

# K-12 Education: Administration of DOD Schools in Bahrain

GAO-26-108077 [Accessible Version]

Q&A Report to Congressional Committees

December 18, 2025

## Why This Matters

The Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA) leads Department of Defense (DOD) efforts to assure that military-connected children have access to a quality education on military installations worldwide. DODEA operates 160 schools that serve nearly 70,000 students across 11 foreign countries, seven states, and two U.S. territories. Two of these schools—Bahrain Elementary School and Bahrain Middle High School—are on the island Kingdom of Bahrain, located in the Middle East. These schools enrolled nearly 600 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 12 in the 2024–25 school year. Students were primarily from families connected to Naval Support Activity (NSA) Bahrain, which supports U.S. and Coalition Forces throughout the region.

As DOD has reported, access to a high-quality education can enhance military-connected students' well-being. However, some media reports have described parent concerns about DODEA's Bahrain Community Schools that ranged from high teacher vacancies to poor communication. The Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying the Servicemember Quality of Life Improvement and National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2025 includes a provision for GAO to examine the administration of DODEA's schools in Bahrain.

This report provides information on the Bahrain Community Schools' students, facilities, advanced academic and extracurricular opportunities, staff recruitment and retention, communication efforts, and special education services.

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## Key Takeaways

At the Bahrain Community Schools in school year 2024–25:

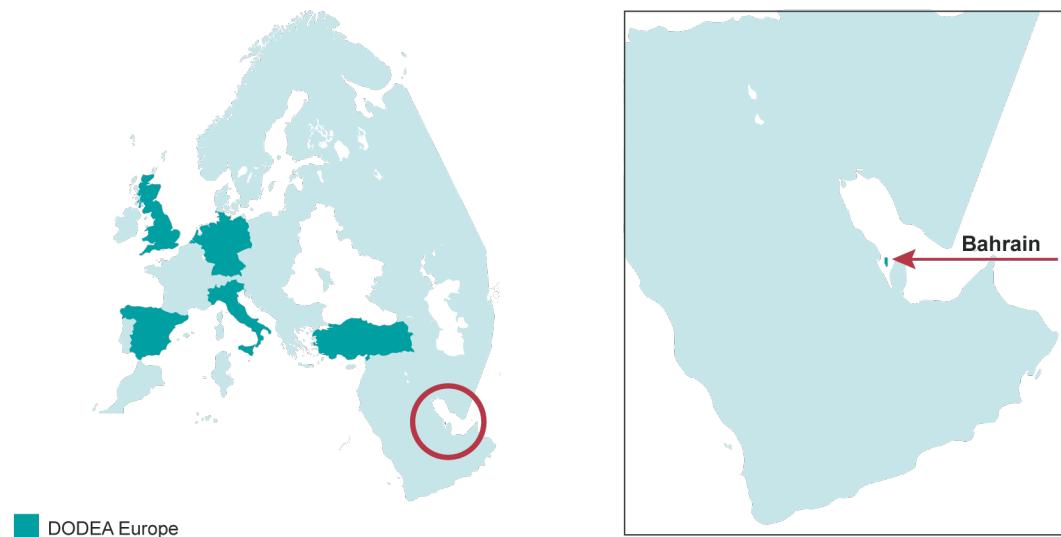
- Eighty-six percent of students were children of active-duty servicemembers, DOD civilian employees, and DOD contractors. The remaining 14 percent were other tuition-paying Americans and foreign nationals.
- Efforts were underway to bring school facilities into compliance with DOD standards (e.g., installing new fire suppression and security systems).
- A variety of academic and extracurricular opportunities were available. In high school, there were 13 Advanced Placement (AP) in-person courses, 26 clubs, and seven sports. DODEA funded travel for some sport competitions abroad.
- Ninety-eight percent of school positions were filled as of September 1, due in part to enhanced recruitment and retention strategies available to Bahrain as a designated hardship location.
- Parents reported delays in school communications about security incidents, which installation leaders said were the result of necessary internal reviews.
- About 9 percent of students received special education services, some of whom needed supports that exceeded the schools' designated capabilities.

Installation leaders said they were taking steps to better screen families to ensure that the schools' capabilities aligned with families' needs.

