

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-18-154](#), a report to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

Education has primary responsibility for administering many federal elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education programs. The agency plays a key role in supporting educational opportunities for students and managing federal student aid programs. GAO was asked to review trends in resources and achievement at Education. This report provides information on:

- the role of the federal government in education, including resources used for K-12 public education and higher education;
- trends in key indicators of K-12 student achievement and access to higher education; and
- Education's progress meeting its goals and objectives.

GAO analyzed publicly available Education data and information from other selected sources, such as federal budget data, the Common Core of Data, the National Assessment of Educational Progress, and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study. GAO analyzed trends from 1980 through 2016, or the most recent year available. GAO also analyzed Education's key goals and objectives related to K-12 student achievement and access to higher education, as reported in its strategic planning documents, from 1998 (when these documents were first required) through 2016 (the most recent available).

GAO is not making recommendations in this report. Education provided technical comments on a draft of this report, which we incorporated, as appropriate.

View [GAO-18-154](#). For more information, contact Jacqueline M. Nowicki at (617) 788-0580 or nowickij@gao.gov.

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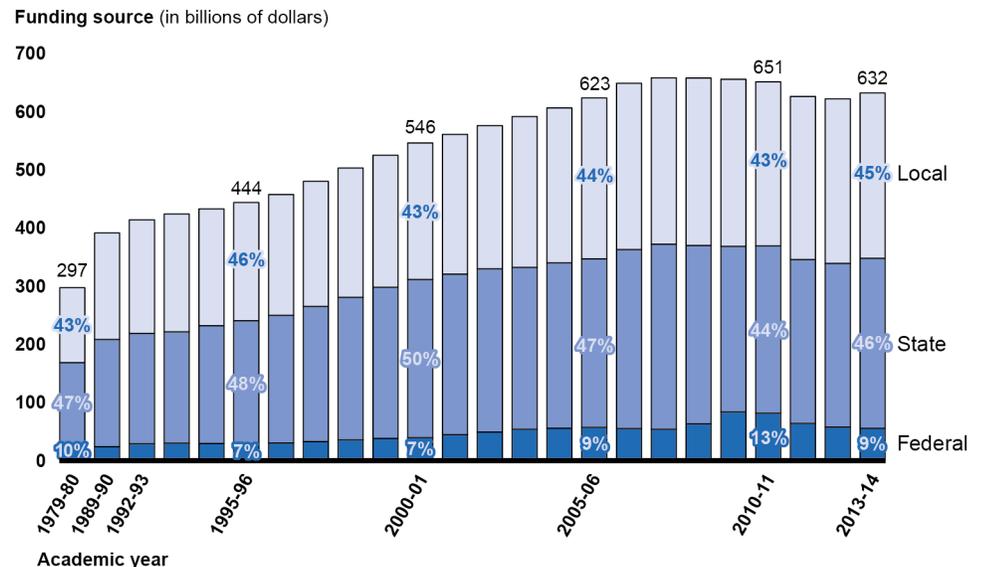
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Resource and Achievement Trends

What GAO Found

Since the Department of Education (Education) began operations in fiscal year 1980, its mission has included promoting student achievement and ensuring equal access to educational opportunity. To do so, Education partners with state and local governments, which provide most of the resources to school districts for K-12 programs. Federal funds accounted for 6 to 13 percent of the annual funding for public K-12 schools from 1980 to 2014, according to the most recent available data (see figure). Education also provides funds to help support higher education. In fiscal year 2016, Education provided \$30.8 billion for selected higher education federal grant and work study programs and was responsible for a portfolio of \$1.3 trillion in outstanding student loans.

Public Elementary and Secondary School Funding by Source, School Years 1980-2014



Source: GAO analysis of data from the Common Core of Data (CCD), as reported in the Digest of Education Statistics. | GAO-18-154

Trends in key indicators of K-12 student achievement have improved from 1980 through 2015, according to the most recent available data. Achievement gaps narrowed in reading and math between White and Black students and between White and Hispanic students. Regarding trends in key indicators for access to higher education, tuition, fees, and room and board also increased (after adjusting for inflation).

Since 1998, Education's strategic planning documents report meeting or exceeding about a quarter of its performance indicators for K-12 student achievement and more than a third of its indicators for access to higher education. From 1998 through 2016, Education reported, on average, meeting or exceeding 25 percent of its K-12 student achievement indicators and not meeting 29 percent. Education reported other outcomes, such as having had discontinued metrics, for, on average, 46 percent of K-12 student achievement indicators.