

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-20-308](#), a report to the Republican Leader, Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

American Indian and Alaska Native students enrolled in public schools have performed consistently below other students on national assessments from 2005-2019. The JOM program provides academic and cultural supports, through contracts, to meet the specialized and unique educational needs of American Indian and Alaska Native students enrolled in public schools and select private schools. In fiscal year 2019, Interior allocated about \$23 million for the JOM program, according to Interior's budget documentation.

GAO was asked to review issues related to Interior's JOM program, administered by BIE. This report examines the extent to which BIE (1) has key program information, (2) provides training to JOM contractors, and (3) clearly defines and identifies JOM roles and responsibilities. GAO reviewed relevant federal laws, regulations, and both BIE and JOM contractor documents; analyzed existing data and information on JOM; and interviewed agency officials, five JOM contractors of different types, and two nonprofit organizations selected for their knowledge of the JOM program.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making five recommendations, including that the Director of BIE should maintain an accurate and complete list of JOM contractors, develop JOM training, and clearly define roles and responsibilities and identify staff for carrying out JOM functions. Interior agreed with the recommendations.

View [GAO-20-308](#). For more information, contact Melissa Emrey-Arras at (617) 788-0534 or EmreyArrasM@gao.gov.

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BUREAU OF INDIAN EDUCATION

Actions Needed to Improve Management of a Supplemental Education Program

What GAO Found

The Department of the Interior's (Interior) Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) does not have key information to manage the Johnson-O'Malley (JOM) program which provides supplemental education services to meet the specialized and unique needs of American Indian and Alaska Native students. For example, BIE does not maintain a complete and accurate list of all its JOM contractors, who provide services including targeted academic supports, Native language classes, and cultural activities. In May 2019, BIE began to identify all the contractors, but officials acknowledged that their list is still incomplete, and GAO found problems with the list, such as duplicate entries. Federal internal control standards state that an agency should have relevant, reliable information to run its operations. Maintaining a complete list of contractors would improve BIE's administration of the JOM program.

BIE does not provide any training for JOM contractors. For example, BIE does not provide training to contractors on how to effectively manage their JOM programs or meet program requirements. By providing training for contractors, BIE could ensure that contractors understand the program and are equipped to provide services to meet the educational needs of their students.

In addition, BIE has not clearly defined the roles and responsibilities or identified the staff needed to effectively administer the JOM program (see figure). For example, when BIE closed a field office in California, staff were not identified to administer the office's contracts, including helping contractors renew their contracts when they expired. Also, BIE has not identified a role for Interior's attorneys in reviewing the contracts and some contractors have types of contracts for which they are not eligible. Further, BIE has not identified staff to conduct consistent program oversight, which is important to mitigating the risk of misuse and abuse of JOM funds. Until all JOM roles and responsibilities have been defined and identified, challenges may persist.

The Bureau of Indian Education Has Not Defined Roles and Responsibilities or Identified the Staff Necessary for Conducting Critical Johnson-O'Malley Functions, Such As:



Source: GAO analysis of agency documents related to the JOM program. | GAO-20-308