



Highlights of [GAO-08-70](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Science and Technology, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Many of our nation's military and civilian personnel depend on Department of Defense (DOD) schools to meet their children's educational needs. These schools provide a range of educational services including programs for students with disabilities and those who struggle to read, some of whom may have a condition referred to as dyslexia. To determine how DOD supports students with dyslexia and how it used \$3.2 million in funds designated to support them, GAO was asked to examine: (1) what professional development DOD provides its staff to support students with dyslexia and how the fiscal year 2004-to-2006 funds designated for this purpose were used, (2) what identification and instructional services DOD provides to students who may have dyslexia, and (3) how DOD assesses the academic achievement of students with disabilities, including dyslexia. To address these objectives, GAO conducted a survey of all school principals and interviewed agency officials, school personnel, and parents in six school districts.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends DOD improve accountability for the academic achievement of students with disabilities, including certain students who may have dyslexia, by publishing separate data on their performance. In commenting on a draft of this report, DOD concurred with the recommendation.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-70](#). For more information, contact Cornelia Ashby, (202) 512-7215, or ashbyc@gao.gov.

DOD SCHOOLS

Additional Reporting Could Improve Accountability for Academic Achievement of Students with Dyslexia

What GAO Found

DOD provides a mix of online and classroom training to teachers who work with students who struggle to read, and DOD used 2004-to-2006 funds designated for professional development on dyslexia, in particular, to supplement these efforts. Most of the online and classroom professional development prepares teachers and specialists to assess student literacy and provides them with strategies to teach students who have particular difficulties. For the 2004-to-2006 funding for professional development on dyslexia, DOD supplemented its existing training with online courses that include specific modules on dyslexia and tools to assess students' literacy skills.

DOD identifies students who struggle to read—some of who may have dyslexia—through standardized tests and provides them with supplemental reading instruction. DOD uses standardized tests to screen its students and identify those who need additional reading instruction, but these schools do not generally label them as dyslexic. To teach students they identify as struggling readers, DOD schools primarily employ an intensive multimedia reading program that is highly regarded by the principals, teachers, and parents GAO interviewed. Those students whose performance does not improve through their enrollment in supplemental reading programs or who have profound reading difficulties may be eligible to receive special education services. DOD is subject to many of the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 on the education of students with disabilities. Students with dyslexia may qualify for these services, but they must meet program eligibility requirements.

DOD uses the same standardized tests it uses for all students to assess the academic achievement of students with disabilities, including those who may have dyslexia, but does not report specifically on the outcomes for students with disabilities. A primary goal of DOD's strategic plan is for all students to meet or exceed challenging academic standards. To measure progress towards this goal, DOD assesses all students' academic achievement and school performance by comparing test scores to a national norm or to a national proficiency level. Overall, students perform well in reading compared to U.S. public school students. DOD disaggregates test scores for students with disabilities but does not report such information publicly. In contrast, U.S. public school systems under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 must report such data. Without this information, it is difficult for parents, policy makers, and others to measure the academic achievement of students with disabilities relative to all other students in the DOD school system.