The one applicant for State-Flex and the three applicants for Local-Flex cited two main reasons why they applied—the commitment of leadership and the ability to develop goals and strategies to improve student achievement. In contrast, states did not apply primarily due to few perceived benefits, as well as conflicting deadlines with other NCLBA requirements, while school districts did not apply primarily due to a lack of awareness about the program. In particular, state officials said they were busy completing mandatory draft plans for measuring student achievement. Additionally, these state officials indicated that they needed student achievement data based on these plans in order to apply for State-Flex. Officials in other states said that less time-consuming options to transfer funds were preferable to State-Flex due to the time and effort required to complete the State-Flex application and develop agreements with school districts. Finally, most school district officials GAO spoke with did not apply for Local-Flex because they were not aware of the program.

Education publicized the flexibility demonstration programs in routine channels, such as the Federal Register, at conferences informing states and school districts about NCLBA, and in letters to nearly 200 of the largest districts. However, Education’s communication strategy did not target those potential applicants in the best position to apply—states and districts that had developed goals and strategies to improve student achievement and narrow achievement gaps. Additionally, Education provided guidance on the application process and assisted interested applicants. However, the two applicants GAO visited said that more guidance was needed in some areas, such as how to demonstrate that funds would be used for allowable purposes. Finally, while Education has developed criteria and procedures for reviewing and awarding flexibility, it is too early to comment on its processes because it has not made awards under these two flexibility programs to any state or district.


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