



Highlights of [GAO-08-422](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

The Native Hawaiian Education Act (NHEA) seeks to develop innovative educational programs to assist Native Hawaiians. The Department of Education (Education) administers NHEA and has provided grants for a wide range of activities. Education is authorized to establish a Native Hawaiian Education Council and seven island councils to help implement NHEA. To inform reauthorization, GAO was asked to analyze (1) what is known about NHEA's impact on Native Hawaiian education, (2) Education's efforts to oversee NHEA grants, and (3) the extent to which Education and the Native Hawaiian councils have fulfilled their roles and responsibilities. To do this, GAO reviewed federal laws and regulations and departmental documents, and interviewed Education officials, council members, grantees, and experts in Native Hawaiian education.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that, among other things, the Secretary of Education report to Congress on the activities under the act, establish additional performance measures, track grant activities, and provide more guidance and assistance to grantees and the Education Council. Education agreed with the majority of recommendations, but not fully or in part with two regarding establishing performance measures and tracking grant activities. GAO believes these recommendations remain valid.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-422](#). For more information, contact Cornelia M. Ashby at (202) 512-7215 or ashbyc@gao.gov.

NATIVE HAWAIIAN EDUCATION ACT

Greater Oversight Would Increase Accountability and Enable Targeting of Funds to Areas with Greatest Need

What GAO Found

Little is known about the NHEA's impact on Native Hawaiian education. Education has not evaluated NHEA due to its relatively small funding level, about \$30 million annually, and academic research that shows educational improvements for Native Hawaiians does not indicate whether NHEA was a contributor to reported gains, such as in preschool enrollment and high school and college graduation rates. Some grantees have reported positive outcomes in education and other areas for Native Hawaiians served by NHEA grants. However, the extent to which NHEA has contributed to these outcomes has not been determined.

Education has made efforts in recent years to improve NHEA grant management and oversight, and plans to address other weaknesses in the future. Education has established three performance measures that grantees are expected to use to assess their activities, conducted community outreach, and improved reporting requirements for grantees. However, these performance measures are not applicable to some of the educational outcomes that could result from NHEA's many activities. Moreover, Education has yet to establish a method to track grantee activities, such as how funds have been distributed across activities or islands, and some grantees said that in the past they have received little direction or guidance from Education. Education officials said they plan to address these weaknesses. They plan to reexamine the performance measures and provide additional guidance and technical assistance to grantees this year. Officials also stated that they would like to develop a tracking system to better manage grants funded by NHEA, but could not say specifically when this would occur.

The parties responsible for administering NHEA—Education, the Education Council, and the island councils—have not fulfilled many of their respective roles and responsibilities under the act. Education has not provided sufficient oversight to ensure that the Education Council carries out many of its responsibilities under the law, or provided guidance to the Education Council on how to assist island councils represent local interests. The Education Council has not fulfilled its primary duty to collect data on the status of Native Hawaiian education, assess current needs in the different communities, make recommendations for the future use of grant funds, or, until recently, provided Education with the required annual reports on its activities. In regard to the island councils, some have not ensured the adequate representation of local interests, or supported the Education Council in efforts to assess and prioritize local needs and make recommendations to Education. In the absence of complete information on NHEA activities and local needs, Education has not targeted grant funds or reported to Congress on NHEA activities, as required. The overall lack of information about NHEA leaves participants and policymakers in a knowledge vacuum, unable to make informed decisions that will help meet and advance NHEA's goals.