment agreement. Representative Crane explained that the amendment specifies that the

reenlistment agreement would be six years to ensure that it be consistent with the initial enlistment time frame. Representative Crane offered the amendment and moved that it be adopted. There was no objection, and the amendment was adopted by a vote of 16 yeas and 0 nays. Representatives Ernie Alexander, Badon, Barrow, Crane, Crowe, Downs, Fannin, Greene, Honey, Kenney, Mike Powell, Tank Powell, Ritchie, Jane Smith, Trahan, and Wright voted yea.

Representative Badon asked about the burden the provisions of the bill would place on state colleges and universities. General Downer responded that during the early 1990s, 4,000 Louisiana national guardsmen participated in the tuition exemption program, while only 1,700 participate currently. He stated that officials optimistically hoped that at least 200 would take advantage of the bill.

Supporting the bill were Mr. Ferdinand Troullier, representing the Louisiana Federation of Teachers, 7417 Jefferson Highway, Baton Rouge, LA 70806, (225) 923-1037; and Mr. Byron Stewart and Mr. Cliff Friedman, representing the Louisiana School Boards Association, 7912 Summa Ave., Baton Rouge, LA 70809, (225) 769-3191.

Representative Jane Smith moved that House Bill No. 775 be reported with amendments. There was no objection, and House Bill No. 775 was reported with amendments by a vote of 16 yeas and 0 nays. Representatives Ernie Alexander, Badon, Barrow, Crane, Crowe, Downs, Fannin, Greene, Honey, Kenney, Mike Powell, Tank Powell, Ritchie, Jane Smith, Trahan, and Wright voted yea.

Representative Crane announced at this point that the committee would stand in recess until a majority of committee members returned from the House floor where the House of Representatives will pose for the official group portrait.

Representative Crane, upon the return of the committee from the House floor, reconvened the meeting. The secretary called the roll. Twelve members answered the roll, constituting a quorum.

House Bill No. 677 by Representative Crane

House Bill No. 677 provides for identifying public school systems financially in crisis or at risk of being in financial crisis, for the appointment of a fiscal administrator for systems in crisis, and for the powers, duties, and responsibilities of the administrator.

Representative Crane announced that he had amendments to offer in order to place the bill in the posture in which he wanted it discussed. The amendments were distributed to each member. Representative Crane explained that the amendments add the state treasurer to the list of persons who will be involved in the notification process when a district is in financial crisis. He noted that the list currently names the attorney general, legislative auditor, the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE), the local school superintendent, and board president. Representative Crane moved that the amendments be adopted. There was no objection, and the amendments were adopted by a vote of 13 yeas and 0 nays. Representatives Ernie Alexander, Badon, Barrow, Crane, Crowe, Downs, Fannin, Kenney, Mike Powell, Tank Powell, Ritchie, Trahan, and Wright voted yea.

Representative Crane explained that House Bill No. 677 directs BESE to develop a set of specific guidelines and rules that the state superintendent of education can use to determine whether or not a school district is in financial crisis or is at risk of becoming a district in financial crisis. He said BESE will be charged with defining what constitutes a district in financial crisis and what constitutes a district that is at risk of becoming a district in financial crisis. Representative Crane added that if a district is identified as a district at risk of becoming one in financial crisis, the state superintendent of education will advise that district, annually in writing, whether or not the district is in danger of becoming a district in financial crisis. Further, he explained that if the district is determined to be in financial crisis, then the state superintendent of education will notify, in writing, the local school board president, superintendent, attorney general's office, legislative auditor, and the state treasurer, as well as the chairman of the Bond Commission, if the school district is carrying a bonded debt. He continued to explain that after the district has been notified that they are in financial crisis, the legislative auditor along with the state superintendent of education, shall enter into negotiations with the school board and the local school superintendent to address the issues or factors that account for that district being in financial crisis. He noted that if the parties agree that the financial crisis cannot be resolved by the local school district, the legislative auditor, state superintendent of education, and treasurer can ask the attorney general to file a rule calling for the appointment of a financial administrator. He further explained that if the attorney general concurs in the evidence presented by the auditor and state superintendent that there is a need for a financial administrator, the attorney general can enter court proceedings and request the appointment of a financial administrator. He said the court will appoint a financial administrator if it concurs in the findings.

Representative Crane stated that the financial administrator will be charged with investigating the financial crisis confronting the particular district in crisis. The financial administrator will be required to submit a report to the local school board, BESE, the attorney general, and treasurer explaining why the problems exist and then making recommendations to solve them.

If the crisis is resolved, the financial administrator can be terminated; an action that would be carried out at the request of the financial administrator if, in his/her judgment, the financial crisis has been resolved.