## Who have the Bahrain Community Schools served?

Located in DODEA's Europe Region, the Bahrain Community Schools served 577 students in pre-kindergarten through grade 12 as of school year 2024–25 (see fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> The majority of students (86 percent) were connected to DOD's mission in Bahrain (i.e., children of active-duty servicemembers, DOD civilian employees, and DOD contractors). The remaining 14 percent were dependents of other Americans and foreign nationals attending the schools on a space-available, tuition-paying basis.<sup>2</sup> Many of these dependents were boarding students, living in an on-campus dormitory operated by the Bahrain International School Association (BISA).<sup>3</sup>

Figure 1: Countries with DODEA Europe Schools and Location of the Kingdom of Bahrain



Source: Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA). Map resources. | GAO-26-108077

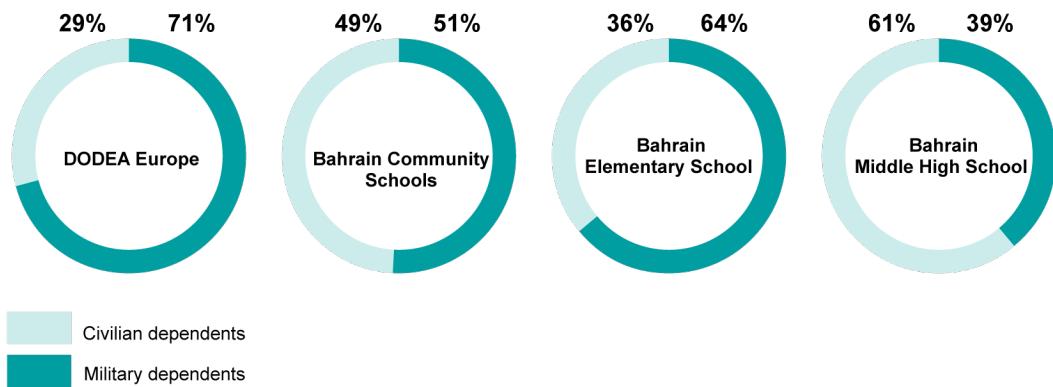
### Accessible Data for Figure 1: Countries with DODEA Europe Schools and Location of the Kingdom of Bahrain

One map that shows countries with DODEA Europe schools and another map that shows the location of the Kingdom of Bahrain.

Source: Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA). Map resources. | GAO-26-108077

Children of active-duty servicemembers (military dependents) accounted for just over half of Bahrain Community Schools students over the past 3 school years (see fig. 2). On average, about three-quarters of students who attended all DODEA schools in the Europe Region were military dependents over the same period.

**Figure 2: Average Military- vs. Civilian-Dependent Enrollment, DODEA Europe Region: All Schools vs. Bahrain Community Schools (school years 2022–23 through 2024–25)**



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA) enrollment data. | GAO-26-108077

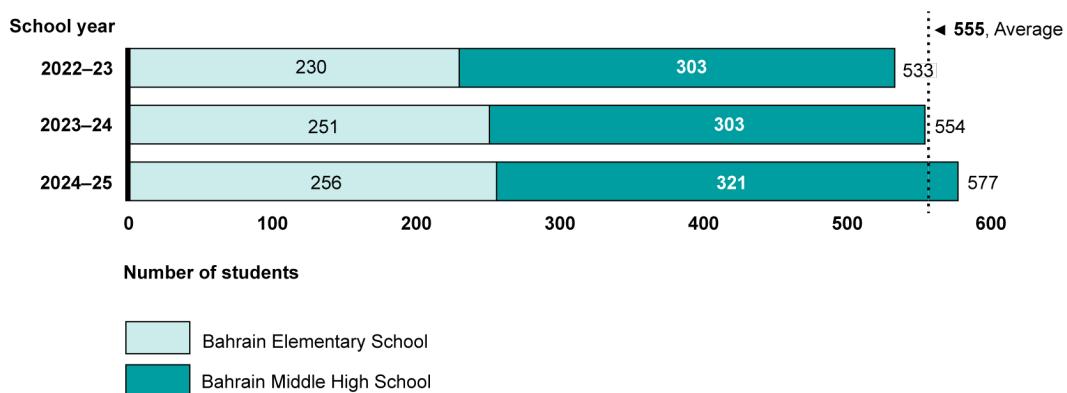
**Accessible Data for Figure 2: Average Military- vs. Civilian-Dependent Enrollment, DODEA Europe Region: All Schools vs. Bahrain Community Schools (school years 2022–23 through 2024–25)**

Category	DODEA Europe	Bahrain Community Schools	Bahrain Elementary School	Bahrain Middle High School
Civilian dependents	29 percent	49 percent	36 percent	61 percent
Military dependents	71 percent	51 percent	64 percent	39 percent

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA) enrollment data. | GAO-26-108077

Enrollment in the Bahrain Community Schools grew slightly over the 3 most recent completed school years (see fig. 3).

**Figure 3: Enrollment in DODEA's Bahrain Community Schools (school years 2022–23 through 2024–25)**



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA) enrollment data. | GAO-26-108077

**Accessible Data for Figure 3: Enrollment in DODEA's Bahrain Community Schools (school years 2022–23 through 2024–25)**

School year	Number of students: Bahrain Elementary School	Number of students: Bahrain Middle High School	Total	Average
2022–23	230	303	533	555
2023–24	251	303	554	555
2024–25	256	321	577	555

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA) enrollment data. | GAO-26-108077

## What are the features of the Bahrain Community Schools' facilities?

The Bahrain Community Schools' 28-acre campus, located just outside of NSA Bahrain, includes an academic building with a wing for each school, science laboratories, a library, three art studios, and a cafeteria-theater (see fig. 4). The campus also includes a swimming pool, lighted artificial turf soccer field, tennis courts, softball fields, and two gymnasiums. The installation provides security for the campus and entrants must be admitted through a security gate.

