



Highlights of [GAO-05-469](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Defense (DOD) operates 59 elementary and secondary schools serving over a dozen military bases in the continental United States. Periodically, questions have been raised concerning the continuing need for such schools. In 2002, DOD commissioned the Donahue Institute of the University of Massachusetts to examine the potential for transferring these schools to local education agencies (LEAs). GAO's assessment focused on (1) the extent to which DOD has established a school closure policy and the effect such policies have on quality-of-life issues for servicemembers and their dependents; and (2) the transfer study, including the clarity of the basis for conclusions reached, the overall financial impact, and issues identified but not resolved by the study. GAO's report also identifies issues not addressed in the transfer study that could impact the future of DOD's domestic schools.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making recommendations to the Secretary of Defense to ensure DOD schools are properly accounted for in real property records and if a transfer decision is made, to undertake a more complete assessment of impending changes in U.S. basing levels and their impact on educational facility requirements to foster appropriate facility planning by DOD and/or LEAs. In commenting on a draft of this report, DOD concurred with GAO's recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-469.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Barry W. Holman at (202) 512-5581 or holmanb@gao.gov.

DOD SCHOOLS

Limitations in DOD-Sponsored Study on Transfer Alternatives Underscore Need for Additional Assessment

What GAO Found

Officials in the DOD Education Activity, which administers the DOD school program, said that neither DOD nor Department of Defense Education Activity has specific policy guidance related to closing domestic dependent elementary and secondary schools. While some expansion and contraction of the number of domestic schools operated by DOD occurred between the 1950s and early 1970s, relatively few have been closed or transferred since then, and most of those have been related to base closure activities. For affected military families, the retention of these schools is seen as an important quality-of-life issue.

The basis for the expert panel recommendations to transfer selected DOD schools to LEAs is difficult to ascertain. Specifically, it is often unclear how various analytical factors examined led to recommendations being made. For example, in one instance the panel recommended transfer of educational responsibilities to the neighboring LEA even though the LEA's per pupil costs were higher than DOD's and the LEA schools were cited as mostly "underperforming." Moreover, the study data indicate that DOD could incur an estimated \$125 million to repair and upgrade existing schools. Under the panel's recommendations, DOD would also have a continuing obligation to maintain the schools even after program transfers to the LEAs. Some long-term savings in operating costs could accrue to DOD, but many of these costs would need to be absorbed by LEAs or other federal programs. The transfer study also indicates that various legal restrictions in some states would need to be resolved. Finally, ownership of the schools DOD operates needs to be clarified in order to ensure that it is properly reflected in property records.

There are other factors, most not present when the transfer study began, that could further complicate school transfer decisions, including ongoing DOD plans to relocate about 70,000 military personnel and approximately 100,000 family members currently stationed overseas to bases in the United States within the next few years; Army efforts to reorganize its force structure, with the potential for increased numbers of personnel assigned to selected military bases in the United States; and the impact of the 2005 base realignment and closure round. Likewise, current DOD efforts to privatize housing on its military bases could also impact future requirements for schools serving military dependents. DOD has appropriately said that it is postponing decision making on the results of the transfer study until after base closure decisions are finalized later this year. However, the impact of troop redeployments and other force structure changes on schools has not yet been fully assessed. Given the expected increase of school age military dependents on various stateside military bases over the next few years, a clear decision on school transfer issues should be made after the results of the base closure process and overseas rebasing plans are known to ensure adequate planning for facilities by DOD and LEAs.