



Highlights of [GAO-06-815](#), a report to congressional requesters

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 report 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. To collect this information, 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

GAO recommends that the Secretary of 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.

To view the Spanish translation of this highlights page, please see <http://www.gao.gov/highlights/d061111high.pdf>.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-815.

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

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

What GAO Found

In the 2003-2004 school year, state data showed that the percentage of students with limited English proficiency scoring proficient on a state's language arts and mathematics tests was lower than the state's annual progress goals in nearly two-thirds of the 48 states for which we obtained data. Further, our review of data 49 states submitted to Education showed that in most states, these students generally did not perform as well as other student groups on state mathematics tests. Factors other than student knowledge, such as how a state establishes its annual progress goals, can influence whether states meet their goals.

For their academic assessments, officials in our five study states reported taking steps to follow generally accepted test development procedures and to ensure the validity and reliability of these tests for students with limited English proficiency, such as reviewing test questions for bias. However, our group of experts expressed concerns about whether all states are assessing these students in a valid manner, noting that some states lack the resources and technical expertise to take appropriate steps to ensure the validity of tests for these students. Further, Education's peer reviews of assessments in 38 states found that 25 states did not provide adequate evidence to ensure the validity or reliability of academic test results for these students. 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. A minority of 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 are implementing new English language proficiency assessments in 2006 to meet NCLBA requirements; 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. Consortia and state officials reported taking steps to ensure the validity of these tests, such as conducting field tests. A 2005 Education-funded technical review of available documentation for 17 English language proficiency tests found insufficient documentation of the validity of these assessments' results.

Education has offered a variety of technical assistance to help states assess students with limited English proficiency, such as peer reviews of states' academic assessments. However, Education has issued little written guidance to states on developing English language proficiency tests. Officials in one-third of the 33 states we visited or directly 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.