

G A O
Accountability · Integrity · Reliability

Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-09-286](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA), districts and schools must demonstrate adequate yearly progress (AYP) for all students. Because schools may spend more time improving students' academic skills to meet NCLBA's requirements, some are concerned that arts education might be cut back. To determine how, if at all, student access to arts education has changed since NCLBA, the Congress asked: (1) has the amount of instruction time for arts education changed and, if so, have certain groups been more affected than others, (2) to what extent have state education agencies' requirements and funding for arts education changed since NCLBA, (3) what are school officials in selected districts doing to provide arts education since NCLBA and what challenges do they face in doing so, and (4) what is known about the effect of arts education in improving student outcomes? GAO analyzed data from the U.S. Department of Education (Education), surveyed 50 state arts officials, interviewed officials in 8 school districts and 19 schools, and reviewed existing research.

What GAO Recommends

To identify factors that may contribute to changes in access to arts education for certain groups, GAO recommends that the Secretary of Education require the department's planned study of NCLBA implementation to ask survey respondents why any changes in instruction time they report occurred. Education generally agreed with our recommendation.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-09-286](#). For more information, contact Cornelia Ashby at (202) 512-7215 or ashbyc@gao.gov.

ACCESS TO ARTS EDUCATION

Inclusion of Additional Questions in Education's Planned Research Would Help Explain Why Instruction Time Has Decreased for Some Students

What GAO Found

According to data from Education's national survey, most elementary school teachers—about 90 percent—reported that instruction time for arts education stayed the same between school years 2004-2005 and 2006-2007. The percentage of teachers that reported that instruction time had stayed the same was similarly high across a range of school characteristics, irrespective of the schools' percentage of low-income or minority students or of students with limited English proficiency, or the schools' improvement under NCLBA. Moreover, about 4 percent of teachers reported an increase. However, about 7 percent reported a decrease, and GAO identified statistically significant differences across school characteristics in the percentage of teachers reporting that the time spent on arts education had decreased. Teachers at schools identified as needing improvement and those with higher percentages of minority students were more likely to report a reduction in time spent on the arts. Because Education's survey did not include questions about why instruction time changed, GAO was not able to determine the reasons for the disparities its analysis identified. A new study of NCLBA implementation that Education plans to undertake may collect information on the uses of instruction time, among other topics. However, Education has not yet determined if it will collect information on the reasons instruction time changed for certain groups.

While basic state requirements for arts education in schools have remained unchanged in most states, state funding levels for arts education increased in some states and decreased in others, according to GAO's survey of state arts officials. Arts education officials attributed the funding changes to state budget changes to a greater extent than they did to NCLBA or other factors.

School principals have used several strategies to provide arts education; however, some struggled with decreased budgets and competing demands on instruction time, according to those GAO interviewed. Strategies for maintaining arts education include seeking funding and collaborative arrangements in the arts community. Competing demands on instruction time were due to state education agency or school district actions taken to meet NCLBA proficiency standards.

Overall, research on the effect of arts education on student outcomes is inconclusive. Some studies that examined the effect of arts education on students' reading and math achievement found a small positive effect, but others found none.

Elementary School Children Participating in Arts Education



Source: Art Explosion (image).