Figure 4: Pictures of Department of Defense Education Activity Bahrain Community Schools' Facilities



Source: GAO and Department of Defense Education Activity (photos). | GAO-26-108077

**Accessible Data for Figure 4: Pictures of Department of Defense Education Activity Bahrain Community Schools' Facilities**

Four photos of Bahrain school. Three interior and one exterior.

Source: GAO and Department of Defense Education Activity (photos). | GAO-26-108077

Note: Clockwise from top left: Bahrain Elementary School classroom; Bahrain Community Schools' library; Bahrain Middle High School's entryway and lockers, and Bahrain Community Schools' exterior entrance.

Unlike nearly every other DODEA school worldwide, DOD does not own the Bahrain Community Schools property.<sup>4</sup> Rather, it leases the Bahrain Community Schools campus from BISA. DODEA has coordinated with the Navy (which holds the lease) and BISA to manage the property.<sup>5</sup> Stakeholders, including parents and installation leadership, noted BISA's strong commitment to the Bahrain Community Schools' families. However, some of these stakeholders suggested that DODEA could better leverage BISA's support to secure facility improvements and other resources they felt were needed.

DODEA and Navy officials acknowledged that upgrades were needed to bring the Bahrain Community Schools into compliance with DOD's facilities standards. They also emphasized that all changes to the Bahrain Community Schools' facilities must go through official DOD channels to ensure that they align with DOD standards and with DODEA capital improvement plans. They described instances in the past in which school-based staff had requested building modifications directly from BISA without going through those channels. Modifications including flexible walls installed in an elementary school classroom and a new stage in the auditorium were found to be out of compliance with the lease and DOD facility standards. As a result, they later had to be removed or repaired.

In 2024, DODEA and Navy officials conducted a facilities assessment and identified 22 areas of the property requiring maintenance. As of May 2025, these repairs were completed or underway. Further, in October 2024, the Navy issued

a \$14 million lease modification to address areas of noncompliance with DOD's facilities standards, according to Navy and DODEA facilities officials. The lease modification includes planned upgrades to the Bahrain Community Schools' fire suppression, security, and other systems over a 6-year period.

Both Navy and DODEA facilities officials told us they were committed to ensuring appropriate oversight of the Bahrain Community Schools' facilities, even in a resource-constrained environment. For example, the Spain-based DODEA facilities specialist responsible for the Bahrain Community Schools said he was temporarily unable to visit the schools due to a March 2025 civilian travel freeze across DOD.<sup>6</sup> To ensure sufficient oversight, he relied on school leaders and school staff to provide facility updates virtually, and worked with on-the-ground Navy officials to address issues as they arose. And although officials from the Navy's Real Estate Office said they were unable to fill civilian vacancies at the time of our review due to DOD's hiring freeze, they were working to improve workflow processes and response timelines for the Bahrain Community Schools' maintenance requests.

## What advanced academic opportunities have existed for students in Bahrain?

Like other DODEA schools, the Bahrain Community Schools offered a variety of advanced academic opportunities for students as of the 2024–25 school year. For example:

- Bahrain Elementary School offered a supplementary gifted education program with dedicated instruction for students identified as having high potential and being exceptional performers. On our visit, we observed a gifted education teacher working with small groups of third grade students on interactive science projects.
- For grades 6–8, Bahrain Middle High School offered accelerated courses for students who required more challenging coursework, such as accelerated world languages or math (for high school credit).
- For grades 9–12, Bahrain Middle High School offered 13 different in-person Advanced Placement (AP) courses (see table 1).<sup>7</sup> The school also previously offered the International Baccalaureate (IB) program.<sup>8</sup> Bahrain Middle High School students filled 213 seats across these 13 courses—up from 142 seats in school year 2022–23. AP courses with the highest enrollment included English Language, Human Geography, and Precalculus. The school received the College Board's AP Platinum Honor Roll because 50 percent or more of graduating students scored a three or higher on at least one AP exam. According to DODEA officials, Bahrain Middle High School offered 19 in-person AP courses in school year 2025–26.

