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## Obama Pitches Education Proposal to Governors

By PETER BAKER and SAM DILLON  
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WASHINGTON — [President Obama](#) kicked off a drive Monday to upgrade American education, unveiling a plan requiring states to adopt new reading and mathematics standards and committing his administration to “breaking down some of the barriers to reform.”

Meeting with the nation’s governors at the White House, Mr. Obama stressed the importance of education to America’s economic competitiveness in a tough global marketplace, a theme he has cited in recent days to undergird a number of his domestic priorities.

He said the depth of the competition was brought home to him during a visit to South Korea last year, when he was told of that country’s determination to educate its children to out-compete American children.

“That’s what we’re up against,” Mr. Obama said. “That’s what’s at stake — nothing less than our primacy in the world. As I said at the [State of the Union address](#), I do not accept a United States of America that’s second-place.”

The president’s proposal, part of the administration’s recommendations for a Congressional overhaul of the [No Child Left Behind](#) education program initiated by President [George W. Bush](#), would require states to adopt “college- and career-ready standards” in reading and math to qualify for federal money from a \$14 billion program that concentrates on impoverished students.

The No Child Left Behind law required states to adopt “challenging academic standards” in those subjects, but left it up to the states to decide what qualified as “challenging.” The result was that the standards set by states varied widely, with some as rigorous as those used in high-performing countries like Japan, but others setting only mediocre expectations for students.

Mr. Obama singled out Massachusetts for raising its performance so that its eighth graders now tie for best in the world in science. But overall, he said, American eighth

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traders rank 9th in the world in math and 11th in science, and under No Child Left Behind, 11 states actually lowered their standards in math between 2005 and 2007.

The president praised efforts by 48 states — all but Alaska and Texas — to develop common standards in math and reading, coordinated by the [National Governors Association](#). The collaboration was a bipartisan project at variance with the highly polarized political mood in Washington that has frustrated many of Mr. Obama's top priorities in Congress.

"We've been tasked to not only see this country through difficult times, but to keep the dream of our founding alive for the next generation," Mr. Obama told the governors. "That's not something to shy away from. It's something to live up to. And I intend to work closely with all of you — Democrats and Republicans — to do just that."

Mr. Obama used his meeting with the governors to defend his economic policies, particularly the [stimulus package](#), which has, among other things, helped many states close their own [recession](#)-widened budget gaps. He gently chided those Republican governors who have criticized the stimulus program, noting that most of them took the money and used it for projects in their states.

"I've seen the photos and I've read the press releases," Mr. Obama said. "So it must be doing something right."

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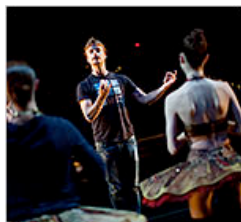
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