

GAO
Accountability · Integrity · Reliability
Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-05-618](#), a report to the Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 has focused attention on improving the academic achievement of all students, including more than 6 million students with disabilities and requires that all students be assessed. Students with disabilities may be included through accommodations, such as extended time, or alternate assessments, such as teacher observation of student performance. To provide information about the participation of students with disabilities in statewide assessments, GAO determined (1) the extent to which students with disabilities were included in statewide assessments; (2) what issues selected states faced in implementing alternate assessments; and (3) how the U.S. Department of Education (Education) supported states in their efforts to assess students with disabilities.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that Education explore ways to make information about inclusion of students with disabilities more accessible on its Web site and work with states, particularly those with high exclusion rates, to explore strategies to reduce the number of students with disabilities who are excluded from the NAEP assessment. In comments, Education officials noted that they were taking actions that would address our recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-618.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Marnie S. Shaul at (202) 512-7215 or shaulm@gao.gov.

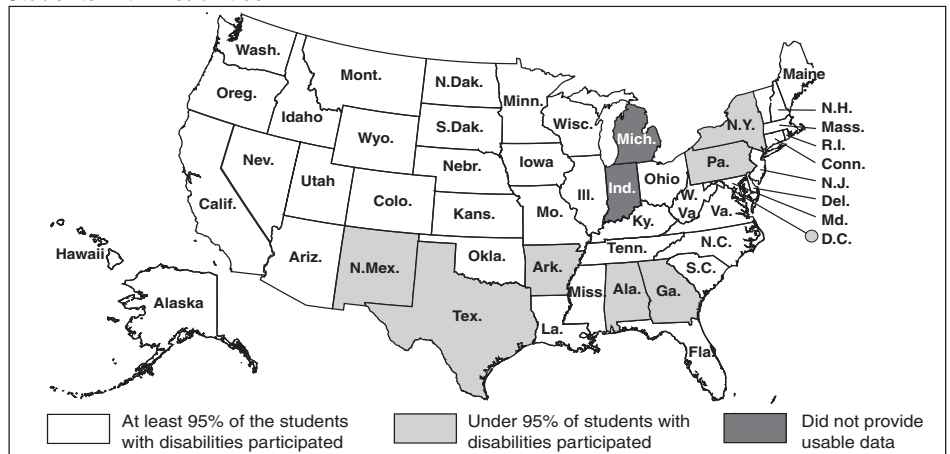
NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT

Most Students with Disabilities Participated in Statewide Assessments, but Inclusion Options Could Be Improved

What GAO Found

In the 2003-04 school year, at least 95 percent of students with disabilities participated in statewide reading assessments in 41 of the 49 states that provided data. Students with disabilities were most often included in the regular reading assessment, and relatively few took alternate assessments. Nationwide, the percentage of students with disabilities who were excluded from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) was 5 percent, but varied across states, ranging from about 2 percent to 10 percent in 2002. Among the reasons for exclusion were differences in accommodations between states and the NAEP and variation in decisions among states about who should take the NAEP.

Participation Rates on Statewide Reading Assessments in the 2003-04 School Year for Students with Disabilities



Source: State data reported to Education in consolidated reports.

National experts and officials in the four states we studied told us that designing and implementing alternate assessments was difficult because these assessments were relatively new and the abilities of students assessed varied widely. Officials in two states said they were not using an alternate assessment measured on grade-level standards because they were unfamiliar with such assessment models or because of concerns that the assessment would not appropriately measure achievement. In addition, learning the skills to administer alternate assessments was time-consuming for teachers, as was administering the assessment.

Education provided support to states on including students with disabilities in statewide assessments in a number of ways, including disseminating guidance through its Web site. However, a number of state officials told us that the regulations and guidance did not provide illustrative examples of alternate assessments and how they could be used to appropriately assess students with disabilities. In addition, our review of Education's Web site revealed that information on certain topics was difficult to locate.