**Table 1: In-Person Advanced Placement (AP) Courses Offered and Total Enrollment, Bahrain Middle High School and All DODEA High Schools (school years 2022–23 through 2024–25)**

School Year	Students in grades 9–12 in Bahrain: Total AP courses offered	Students in grades 9–12 in Bahrain: Total AP course enrollment	Students in grades 9–12 in the DODEA system: Average AP courses offered	Students in grades 9–12 in the DODEA system: Average AP course enrollment
2022–23	14	142	12	223
2023–24	15	209	12	240
2024–25	13	213	14	303

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA) AP course enrollment data. | GAO-26-108077

Note: During this period, DODEA also offered high school students an opportunity to enroll in virtual Advanced Placement courses when a subject was not taught at their school in person.

Some parents expressed frustration with limitations in the AP courses available to their children. For example, one parent noted that the school offered AP Chemistry in alternating years only. As with other relatively small schools in DODEA, school staff acknowledged that teacher availability and scheduling limitations constrained their ability to offer all of the AP courses students were interested in. Considering these constraints, school leaders told us they asked students about their AP course preferences and incorporated their feedback into decisions about which courses to prioritize.

Further, DODEA students, including those in Bahrain, were able to take AP courses not offered in person through DODEA's Virtual High School. For instance, a student who moved from Japan was able to continue Japanese instruction online through the virtual school. While some teachers and parents expressed reservations about the effectiveness of online instruction, school leadership emphasized that this method of course delivery was not the norm and presented it as another option for families who wished to use it. In school year 2024–25, 17 students at Bahrain Middle High School were enrolled in eight AP courses through DODEA's Virtual High School.

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### What extracurricular opportunities have been available to students in Bahrain?

Middle and high school students in Bahrain had opportunities to participate in certain sports and extracurricular clubs in school year 2024–25.

- **Middle school sports and clubs.** In Bahrain, middle school students participated in four recreational sports: basketball, volleyball, swimming, and soccer. (DODEA did not offer competitive sports in its middle schools as of school year 2024–25.) Additionally, nine clubs were available to middle school students, including student council and drama club.
- **High school sports and clubs.** High school students participated in seven competitive sports in school year 2024–25: tennis, soccer, cross-country, basketball, track and field, volleyball, and swimming. Further, 26 high school clubs were available, including video and yearbook clubs.

Parents, school leaders, and district officials all agreed that students had limited opportunities to compete in sports locally.

Given the lack of local competition, district leaders told us it was important for students to have opportunities to compete against students from other DODEA schools. District leaders said that district and regional funding was allocated for students to travel to Europe to participate in DODEA district and regional competitions. However, district leaders and school staff also acknowledged that travel to Europe from Bahrain could be complicated and expensive, and they were unable to provide as many travel opportunities as they would like.

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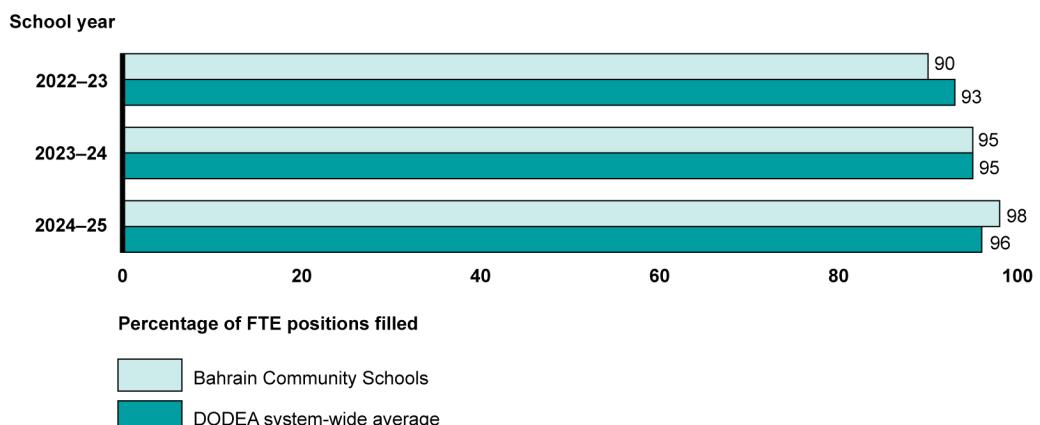
### How has DODEA staffed the Bahrain Community Schools?

DODEA has used enhanced recruitment and retention strategies to help ensure full staffing in Bahrain, which has been designated as one of three hardship locations in the DODEA system.<sup>9</sup> For example, unlike most overseas DODEA positions, which are initially only open to local candidates already in DODEA's employment system, Bahrain positions are advertised DODEA wide and externally on the federal government's official employment website all at once, according to school leaders.<sup>10</sup> Further, applicants who accept positions in Bahrain receive a 20 percent cost of living allowance and additional monetary incentives. Finally, after 2 years of service, teachers in Bahrain have access to

an additional incentive allowing them to apply for reassignment to another overseas location, instead of first returning stateside before taking another overseas position.<sup>11</sup>

Due in part to these efforts, the Bahrain Community Schools have been nearly fully staffed—and at rates above the DODEA-wide average—as of September 1 of each of the past 2 school years (see fig. 5).<sup>12</sup> In school year 2022–23, vacancy rates were higher both in Bahrain and across DODEA. To address concerns about these relatively high vacancy rates, DODEA headquarters officials told us they implemented a teacher hiring program that subsequently improved staffing rates system wide. Among other things, the program included a request for teachers to notify administrators of their plans to leave, transfer, or retire earlier in the school year to enable the agency to fill those positions before the first day of school.

