



PAR, CABL back Board of Regents

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A recommendation to abolish the state Board of Regents, which oversees all higher education in Louisiana, has drawn criticism from two good-government organizations.

The Public Affairs Research Council and the Council for a Better Louisiana oppose a proposal to do away with the Board of Regents.

That idea came from the Post-Secondary Education Review Commission, a panel of Louisiana and out-of-state educators, that was formed to study Louisiana's higher education model.

Four management boards oversee higher education in the state: the Louisiana State University System, the Southern University System, the University of Louisiana System and the Louisiana Community and Technical System.

The UL System manages eight universities, including McNeese State University. The Community and Technical System oversees all two-year vocational-technical schools and community colleges, including Sowela Technical Community College.

The PERK Commission recommended the boards be consolidated into two boards--one with jurisdiction over all four-year institutions in the state and the other to direct all two-year colleges.

But PAR President Jim Brandt said elimination of the state Board of Regents would not result in any meaningful change.

"The... recommendation to merge boards would eliminate the only state entity dedicated to developing an overarching, coordinated approach to the delivery of higher education," he said.

He said without the Board of Regents, the two surviving boards would be pitted against one another in a struggle for funding and that the governor's office would have too much sway in the operations of the boards.

Brandt said abolishing the Board of Regents would "increase the politicization of higher education policy in the state and reverse recent progress toward better student outcomes."

The PAR president recommended that the power of the Board of Regents be strengthened so that it can implement a master plan for all campuses.

Barry Erwin, president of CABL, also questioned the PERK recommendation.

"The question arises is how effective can this new board be if it has to (oversee) 14 universities, two law schools, two agricultural centers, two medical schools, various research centers, the state's public hospital system and establish overall policies and coordination of all these institutions?" he said.

Brandt and Erwin and the organizations they head have developed sterling reputations for level-headed thinking.

Like the E.F. Hutton commercial, when they talk, state leaders and lawmakers would do well to listen.