State Superintendent of Education Cecil Picard, representing BESE, 1201 N. 3rd St., Baton Rouge, LA 70804, (225) 342-3602, explained that a few months ago the legislative auditor, Mr. Steve Theriot, informed him about three systems with financial problems, indicating that there was a way to handle them under statute relative to bonded indebtedness because there was no way to handle the problems for systems without bonded indebtedness. He informed the committee that Bogalusa, Pointe Coupee, and Franklin were the systems with serious problems. Superintendent Picard emphasized that House Bill No. 677 had nothing to do with New Orleans because it is already taken care of, since it has bonded indebtedness. He said this bill will take care of systems that do not have bonded indebtedness. He pointed out that the provisions of the bill afford an opportunity for the department to work with the systems that do not have bonded indebtedness. He informed committee members that the department was currently working with several school systems in an attempt to help them avoid bankruptcy. Superintendent Picard referred committee members to a document that listed all the school systems and their ratings. He noted that some of the systems will not survive if action is not taken to alleviate the strains brought about by rising health insurance costs and retirement. He stated that it was extremely critical that movement is made to ensure that these school systems remain stable and consistent.

Mr. Theriot explained that the reason for bringing the bill did start with work being done to study the financial problems of the Orleans Parish school system. He pointed out that during this work, the financial problems of the abovementioned school districts and others in the state came to light. Mr. Theriot stated that the financial difficulties stemmed from a lack of communication between the local superintendent and school boards, especially in smaller districts that did not have bonded indebtedness. He pointed out that these districts had no idea that they were exposing their systems to grave problems in the areas of insurance for employees and retirement investments. Mr. Theriot informed committee members that two members of the Audit Advisory Committee had filed similar legislation to House Bill No. 677, but theirs covered additional local agencies.

Representative Mike Powell asked Superintendent Picard to identify the 15 top school districts that are having problems.

Superintendent Picard asked Ms. Marilyn Langley to respond to Representative Powell's request. Ms. Langley, representing BESE, P.O. Box 94064, Baton Rouge, LA 70804, (225) 342-3617, had distributed to members a document that explained the risk analysis process and in a document entitled, "Financial Risk Analysis-Description of Risk Factors". The document

included the ranking of school systems and their positions of risk. She informed committee members that the department has been using a risk analysis procedure for a number of years to help identify districts that needed to be visited for purposes of federal monitoring. She indicated that the procedure was expanded to include a set of 19 indicators.

Superintendent Picard pointed out that the top 20 school districts listed were on a "watch list." He added that if a system is in denial that they are in a fiscal crisis, House Bill No. 677 will serve as a vehicle placed in statute to assist in revealing the problems and providing a means to resolve them. Superintendent Picard described most systems as having the problems because of a lack of resources, effective management, or politics.

Committee members described concerns that ranged from witnessing local systems that experience financial problems because of the minimum formula program (MFP) formula to those that cannot pass local school taxes.

Speaking in support of the legislation were Mr. Ferdinand Troullier, representing the Louisiana Federation of Teachers, 9623 Brookline Ave., Baton Rouge, LA 70809, (225) 923-1037/(800) 634-5089; Mr. Wayne Free, representing the Louisiana Association of Educators (LAE), P.O. Box 479, Baton Rouge, LA 70821, (225) 343-9243.

Mr. Troullier commented that the legislation was good. He cautioned that it should be recognized as an extreme measure, and there must be an extreme circumstance before this type of legislation can be put into place. He said the state should be in place to render assistance.

Mr. Free, director of instructional advocacy at the LAE, testified that the bill presents good policy but implementing the policy presents a difficult process. He stated that it was critical that while the process is handled, the department and BESE need to meet early and often with the affected groups. He encouraged committee members to amend or make clear that the process needs the input of all participants.

Also supporting the bill was Mr. Jim Hrdlicka, representing BESE, 1201 N. 3rd St., Baton Rouge, LA 70804, (225) 342-3602; Mr. Barry Erwin, representing the Council for A Better Louisiana (CABL), P.O. Box 4308, Baton Rouge, LA 70821, (225) 344-2225; and Mr. Cliff Friedman, representing the Louisiana School Boards Association, 7912 Summa Ave., Baton Rouge, LA 70809, (225) 769-3191.

Available to provide information if requested were Mr. Daryl Purpera, representing the Legislative Auditor, (225)339-3800, and Mr. Jim Napper, representing the State Treasurer's office, 21st floor, State Capitol, Baton Rouge, LA, (225) 342-0029.

Speaking in opposition to the legislation were Ms. Heidi Daniels, Ms. Phyllis Landrieu, and Mr. Torin Sanders, all representing the Orleans Parish school system, 3510 General De Gaulle, New Orleans, LA 70114, (504) 304-5735.