**Figure 5: Percent of Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Positions Filled as of September 1, Bahrain Community Schools and DODEA System-Wide Average (school years 2022–23 through 2024–2025)**



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA) staffing data. | GAO-26-108077

**Accessible Data for Figure 5: Percent of Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Positions Filled as of September 1, Bahrain Community Schools and DODEA System-Wide Average (school years 2022–23 through 2024–2025)**

School year	Percentage of FTE positions filled: Bahrain Community Schools	Percentage of FTE positions filled: DODEA system-wide average
2022–23	90	93
2023–24	95	95
2024–25	98	96

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA) staffing data. | GAO-26-108077

As in other DODEA schools, mid-year teaching vacancies in Bahrain have occurred—for instance, after a teacher spouse's change in duty station. In these instances, Bahrain Community School leaders said they had been able to draw from a roster of approved local substitutes—who were often certified teachers—to temporarily fill those vacancies while they search for a permanent replacement.

Parents in each of the two discussion groups we held expressed concerns about relying on substitutes to fill sometimes lengthy staffing vacancies. DODEA headquarters officials and district leaders acknowledged that teacher hiring could take a long time, in part due to lengthy background checks. In school year 2024–25, it took an average of 76 days to make a firm offer to fill a teaching vacancy in Bahrain—slightly shorter than the 79-day average across DODEA schools, according to DODEA headquarters officials.

To mitigate disruption associated with vacancies, DODEA headquarters officials told us they created a permanent certified substitute teaching position for the Bahrain Community Schools for school year 2022–23. The teacher who occupied

this position told us she was a flexible resource available to support the schools in the case of unexpected vacancies and short-term absences. The two other long-term substitutes working in the Bahrain Community Schools at the time of our visit told us they received professional support and curriculum guidance from district content-area specialists and school department chairs.

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## **How have the Bahrain Community Schools shared information with families?**

The Bahrain Community Schools have used a variety of means to share information on issues affecting the school community. These have included weekly newsletters, social media posts, text and phone notification systems, the school website, and parent-teacher conferences. Parents in both discussion groups told us they were generally satisfied with regular communications from the schools. And while some of these parents shared prior frustrations—for instance, regarding lengthy newsletters—they stated that school administrators had generally resolved these issues.

Across both parent discussion groups, parents shared positive and constructive feedback on teacher communication on their individual children's academic performance. Some parents in these discussion groups shared that they felt well-informed about their children's academic progress and had no trouble reaching teachers to discuss concerns. Other parents described situations in which teachers had not proactively notified them that their children were struggling academically. Participants in each of our two teacher discussion groups told us they were available to discuss student issues with parents in person or via email. School leaders told us they were available to assist parents if a teacher was not responsive to their concerns.

Parents in both discussion groups raised concerns about the speed with which the schools shared important, time-sensitive information about security events—such as installation lockdowns. One parent stated that earlier notification could have helped them make different decisions—for instance, not to send their children to school that day.

School leaders acknowledged that communication regarding security events was not always timely but told us they must rely on the installation commander to tell them what information they could share with parents and when. The installation's commander and school liaison officer further explained that this information must also be cleared by the commander of Naval Forces Central Command. While installation leaders understood that parents were frustrated, they said that communications must be vetted carefully because the school community had included nonmilitary and foreign-national families. Installation and school leaders told us that safety was their top priority.

