

Why GAO Did This Study

Confucius Institutes, educational partnerships between entities in the People's Republic of China (PRC) and schools in the U.S. and other countries, offer Chinese language instruction, cultural programming, and funding for China-related research. Some officials have raised questions about Confucius Institutes, including their relationship to the PRC government, their sources of funding, and the potential for undue PRC influence or risks to national security.

GAO was asked to review the status of Confucius Institutes at U.S. schools. This report examines (1) factors schools cited for closing their Confucius Institutes; (2) steps schools reported taking to address potential concerns associated with Confucius Institutes or similar programs supported by foreign partnerships; and (3) how, if at all, schools that closed Confucius Institutes responded to any effects of the closure on resources and programming.

In January 2023, GAO conducted two surveys of almost 100 schools (1) with open Confucius Institutes and (2) that have closed their Confucius Institutes since 2019. GAO's survey covered topics such as the impact of the Confucius Institutes' closure, practices implemented to address risks and concerns, and other foreign partnerships. GAO reviewed guidance documents and written agreements. GAO also interviewed officials at the Departments of Defense, Education, Justice, and State; researchers; representatives from higher education associations; and 12 officials at schools with open or recently closed Confucius Institutes.

View [GAO-24-105981](#). For more information, contact Kimberly Gianopoulos at (202) 512-8612 or gianopoulosk@gao.gov.

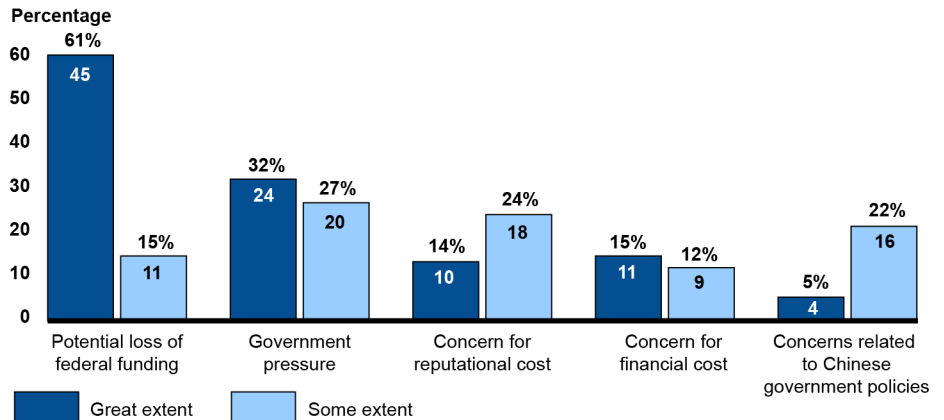
CHINA

With Nearly All U.S. Confucius Institutes Closed, Some Schools Sought Alternative Language Support

What GAO Found

The number of Confucius Institutes at U.S. universities and colleges declined since 2019, from about 100 to fewer than five. Schools most commonly cited the potential loss of federal funding and external pressures as contributing to their decision to close their Confucius Institute. More than 60 percent of the 74 respondents to GAO's survey stated that the potential loss of or ineligibility for federal funding, such as Department of Defense funding subject to limitations in the FY 2019 and FY 2021 National Defense Authorization Acts, contributed to "a great extent" to the institution's decision to close the Confucius Institute. Schools also cited pressure from U.S. government, congressional, or state representatives among other factors that contributed to their decision.

Contributing Factors Schools Reported for Decision to Close Confucius Institute



Source: GAO analysis of GAO survey of institutions with closed Confucius Institutes. | GAO-24-105981

Most survey respondents from both closed and open Confucius Institutes reported implementing a variety of practices to address potential concerns associated with hosting a Confucius Institute. Eleven respondents reported that, following the closure of their Confucius Institute, they continued to apply these practices to other foreign partnerships that fund Chinese language or academic programming. The two most commonly cited practices were (1) ensuring Confucius Institute foreign national staff had no decision-making authority on campus (97 percent) and (2) making the U.S. director of the Confucius Institute accountable to senior officials at the school (96 percent).

Some schools that closed Confucius Institutes reported using alternate sources of support to provide Chinese language and cultural programming. Many survey respondents stated that the closure of their Confucius Institute reduced opportunities for Chinese language learning and China-related cultural and academic programming, among others. Schools that closed their Confucius Institutes reported various other sources of support for Chinese language at their institutions, including the schools' academic departments (43 respondents) and U.S. government-sponsored language programs (16). Others reported receiving support, such as scholarships or joint degree programs, from Taiwanese entities (12) and the Chinese partner institution associated with the former Confucius Institute (9).