

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-13-852T](#), a report to the Committee on Education and the Workforce, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The federal government has a longstanding role in conducting education research and collecting related data. The Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 established IES as Education's primary research and evaluation arm. With a budget of just under \$600 million in fiscal year 2013, IES has a broad mission to provide its research, evaluations, and statistics to a wide variety of stakeholders, including researchers, parents, educators, and the general public.

This testimony reports on ongoing GAO work about IES. A full report will be issued later this year. Based on preliminary findings, this testimony will focus on: (1) the extent to which IES supports high-quality research and fulfills its mission, (2) the extent to which selected Education research and technical assistance groups disseminate relevant products to the education field, and (3) IES's coordination within Education and with other federal agencies.

For this work, GAO reviewed agency documents and relevant federal legislation, interviewed agency officials and stakeholders, and analyzed information from selected research and technical assistance groups. GAO also compared IES's practices to established guidelines for internal controls and effective program management and performance reporting.

View [GAO-13-852T](#). For more information, contact George A. Scott at (202) 512-7215 or scottg@gao.gov.

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EDUCATION RESEARCH

Preliminary Observations on the Institute of Education Sciences' Research and Evaluation Efforts

What GAO Found

The Institute of Education Sciences (IES) supports high-quality research, according to stakeholders, but lacks certain key procedures needed to fulfill other aspects of its mission. Since its inception, IES has substantially improved the quality of education research. However, stakeholders expressed some concerns about IES's ability to produce timely and relevant research that meets their various needs. For example, IES's efforts to respond quickly to its stakeholders are slowed, in part, because the time IES's products have spent in peer review substantially increased this past year, and IES does not monitor some aspects of these timeframes. In addition, IES does not have a structured process for incorporating stakeholder input into its research agenda, which previous GAO work has shown to be key to sound federal research programs. Lastly, IES's performance measures do not fully reflect its current programs, which is not consistent with GAO's leading practices for performance management. IES officials said, however, that they have begun to develop new performance measures for all of their programs.

Although the Department of Education's (Education) research and technical assistance groups have taken steps to produce and disseminate relevant research to the field, IES does not always assess these efforts. Some stakeholders raised concerns about the relevance and dissemination of research and products from the Regional Educational Laboratories (REL) and Research and Development Centers (R & D Center). For example, they told us that these groups do not always adapt their products for use by both policymaker and practitioner audiences. Further, IES has not fully assessed REL and R & D Center relevance and dissemination efforts. As a result, IES does not know if these efforts are effective in meeting their mandated goal of providing usable research and information to policymakers and practitioners. GAO's prior work on information dissemination suggests that further assessment could help to inform IES's oversight of the RELs and R & D Centers to improve these groups' dissemination to key audiences.

IES works with federal education research agencies to increase the use of research evidence in federal decision-making, but according to officials, has limited ability to prioritize evaluations. IES and the National Science Foundation recently developed guidelines to help improve the quality of evidence resulting from federally-funded education research, which stakeholders said will benefit the education field. Within the department, IES plans evaluations of Education programs in concert with various other offices. However, Education officials said funding and program evaluation requirements prevent the agency from combining evaluation funds across programs, which limits their ability to conduct the evaluation projects they consider most important.