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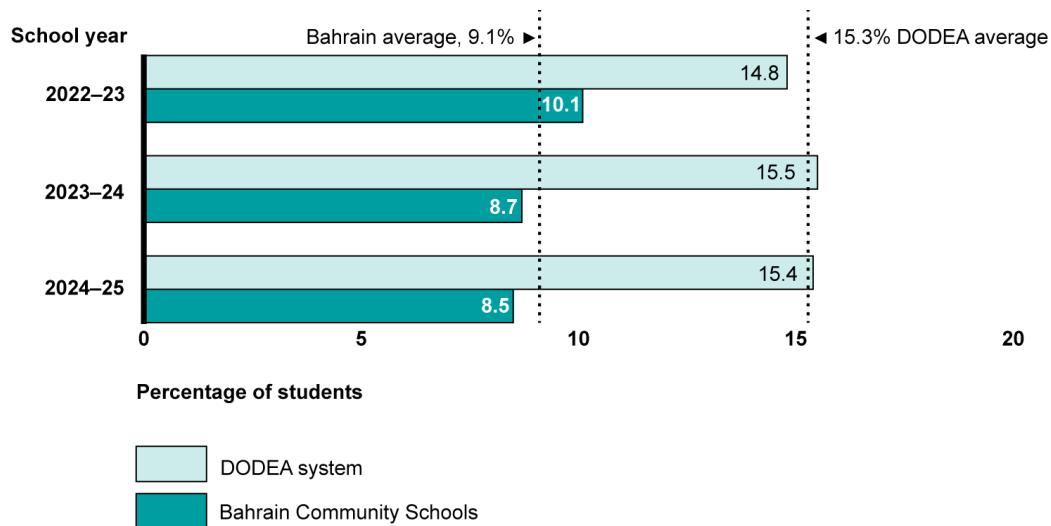
## **What special education services have the Bahrain Community Schools provided?**

While DOD classified the Bahrain Community Schools as offering only specific special education services as of the 2024–25 school year, DOD policy also requires all DODEA schools to provide all eligible students with a free appropriate public education.<sup>13</sup> As a result, at times, the Bahrain Community Schools have served students whose special education needs exceeded the school's designated capabilities.

On average, about 9 percent of students (or about 50 students) in the Bahrain Community Schools received special education services over the 3 most recent completed school years, lower than DODEA's average rate of about 15 percent

(see fig. 6). While many students received services for disabilities that fell within DOD's approved list of services for the Bahrain Community Schools—such as specific learning disabilities, speech or language impairment, and hearing impairment—others did not. Specifically, on average, 37 percent of students had disabilities beyond those the schools were designated to serve. Those disabilities included autism, developmental delay, emotional impairment, and intellectual disabilities.

**Figure 6: Percent of Students Receiving Special Education Services in DODEA and DODEA's Bahrain Community Schools (school years 2022–23 through 2024–25)**



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA) special education enrollment data. | GAO-26-108077

**Accessible Data for Figure 6: Percent of Students Receiving Special Education Services in DODEA and DODEA's Bahrain Community Schools (school years 2022–23 through 2024–25)**

School year	Percentage of students: DODEA system	Percentage of students: DODEA average	Percentage of students: Bahrain Community Schools	Percentage of students: Bahrain average
2022–23	14.8	15.3	10.1	9.1
2023–24	15.5	15.3	8.7	9.1
2024–25	15.4	15.3	8.5	9.1

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA) special education enrollment data. | GAO-26-108077

School leaders, teachers, and student support staff across both schools said they were committed to providing every student with a high-quality education, including those eligible for special education. School leaders told us they hired additional special education staff to help ensure that children with disabilities received these services. For example, Bahrain Elementary School had embedded a part-time emotional impairment teacher in the school's new preschool program to support children with difficult-to-manage behaviors. It had also created a self-contained classroom focused on functional living and daily skills for students with more severe disabilities. School leaders and staff told us they also relied on district special education content specialists for guidance on how best to support students receiving special education and who required supports outside of the staff's scope of expertise.

Parents of children with special needs who participated in our parent discussion groups told us they were grateful for the support their children received at the Bahrain Community Schools. Two parents told us they returned to Bahrain after moving elsewhere because they trusted school staff to support their child and help them grow. One parent noted that the special education services her child received helped her improve so much that she was later able to take AP courses with minimal support. And while some students arrived at the Bahrain Community Schools with moderate or severe disabilities, school leaders told us most

students were studying the general curriculum, for which teachers and aides provided individualized support.

However, some school staff and parents expressed concern about the impact of accommodating students with disabilities the schools were not equipped to handle.<sup>14</sup> Special education staff at the elementary school told us some students had severe intellectual and emotional disabilities that required expertise the school did not have. These staff said they did everything possible to accommodate the students' needs, sometimes at the expense of other students. Special education staff also noted that other assigned duties—like serving as recess and lunch monitors—took time away from students who needed their support.

Adding to these frustrations, school, district, and installation leaders told us that some military and civilian families did not disclose their child's disability in advance of their arrival in Bahrain.<sup>15</sup> DOD policy requires military families to disclose special education needs before moving to a new duty station. Civilians are encouraged to disclose dependent needs but are not required to do so. This policy is implemented through DOD's Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) and is meant to ensure that families are not assigned to duty stations that lack appropriate support for family members with exceptional medical or educational needs.<sup>16</sup>

The installation's commander and school liaison officer acknowledged this issue and told us they were developing procedures to solicit additional information from families about their educational needs before their arrival in Bahrain. They told us they planned to use this information to more thoroughly screen families and better ensure that their educational needs aligned with the Bahrain Community Schools' capabilities. These steps were being taken in consultation with the schools' special education teams and the installation medical team, with an aim to be completed by June 2026, according to the school liaison officer.

