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# Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-04-734](#), a report to congressional committees

## Why GAO Did This Study

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLBA) has focused national attention on improving the academic achievement of the nation's 48 million students by establishing a deadline—school year 2013-14—for public schools to ensure that all students are proficient in reading and math. Accordingly, states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico developed plans that set goals for increasing the numbers of students who attain proficiency on state tests each year, with all meeting goals by 2014. To provide information about states' efforts, GAO determined (1) what goals states established for student proficiency and their implications for whether schools will meet these goals; (2) what factors facilitated or impeded selected state and school district implementation efforts; and (3) how the Department of Education (Education) supported state efforts and approved state plans to meet student proficiency requirements.

## What GAO Recommends

We are recommending that the Secretary of Education delineate a written process and timeframes for states to meet conditions for full approval, develop a written plan with steps and timeframes so all states have approved standards and assessment systems by 2006, and further support states' efforts to gather accurate student data used to determine if goals have been met. Education disagreed with the first recommendation and agreed with the others. [www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-734](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-734).

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

# NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT

## Improvements Needed in Education's Process for Tracking States' Implementation of Key Provisions

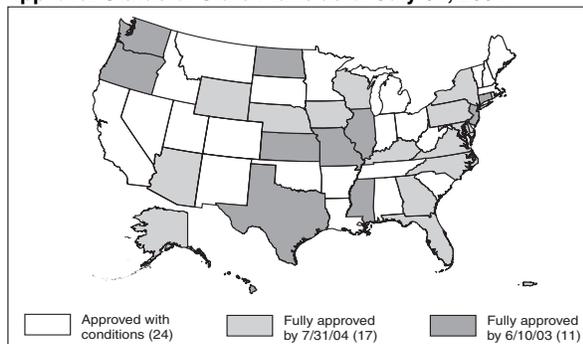
### What GAO Found

States varied in how they established proficiency goals and measured student progress, which is permitted by NCLBA so that states can address their unique circumstances. For example, states differed in the annual rates of progress they expected schools to make in order to have all of their students academically proficient by 2014 and in methods used to determine whether schools had met state goals. This variation in state approaches could affect how many schools meet their annual goals over time.

State and school district officials said that their leadership's commitment to improving student achievement and technical assistance provided by an Education contractor facilitated implementation of NCLBA requirements. However, tight timeframes for determining school progress and problems with student data impeded implementation. Measuring achievement with faulty data can lead to inaccurate information on schools meeting proficiency goals. Education is working on efforts to help states improve their data systems, such as monitoring state data quality policies.

Education assisted states in developing their plans for improving student proficiency and by June 10, 2003 approved, fully (11) or conditionally (41), all plans. As of July 31, 2004, Education had fully approved 28 states' plans without conditions; plans from 23 states and the District of Columbia were approved but contained conditions needed to implement NCLBA requirements. To help states, Education asked assessment experts to review all plans and provide states with on-site evaluations. Although Education officials said that they are continually monitoring states whose plans have conditions, the Department does not have a written process that delineates how and when each state will meet its conditions. In addition, by the school year (2005-06) NCLBA requires states to increase assessments. Education has developed guidance for its review and approval of states' expanded standards and assessments. However, it has not established a written plan that clearly identifies the steps required, interim goals, review schedules, and timelines. Without such written plans, states may be challenged to meet NCLBA system requirements by the 2005-06 deadline.

### Approval Status of State Plans as of July 31, 2004



Source: GAO analysis.