

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-17-421](#), a report to the Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies, Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

Indian Affairs is responsible for ensuring safe and healthy learning environments for about 41,000 Indian students at 185 BIE schools. In March 2016, GAO identified numerous weaknesses with BIA's school inspections. GAO was asked to review Interior's oversight of BIA's safety program and inspections of BIE schools.

Among other issues, GAO examined the extent to which Interior has taken actions to address weaknesses with BIA's safety program, and the extent to which Indian Affairs monitors BIE school safety inspection reports and uses timeliness information to evaluate employee performance. GAO reviewed Interior's internal evaluations; a nongeneralizable sample of 50 randomly selected fiscal year 2016 BIE school inspection reports covering the nine BIA regions with inspection responsibilities for schools; BIA regional documentation of employee appraisals; and performance management practices in four BIA regions selected for geographic diversity and a range of safety inspection results.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making six recommendations to Interior, including to take steps to address previously identified weaknesses in BIA's safety program; establish processes to monitor the quality and timeliness of BIE school inspection reports; and use timeliness information to better assess employee performance. Interior agreed with all six recommendations and noted several actions it plans to take to address them.

View [GAO-17-421](#). For more information, contact Melissa Emrey-Arras at (617) 788-0534 or [emreyarrasm@gao.gov](mailto:emreyarrasm@gao.gov).

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## INDIAN AFFAIRS

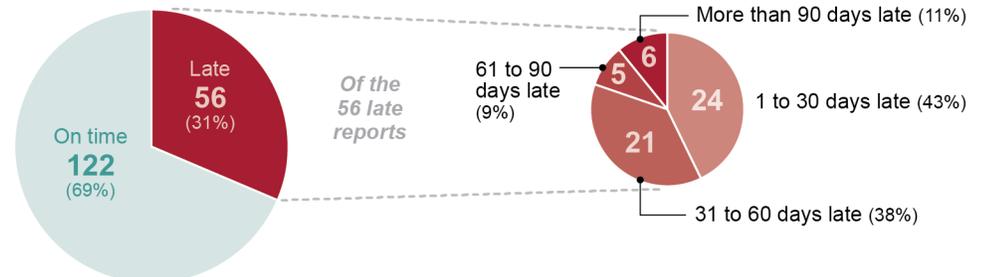
# Further Actions Needed to Improve Oversight and Accountability for School Safety Inspections

## What GAO Found

The Department of the Interior (Interior) and its Office of the Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs (Indian Affairs) have not taken actions to address identified weaknesses in the Bureau of Indian Affairs' (BIA) safety program, despite internal evaluations that have consistently found it to be failing. Specifically, Interior's internal evaluations conducted since 2011 identified major deficiencies in all areas of BIA's safety program, including safety management and safety inspections, which include Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools. However, GAO found that Interior and Indian Affairs have not taken actions to address these evaluation findings, such as developing and implementing a corrective action plan. Federal standards for internal control state that federal managers should address weaknesses by ensuring that corrective actions are promptly planned and taken. Unless steps are taken to address previously identified safety program weaknesses, the safety and health of students and staff at BIE schools may be at risk.

No Indian Affairs office routinely monitors the quality or timeliness of inspection reports, and BIA employees were not held accountable for late reports despite a new employee performance standard on timely report submission. While BIA completed safety inspections at all BIE schools in fiscal year 2016, GAO found that 28 of 50 inspection reports reviewed were incomplete, inaccurate, or unclear. For example, GAO identified reports in which inspectors did not inspect buildings or incorrectly gave school officials a year to fix broken fire alarms instead of the required 24 hours. GAO also found BIA inspectors submitted nearly a third of all reports after Indian Affairs' required 30 days, but no employee with safety program responsibilities was rated "minimally successful" or "unsatisfactory" as required by BIA's performance standards. Federal standards for internal control state that monitoring should be ongoing and assess effectiveness and that managers should hold employees accountable for performance. Until Indian Affairs monitors the quality and timeliness of school inspection reports and uses timeliness information to better manage safety employees' performance, the agency cannot ensure that BIE school officials receive the information they need to provide safe and healthy environments for students and staff.

**Number of School Safety Inspection Reports Submitted to Indian Affairs' Safety Office within 30 Days of the Inspection, Fiscal Year 2016**



Source: GAO analysis of Indian Affairs data. | GAO-17-421

Note: There are 185 BIE schools located at 178 locations across the country. Some schools are co-located on the same campus, and Indian Affairs considers them a single location for inspection purposes.