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## Perry: Texas won't seek federal education funding

1/13/2010, 12:23 p.m. PST

JUAN A. LOZANO

The Associated Press

(AP) — HOUSTON - Texas won't compete for up to \$700 million in federal stimulus money for education because the program "smacks of a federal takeover of our public schools," Republican Gov. Rick Perry said Wednesday.

The funding is from the U.S. Department of Education's "Race to the Top" program, a \$5 billion competitive fund that will award grants to states to improve education quality and results. The program, created in the economic stimulus law, is part of Democratic President Barack Obama's efforts to overhaul the nation's schools.

Perry has been critical of the federal stimulus program and the federal bailout of the nation's financial institutions. He previously turned down \$555 million in federal stimulus money for the state's unemployment fund because it would have required Texas to expand its unemployment benefits.

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However, the state did accept billions of dollars of federal stimulus money to help balance its two-year budget in 2009.

Perry stood next to Texas Education Commissioner Robert Scott and representatives of teachers' unions and said taking the money would force the state to adopt national education and testing standards and result in Texas losing its autonomy in educating children.

The education program is pushing for a link between student test scores and teacher pay. Other reforms it is asking for include turning around the lowest-achieving schools and building data systems that measure student growth and success and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction.

Leaders in states such as Michigan and Wisconsin have been pushing hard for lawmakers to overhaul their education systems so they have a better

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chance at qualifying for the money. At least 10 states have changed laws banning the use of student test scores to judge teachers, eased charter school restrictions or backed off budget cuts to boost their chances.

Perry said Texas' education system is doing well under state and local control-standardized test scores are up, the dropout rate is down and Texas has been recognized as one of only four states that is closing the achievement gap in math. The grant program doesn't remove schools from state and local control but it gives Obama considerable leverage as he pushes education reform.

"Here in Texas, we don't have broad consensus on every issue facing our school system," Perry said. "We do agree we'd rather work those differences out in Texas with solutions that work for Texans instead of accepting a top down mandate from some distant bureaucrats."

Texas Democrats were quick to criticize Perry's decision.

State Rep. Jim Dunnam, D-Waco, said he didn't agree with all of Race to the Top's mandates, but the grants could help the state lower the achievement gap and better prepare Texas children for college.

"By throwing in the towel before the competition has even begun, Gov. Perry has officially won the race to the bottom," said Dunnam, chairman of the House Select Committee on Federal Economic Stabilization Funding.

But several teachers' unions and groups promoting fiscal responsibility supported Perry's decision, saying the state's curriculum serves students well and they have no interest in the federal government dictating teaching practices.

"The dollars being dangled have far too many strings attached and for Texans the price would be far too high," said Jeri Stone, executive director of the Texas Classroom Teachers Association.

Tuesday is the deadline to submit applications for the first round of funding with winners announced in April.

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