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## Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this report to the Department of Defense for review and comment. In its written response, which is reproduced in appendix I, the Department of Defense stated that it reviewed the report for technical accuracy and had no comments on the report.

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## How GAO Did This Study

We analyzed DODEA's data on student enrollment, AP course offerings, staff levels, and special education enrollment for school years 2022–23 through 2024–25, the most recently completed school years at the time of our review. We assessed the reliability of these data by interviewing DOD officials, reviewing relevant documentation, and reviewing the data for obvious errors, outliers, and missing information. We determined that these data were sufficiently reliable for our purposes.

We interviewed DODEA officials in headquarters and the Europe South District and visited the Bahrain Community Schools in person. We interviewed the Bahrain Community Schools' leaders (principals and assistant principal), student support staff (school psychologists and school counselors), and special education staff. We conducted a total of four discussion groups: two with over 40 teachers total and two with about 50 parents total. We obtained perspectives on the administration of the elementary and middle high schools, including staffing levels, facilities, advanced academic opportunities, extracurricular activities, communication, and special education services. Finally, we met with leadership

and representatives from the NSA Bahrain installation and the American embassy in Bahrain. We also reviewed relevant agency policies and procedures.

We conducted this performance audit from January 2025 to December 2025 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

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## **List of Addressees**

The Honorable Roger Wicker  
Chairman  
The Honorable Jack Reed  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Armed Services  
United States Senate

The Honorable Mike Rogers  
Chairman  
The Honorable Adam Smith  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Armed Services  
House of Representatives

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees, the Secretary of Defense, and other interested parties. In addition, the report will be available at no charge on the GAO website at <https://www.gao.gov>.

## Appendix I: Comments from the Department of Defense



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE EDUCATION ACTIVITY  
HEADQUARTERS  
4800 MARK CENTER DRIVE  
ALEXANDRIA, VA 22350-1400

DEC 8 2025

Ms. Jacqueline M. Nowicki  
Director, Education, Workforce, and Income Security Issues  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street, NW  
Washington DC 20548

Dear Ms. Nowicki,

This is the Department of War response to the GAO Draft Report, GAO-26-108077, 'K-12 EDUCATION: Administration of DoD Schools in Bahrain,' dated September 25, 2025 (GAO Code 108077).

DoDEA has reviewed the report for technical accuracy and has no comments regarding the draft report. The point of contact regarding this matter is the DoDEA Europe Chief of Staff.

Sincerely,

Beth Schiavino-Narvaez, Ed.D.  
Director

**Accessible Text for Appendix I: Comments from the Department of Defense**

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE EDUCATION ACTIVITY  
HEADQUARTERS  
4800 MARK CENTER DRIVE  
ALEXANDRIA, VA 22350-1400

DEC 8 2025

Ms. Jacqueline M. Nowicki  
Director, Education, Workforce, and Income Security Issues  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street, NW  
Washington DC 20548

Dear Ms. Nowicki,

This is the Department of War response to the GAO Draft Report, GAO-26-108077, 'K-12 EDUCATION: Administration of DoD Schools in Bahrain" dated September 25, 2025 (GAO Code 108077).

DoDEA has reviewed the report for technical accuracy and has no comments regarding the draft report. The point of contact regarding this matter is the DoDEA Europe Chief of Staff.

Sincerely,

Beth Schiavino-Narvaez, Ed.D.  
Director

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## GAO Contact Information

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**Staff Acknowledgments:** Ellen Phelps Ranen (Assistant Director), Manuel Valverde (Analyst in Charge), Vincent Ballon, Elizabeth Calderon, Jeanine Navarrete, Mimi Nguyen, Jessica Orr, James Reynolds, Jerry Sandau, and Rebecca Sero.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>DODEA's other regions are the Americas with 50 schools and the Pacific with 46 schools.

<sup>2</sup>According to DODEA officials, students in this category have included Americans who work in the Gulf Region (e.g., Saudi Arabia and Kuwait) and other foreign nationals (e.g., Canadians, Bahrainis, and Australians). Installation leaders also said that prominent members of Bahraini civil society and the royal family have also attended these schools.

<sup>3</sup>Since 1978, BISA has managed the operation of the Bahrain Community Schools grounds and facilities. BISA's objectives are exclusively educational and charitable, and no profits are allowed from the operation of the school or from its property. BISA owns and operates a 120-bed dormitory on the grounds for grades 9–12 students whose parents do not reside in Bahrain. BISA is not affiliated with any other schools in Bahrain.

<sup>4</sup>According to a DODEA district official, Naples Community Schools are the only other schools in the DODEA system with leased facilities and grounds.

