

### Why GAO Did This Study

Since the early 1990s, Congress has supplemented the Department of Education’s (Education) Impact Aid program by providing funds for the Department of Defense’s (DOD) Impact Aid program to compensate school districts with a high number of military dependent students. The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010 required GAO to review the use of these funds. GAO reviewed (1) what is known about the utilization and effectiveness of DOD Impact Aid funds, (2) the challenges faced by school districts in serving military dependent students, and (3) how DOD and Education have collaborated on their assistance. To address these issues, GAO conducted a Web-based survey of all 154 school districts that received DOD Impact Aid in any year from 2001 to 2009, with a response rate of 77 percent. GAO also interviewed officials from DOD and Education and seven school districts in five states, ranging in school district size, location, and percentage of military dependent students. The findings from these visits cannot be projected nationwide, but illustrate valuable perspectives.

### What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of Education determine whether to require school districts to report data on the academic outcomes of military dependent students, and if so, to determine the need for any additional legislative authority. Education agreed with GAO’s recommendation, and DOD provided oral concurrence.

View [GAO-11-231](#) or key components. For more information, contact George Scott at (202) 512-7215 or [scottg@gao.gov](mailto:scottg@gao.gov).

# EDUCATION OF MILITARY DEPENDENT STUDENTS

## Better Information Needed to Assess Student Performance

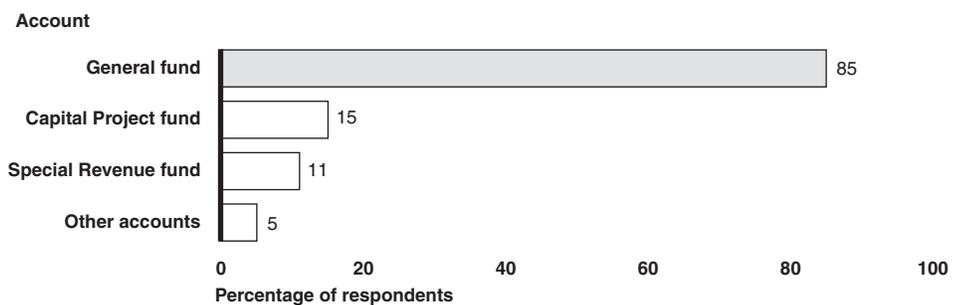
### What GAO Found

DOD Impact Aid has three distinct funding components, with more than three quarters of the funds provided through the DOD Impact Aid Supplemental program. Eighty five percent of the 87 responding school districts that received funds for the 2009–2010 school year reported placing these funds into their general fund to use for overall maintenance and operations. (See figure below.) Because there are no reporting requirements on districts’ use of the funding, it is difficult to assess how the funds are used and to what extent military dependent students benefit. Further, there are no data available on these students that could be used to assess their academic achievement or educational outcomes, or determine where funding needs are greatest. Such reporting requirements exist for certain other groups of students, such as economically disadvantaged students and students with disabilities. Federal agency officials acknowledged this need for information, and Education has begun discussing how to address this need.

School districts GAO contacted reported that issues related to the mobility of military dependent students and serving students with special needs were among the greatest challenges they faced in serving these students. Mobility increased academic needs due to differences in state and district curricula and behavioral and emotional issues in the classroom. To address challenges in serving military dependent students, school districts reported adopting a range of strategies, including additional counseling for students with a deployed parent and flexibility on academic requirements for newly transferred students.

Guided by a memorandum of understanding signed in 2008, DOD and Education have implemented practices that facilitate their collaboration to assist military dependent students, according to practices GAO has identified that enhance collaboration. For example, beginning in 2008, the departments completed eight joint site visits to high-growth military installations, which helped them advise school districts on preparation for an influx of military dependent students. To monitor these collaborative efforts, DOD and Education have developed a strategic plan that tracks their progress.

School District Allocation of DOD Impact Aid Supplemental Funds, 2009–2010 School Year



Source: GAO survey of school districts that received DOD Impact Aid Supplemental funds in any year from 2001 through 2009.

Note: School districts may place funds in more than one account.