



Highlights of [GAO-07-646T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education, Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLBA) focused attention on the academic achievement of more than 5 million students with limited English proficiency. Obtaining valid test results for these students is challenging, given their language barriers. This testimony describes (1) the extent to which these students are meeting annual academic progress goals, (2) what states have done to ensure the validity of their academic assessments, (3) what states are doing to ensure the validity of their English language proficiency assessments, and (4) how the U.S. Department of Education (Education) is supporting states' efforts to meet NCLBA's assessment requirements for these students.

This testimony is based on a July 2006 report (GAO-06-815). To collect the information for this report, we convened a group of experts and studied five states (California, Nebraska, New York, North Carolina, and Texas). We also conducted a state survey and reviewed state and Education documents.

What GAO Recommends

The GAO report recommended that Education (1) support research on accommodations, (2) identify and provide technical support states need to ensure the validity of academic assessments, (3) publish additional guidance on requirements for assessing English language proficiency, and (4) explore ways to provide additional flexibility for measuring annual progress for these students. Education generally agreed with our recommendations and has taken a number of steps to address them.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-646T.

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

NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT

Education Assistance Could Help States Better Measure Progress of Students with Limited English Proficiency

What GAO Found

In nearly two-thirds of 48 states for which we obtained data, students with limited English proficiency did not meet state proficiency goals for language arts or mathematics in school year 2003-2004. Further, in most states, these students generally did not perform as well as other student groups on state mathematics tests for elementary students.

Officials in our five study states reported taking steps to follow generally accepted test development procedures to ensure the validity and reliability of academic tests for these students. However, our group of experts expressed concerns about whether all states are assessing these students in a valid manner, noting that some states lack technical expertise. Further, Education's completed peer reviews of assessments in 38 states found that 25 states did not provide adequate evidence of their validity or reliability. To improve the validity of these test results, most states offer accommodations, such as a bilingual dictionary. However, our experts reported that research is lacking on what accommodations are effective in mitigating language barriers. Several states used native language or alternate assessments for students with limited English proficiency, but these tests are costly to develop and are not appropriate for all students.

Many states implemented new English language proficiency assessments in 2006 to meet NCLBA requirements, and, as a result, complete information on their validity and reliability is not yet available. In 2006, 22 states used tests developed by one of four state consortia. Officials in our study states reported taking steps to ensure the validity of these tests. However, a 2005 Education-funded review of 17 English language proficiency tests found insufficient documentation of their validity.

Education has offered a variety of technical assistance to help states assess students with limited English proficiency. However, Education has issued little written guidance to states on developing English language proficiency tests. Officials in about one-third of the 33 states we contacted told us they wanted more guidance about how to develop tests that meet NCLBA requirements. Education has offered states some flexibility in how they assess students with limited English proficiency, but officials in our study states told us that additional flexibility is needed to ensure that progress measures appropriately track the academic progress of these students. Since our report was published, Education has initiated a partnership with the states and other organizations to support the development of valid assessment options for students with limited English proficiency.