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School aid, results not tied, some say

By **Monica Wolfson**

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AUSTIN — Putting more money into schools doesn't mean student performance will improve, several tax and education analysts said Wednesday.

School finance was a main topic at a policy orientation sponsored by the Texas Public Policy Foundation, a conservative think tank in Austin. The two-day seminar is intended to educate lawmakers and others on major issues facing the state.

Gov. Rick Perry may call lawmakers into a special session this spring to pass a new school-finance system in Texas.

Lawmakers are discussing a variety of proposals to fund the state's schools, including school vouchers, teacher incentive programs, and implementing a statewide business property tax while reducing residential property taxes.

Nationally, education funding increased considerably from 1970 to 2000 but student perform-

ance has remained flat, said Eric Hanushek, a senior fellow at the Hoover Institute, a domestic policy think tank based at Stanford University.

Richard Vedder, professor of economics at Ohio University, suggested paying teachers based on productivity rather than a salary scale and encouraged lawmakers to "reward good performance and punish bad performance."

Turning to taxes, most of the speakers said Texas should be cautious about raising taxes to increase school funding.

Vedder warned that raising taxes ultimately has an adverse affect on state economic growth and suggested the state consider a constitutional amendment limiting the yearly growth of government spending.

Grover Norquist, president of Americans for Tax Reform, also advocated for school vouchers and dismissed suggestions that Texas needs more taxes.

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"The only thing that makes the U.S. Postal Service move faster is UPS and FedEx nipping at their heels," Norquist said. "If you really believe given

school choice that most parents would leave (public schools), then that's an incredible indictment of public schools."

An income tax would raise enough money to provide significant property tax relief as well as increase education funding, said Dick Lavine, senior fiscal analysts for the Center for Public Policy Priorities.

"Nobody likes to pay taxes," Lavine said. "But it's worth it to me to pay taxes for certain purposes."

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