



Highlights of [GAO-08-380](#), a report to congressional requesters

### Why GAO Did This Study

Under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA), the federal government provides millions of dollars annually to assist schools that have not met state academic goals. In the 2006-2007 school year, over 10,000 such schools were identified for improvement. NCLBA requires states to set aside 4 percent of their Title I funds to pay for school improvement efforts. GAO was asked to determine (1) the extent to which states have set aside these funds and used other resources for school improvement, (2) which schools received improvement funds and the extent funds are tracked, (3) the activities states and schools have undertaken and how activities are assessed, and (4) how Education supports states' improvement efforts. GAO administered a survey to state education officials and received a 100 percent response rate, matched survey data to an Education database, and conducted site visits to five states.

### What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that Education review its monitoring to ensure that states comply with NCLBA requirements for allocating school improvement funds for district-level activities and prioritizing funds to the lowest achieving schools, provide guidance on when and how states are to make information available about which schools receive improvement funds, and analyze the effects of removing a hold-harmless provision on those districts protected by it. Education agreed with these recommendations.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-380](#). For more information, contact Cornelia Ashby at (202) 512-7215 or [ashbyc@gao.gov](mailto:ashbyc@gao.gov).

## NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT

### Education Actions Could Improve the Targeting of School Improvement Funds to Schools Most in Need of Assistance

#### What GAO Found

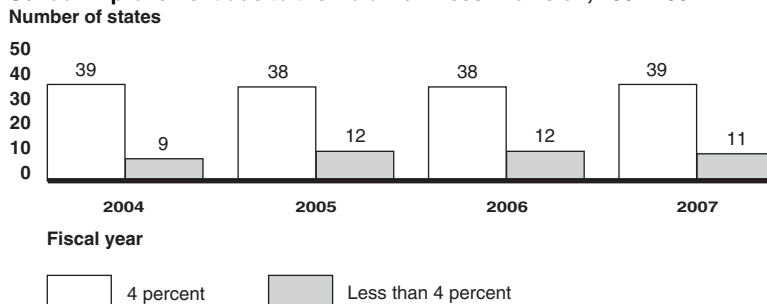
A statutory requirement—known as a hold-harmless provision—has limited some states' ability to target the full 4 percent of Title I funds for school improvement to low-performing schools. However, many states have used other federal and state funds for this purpose. While the hold-harmless provision is designed to protect school districts from reductions in their Title I funding, it has also kept 22 states from setting aside the full portion of Title I school improvement funds since 2002 because they did not have enough funds to do so after satisfying the hold-harmless provision. To address this, Education has proposed repealing the hold-harmless provision. However, it is not known how removing this provision would affect districts protected by it. In addition to Title I funds, 38 states have dedicated other federal funds, and 17 have contributed state funds for school improvement.

Though states generally target improvement funds to the most persistently underperforming schools, some states did not fulfill key NCLBA requirements. Specifically, 4 states did not follow all requirements to ensure that schools most in need of assistance received funds. Although Education monitors how states allocate improvement funds, it did not identify this issue. Also, 4 states were unable to provide a complete list of schools that received improvement funds, as required by law. Education has not provided guidance on this requirement and does not monitor compliance with it.

Schools and states are engaged in a variety of improvement activities, and most states use student data and feedback to assess activities. Most states reported that schools receiving improvement funds used the funds for professional development and for reorganizing curriculum or instruction time. Nearly all states assisted schools with school improvement plans and professional development. Most states use student achievement data and feedback from schools and districts to assess improvement activities.

Education provides a range of support for school improvement, including technical assistance and research results. Nearly all states want more help, such as more information on promising improvement practices. Education has a new Web site to provide additional resources and plans to collect more information on promising practices through a new grant program.

**Number of States That Could and Could Not Set Aside Full 4 Percent of Title I Funds for School Improvement due to the Hold-Harmless Provision, 2004-2007**



Source: GAO survey of states.

Note: Totals do not add to 51 because some states did not set aside the full amount due to reasons other than the hold-harmless provision.