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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-05-7](#), a report to the Secretary of Education

Why GAO Did This Study

The school choice provision of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) of 2001 applies to schools that receive Title I funds and that have not met state performance goals for 2 consecutive years, including goals set before the enactment of NCLBA. Students in such schools must be offered the choice to transfer to another school in the district. GAO undertook this review to provide the Congress a report on the first 2 years of the implementation of NCLBA school choice. GAO reviewed (1) the number of Title I schools and students that have been affected nationally, (2) the experiences of selected school districts in implementing choice, and (3) the guidance and technical assistance that Education provided.

GAO collected school performance data from all states, interviewed Education officials, and visited 8 school districts in California, Illinois, Ohio, Mississippi, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Washington.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that Education monitor issues and promote promising practices related to limited classroom capacity, help states develop strategies for better informing parents about school choice, and include in its planned NCLBA implementation study, an examination of the academic outcomes and retention rates of transferring students. Education generally agreed with GAO's recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-7.

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

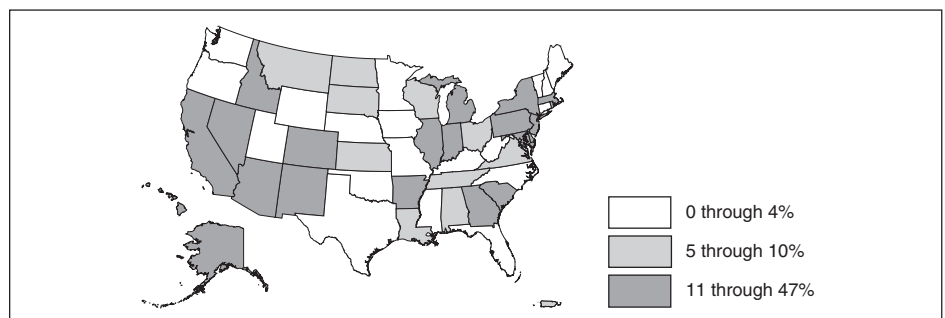
NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT

Education Needs to Provide Additional Technical Assistance and Conduct Implementation Studies for School Choice Provision

What GAO Found

About 1 in 10 of the nation's 50,000 Title I schools were identified for school choice in each of the first 2 years since enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) of 2001. The proportion of schools identified for choice varied by state. About 1 percent of eligible children, or 31,000 students, transferred in school year 2003-2004. However, little is known about the students who did and did not transfer or factors affecting parents' transfer decisions. Education has launched a study that will yield some information on these topics.

Percentages of Title I Schools Identified for School Choice in 2003-2004 by State



Source: GAO analysis of state data.

Officials in most of the 8 districts GAO visited said they welcomed NCLBA's emphasis on improved performance, but had difficulties providing choice because of tight timeframes and insufficient classroom capacity. Final state determinations of the schools that met state yearly performance goals were not generally available before the school year started, so offers of transfers were based on preliminary determinations. District officials expressed concern that parents had inadequate time and information to make an informed decision. Parents were offered at least 2 possible schools as transfer options, but many of these schools had not met state performance goals in the most recent year. Because of limited classroom capacity in 4 of the districts, some students did not receive the opportunity to transfer. For students who transferred, transportation was provided on school buses, public transit or personal cars, and most districts spent less than 7 percent of the pool of funds that NCLBA required be set aside for that purpose in school year 2003-2004.

Education issued extensive guidance on choice. However, the complexity of providing school choice raises a number of issues that have not been addressed in guidance available through October 2004, such as how to handle cases where schools receiving transfers later are identified for choice and how to expand capacity in the short-term within budgetary constraints.