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# Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-04-909](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

To improve the academic achievement of the nation's 48 million school-aged children, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) introduced significant changes to state, district, and school accountability for student performance and teacher qualifications. Congress has raised concerns about difficulties rural districts face implementing NCLBA. GAO is providing NCLBA implementation information on (1) key challenges rural states and districts face, (2) strategies rural districts have developed, (3) expenditures and resources related to rural districts' compliance, and (4) guidance and assistance the Department of Education (Education) is providing.

To address these objectives, GAO conducted a nationally representative survey of rural and nonrural school districts. Also GAO interviewed officials in rural states and districts and Education officials.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that Education provide additional assistance on approaches small rural districts can use to address their unique challenges and support research on effective strategies to improve student performance in small rural districts through its new center. In Education's comments on a draft of this report, it provided information on its past and planned efforts but did not explicitly agree or disagree with our recommendations.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-909](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-909).

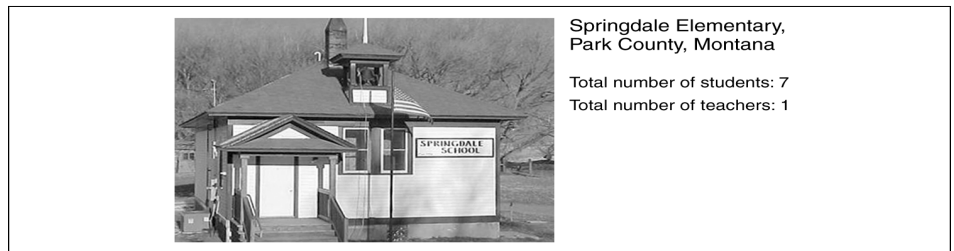
To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Marnie Shaul at (202) 512-7215 [shaulm@gao.gov](mailto:shaulm@gao.gov).

# NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT

## Additional Assistance and Research on Effective Strategies Would Help Small Rural Districts

### What GAO Found

Rural districts faced some challenges in meeting NCLBA provisions to a greater extent than nonrural districts. For example, rural district officials were more likely than nonrural district officials to report challenges presented by a large enrollment of economically disadvantaged students who may live in communities lacking resources such as libraries. Rural districts also identified small school size and geographic isolation as greatly affecting their ability to implement NCLBA. Rural officials we interviewed said that limited access to teacher training facilities and Internet line maintenance difficulties impeded NCLBA implementation efforts.



Source: Montana Office of Public Instruction.

Rural district officials reported using some strategies, such as training for teachers, to the same extent as nonrural respondents, to help meet student proficiency provisions and implement teacher qualification requirements of NCLBA. Rural districts were more likely to increase computer capacity than nonrural districts. However, small rural districts were less likely than other rural districts to report using certain strategies, such as teacher mentoring.

Rural state and district officials we interviewed identified some specific expenditures related to NCLBA, such as those related to analyzing assessment results and providing tutoring services to students. However, district officials were unable to determine total expenditures made to implement NCLBA, in part because their accounting records were not maintained in a way that tracked expenditures by NCLBA categories; states we contacted did not require districts to report separately on NCLBA expenditures. Besides state and local funds, officials reported using multiple federal programs to implement NCLBA, such as the Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP).

Since 2002, Education has provided NCLBA guidance and assistance to all states and districts, and since April 2003, it has focused on rural education issues by issuing new guidance, establishing a task force on rural issues, and awarded a grant in September 2004 for a rural education research center. However, rural officials indicated that further assistance would be helpful for small rural districts that are experiencing difficulties in providing teacher development opportunities and identifying effective remedial services to improve student achievement. Currently, research on the effectiveness of different strategies to improve student performance is limited.