Mr. Sanders stated that school systems across the country are strapped with declining enrollment, pension issues, and insurance problems. He said Orleans Parish was on the mend and has seen great strides made; the system has hired firms and has seen increased reimbursements from the state. He expressed concern that since education is a local issue, problems should be handled locally. He added that there should be a clarification of the definition of what a fiscal crisis is and it should be restrictive to avoid arbitrary meanings or capriciousness. Mr. Sanders said the local board should be given a chance to develop and implement a plan.

Ms. Landrieu noted her concern with possibly usurping the authority of the local school board; that the authority is already in place; that there seems to be an absence of academic accountability in the bill; and that it only emphasizes the fiscal side and not the academic side.

Representative Crane reiterated that nothing happens under the provisions of the bill unless a fiscal crisis is evident.

Ms. Daniels commented, as well, that the bill offered no clear definition of what a fiscal crisis is and that it could be taking away local control.

Representative Crane reiterated that all actions will be done by rule and that nothing will be done unless a clear definition of fiscal crisis is presented.

Also speaking in opposition to the bill was Ms. Assata Olugbala, 5043 Press Dr., New Orleans, LA 70120, (504) 282-4496; Ms. Karran Harper Royal, representing children in Orleans, 1360 Soldiers St., New Orleans, LA 70122, (504) 722-8174 and Rev. John H. Moore, representing Higher Heights Pan Africa Ministries, 2221 Oriole St., New Orleans, LA 70122, (504) 283-6299 or (504) 388-1255. Ms. Olugbala expressed concern with recent actions of the local board, noting a concern that citizens have been "locked out" of making comments before the board. She said the stakeholders are being left out and one person cannot solve the problems. Ms. Olugbala also expressed concern about unfunded mandates and the distribution of ancillary certificates. Ms. Royal stated that the local school system should retain its ability to make decisions. Rev. Moore said he does not concur with the rush to judgment. He said all stakeholders should be able to discuss the problems before a fiscal administrator is assigned.

In closing, Superintendent Picard reminded that the bill affects all systems across the state that are in trouble and do not have a bonded indebtedness provision in place. He said the bill is a fiscal crisis bill and that academic problems cannot be solved while a fiscal crisis is in place.

Representative Trahan moved that House Bill No. 677 be reported with amendments, to which there was objection, and the secretary called the roll. House Bill No. 677 was reported with amendments by a vote of 12 yeas and 2 nays. Representatives Ernie Alexander, Crane, Crowe, Downs, Greene, Kenney, Mike Powell, Tank Powell, Ritchie, Jane Smith, Trahan, and Wright voted yea, and Representatives Badon and Fannin voted nay.

V. OTHER BUSINESS

Pursuant to R.S. 17:3805(E)(2), to receive and consider for legislative approval certain revisions proposed by the Rapides Parish School Board to a plan previously approved by the state Department of Education and the legislature for the expenditure of monies from the Education Excellence Fund.

Representative Crane announced that an amendment to the Education Excellence Fund (EEF) for Rapides Parish needed to be approved by the committee. He asked representatives of the Department of Education to explain.

Representing the department were Ms. Susan A. Aysenne and Mr. Pete LaFleur, 1201 N. 3rd St., Baton Rouge, LA 70804, (225) 342-3602. Ms. Aysenne explained that Rapides Parish's initial application budget request included funds to cover the cost of paraprofessionals in preschool classes. She pointed out that a different person submitted a supplemental request later in the year which unknowingly included a duplication of the preschool paraprofessional request. She indicated that when the duplication was revealed, the district submitted a budget revision that redirected the duplicated funds for the paraprofessionals to kindergarten classes rather than preschool classes. Ms. Aysenne further explained that while this was an allotable expenditure under EEF guidance, the department felt it was a significant enough program change to warrant legislative approval. She said the department does recommend approval of Rapides Parish's EEF budget revision.

Representative Mike Powell moved that the revisions proposed by the Rapides Parish School Board to a plan previously approved by the state Department of Education and the legislature for the expenditure of monies from the Education Excellence Fund be approved. There was no objection, and the motion to approve the revision passed by a vote of 14 yeas and 0 nays. Representatives Ernie Alexander, Badon, Crane, Crowe, Downs, Fannin, Greene, Kenney, Mike Powell, Tank Powell, Ritchie, Jane Smith, Trahan, and Wright voted yea.

Committee members decided to take up BESE reports relative to Louisiana Quality Education Support Fund "8(g)" proposed programs and budgets and responses from BESE to 2004 legislative resolutions at a later meeting.

VI. ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no announcements.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 1:14 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Austin J. Badon, Jr., Chairman

The committee has acknowledged on _____, that these minutes were prepared in accordance with the rules of the House of Representatives.