<sup>5</sup>Under the current 10-year lease, which runs through 2034, BISA is responsible for all structural repairs, replacements, additions, and utility systems. The Navy and DODEA are responsible for all utility payments, day-to-day maintenance, and custodial services. All three parties must agree on any major alterations and determine who will be financially responsible for subsequent maintenance. BISA is not to make alterations to the buildings without DODEA's approval and oversight.

<sup>6</sup>Prior to DOD's civilian travel freeze in March 2025, the facilities specialist said he visited Bahrain two to three times a year or when an emergency occurred. For example, he traveled to Bahrain in 2024 when the schools experienced significant flooding and water damage to coordinate DODEA, the Navy, and BISA's response.

<sup>7</sup>The Advanced Placement Program (AP), owned and managed by the College Board, offers an opportunity for students to pursue college-level studies while still in high school. Most 4-year colleges and universities in the United States grant students credit, placement, or both for qualifying AP exam scores. Bahrain students also have access to dual-enrollment courses that provide both high school and college credits.

<sup>8</sup>Bahrain Middle High School phased out the International Baccalaureate (IB) program in 2023, due to declining enrollment. According to school leaders, the program's multi-year requirements were difficult to complete for highly mobile military connected students. Further, Bahrain was the only DODEA school to offer the IB program, so the curriculum was not translatable to other DODEA schools. The IB program is a 2-year college preparatory program with an international focus. To earn an IB diploma, students must take a liberal arts course of studies and pass examinations in six academic subjects, among other academic requirements.

<sup>9</sup>DODEA's other hardship locations are Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and Ankara, Turkey. In Bahrain, school leaders described recruiting challenges including perceptions of the Middle East as unsafe and the difficulty and expense of traveling to the United States. A school leader told us they used the interview process as an opportunity to address concerns from job candidates about quality of life in Bahrain.

<sup>10</sup>For overseas positions that are not designated "hard to fill," DODEA first generates a candidate list of local candidates who are interested in a new position through DODEA's Employment Application System. If no selection from this list is made, then a referral list of qualified internal DODEA applicants and the top 50 external applicants is shared with the position's hiring manager for consideration. According to DODEA, most vacancies are filled at this point in the recruitment process.

<sup>11</sup>DODEA headquarters officials told us they select teachers for reassignment based on years of service in DODEA and subject to the availability of open positions in other overseas DODEA locations.

<sup>12</sup>Permanent full-time employees include school administrators, teachers, substitutes, and other school support positions.

<sup>13</sup>Free appropriate public education includes special education and related services provided under the general supervision and direction of DODEA, at no cost to parents of a child with a disability, as designated in a child's individualized education program and in accordance with the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and DOD policy. DOD uses three "service levels," grouped by disability category, to distinguish the differences in special education and related services available to students with disabilities in overseas DODEA schools. The Bahrain Community Schools are categorized as Level 1 for hearing and visual impairment special education. Level 1 includes children who work independently with accommodations and minimal instructional adaptations and oversight. The Bahrain Community Schools are also categorized as Level 2 for speech or language impairments and specific learning disabilities special education. Level 2 includes children who receive specific or targeted accommodations and moderate instructional adaptations and oversight. For more information, see: *Department of Defense Directory for the Provision of Early Intervention Services, Special Education, and Related Services in OCONUS Communities for the Department of Defense Education Activity Schools and the Educational and Developmental Intervention Services Program* (Jan. 2025), <https://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/EFMP/OCONUS-Directory.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup>In April 2025, we reported on issues related to DODEA's provision of special education services, including how related services provided by the military branches for students in overseas locations—such as physical therapy—were often limited or unavailable, resulting in service delays or disruptions. Additionally, we reported that paraeducators said they received little to no onboarding training for special education. GAO made five recommendations, including that DODEA ensure crisis training is provided to special education paraeducators who work with students who may need behavioral supports. DOD partially concurred with this recommendation and noted ongoing efforts to expand its crisis training contract. As of July 2025, DOD had not taken further steps to fully address the recommendation. See GAO, *Special Education: Improved Allocation of Resources Could Help DOD Education Activity Better Meet Students' Needs*, GAO-25-107053 (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 17, 2025).

<sup>15</sup>According to the Bahrain Elementary School principal and Bahrain Middle High School special education staff, most students receiving special education services were military dependents. They stated that tuition-paying, space-available students were typically not admitted if they required special education services outside the scope of the school's resources.

<sup>16</sup>Enrollment in the EFMP is mandatory for active-duty service members who have dependent family members with medical or special educational needs. In 2018, GAO reported on DOD's EFMP program and made three recommendations to improve program oversight, including its oversight of how each service branch coordinates assignments for families with special needs. DOD agreed with these recommendations but had not yet fully implemented them as of July 2025. See GAO, *Military Personnel: DOD Should Improve Its Oversight of the Exceptional Family Member Program*, GAO-18-348 (Washington, D.C.: May 8, 2018).