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Baldacci won't sponsor charter school bill

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AUGUSTA -- Maine charter school advocates will have to wait another year before they get a chance at getting the independently run public schools legalized in the Pine Tree State.

Education Commissioner Susan Gendron told lawmakers Tuesday that Gov. John Baldacci's administration won't introduce a bill to legalize charter schools this winter. Since it's too late for legislators to sponsor new bills for the upcoming four-month session, a bill from the governor was the only opportunity the advocates had for keeping the charter school debate going in the Legislature.

"I think we have other challenges that we're going to have to look at as a state for Race to the Top," Gendron said, referring to a competition among the states for \$4 billion in federal money aimed at education innovations.

The U.S. Department of Education last week released final guidelines for the \$4 billion contest. The guidelines put less emphasis on allowing charter schools than Obama administration priorities such as allowing teacher pay to be tied to students' academic performance.

"There are lots of points of discussion," Gendron told members of the Education Committee. "Charter schools are probably lowest on the list of what I think we have to solve."

Maine is one of 11 states that don't allow charter schools. Federal education officials warned throughout the spring that those states would put themselves at a disadvantage in the grant competition if they didn't allow charter schools.