

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-25-108103](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, Committee on Natural Resources, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

BIE's mission is to provide a high-quality education to approximately 46,000 students at 183 elementary and secondary schools on or near reservations in 23 states. About two-thirds of these schools are operated by Tribes, while the remaining third are operated by BIE.

Over the past 12 years, GAO has identified a pattern of problems in BIE's support and oversight of schools. Because of the persistence of these problems, GAO added BIE's school management to its High-Risk List in 2017.

This testimony describes (1) problems GAO has identified at BIE, (2) progress BIE has made in recent years, and (3) the high-risk management weaknesses that remain. It draws on GAO's reports and testimonies on BIE since 2013. For these prior reports, GAO reviewed relevant federal laws and regulations, examined agency documentation, interviewed agency officials, and conducted site visits to selected BIE schools, among other methods.

This testimony also includes new information on BIE's progress in addressing high-risk management weaknesses since GAO's most recent high-risk update in 2023. This new information is based on GAO's review of agency documentation and interviews with agency officials.

View [GAO-25-108103](#). For more information, contact Melissa Emrey-Arras at (202) 512-7215 or emreyarrasm@gao.gov.

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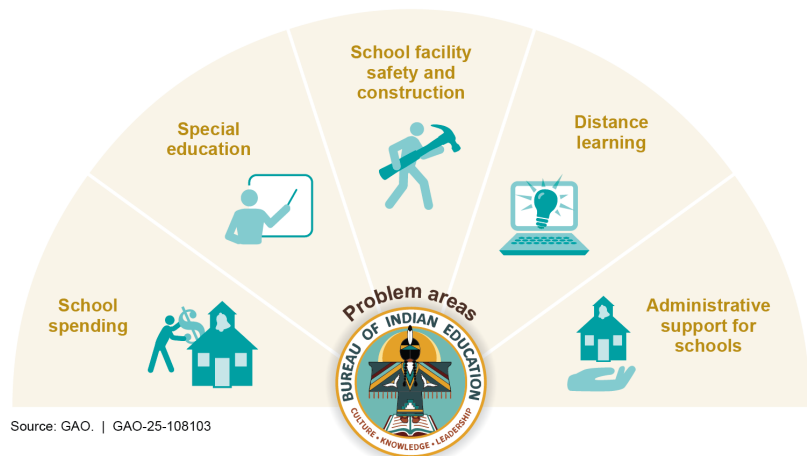
BUREAU OF INDIAN EDUCATION

Greater Progress Needed to Address Remaining Challenges in Supporting and Overseeing Schools

What GAO Found

GAO has identified and reported on numerous problems since 2013 at the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), within the Department of the Interior (Interior). During this period, GAO issued 24 reports and testimonies and made 38 recommendations to BIE related to the agency's support and oversight of schools. Key problem areas with BIE's support and oversight have been school spending, special education, school safety and construction, distance learning, and administrative support for schools. For example, in 2024 GAO found that nearly half of COVID-19 spending made with purchase cards at BIE schools involved transactions at elevated risk for fraud or misuse, but BIE did not provide evidence that it had investigated any of these purchases. GAO's repeated findings of problems in key areas have indicated a pattern of systemic management weaknesses at BIE that limit its support and oversight of schools.

Key Problem Areas in the Bureau of Indian Education's School Support and Oversight Identified in GAO Reports and Testimonies Since 2013



BIE has taken commendable steps in recent years to address many of these problems. BIE and related Interior offices have implemented 28 of the 38 recommendations GAO made since 2013, including all recommendations on school safety and construction. Ten recommendations on support and oversight of special education, distance learning, and school spending remain open. In addition, BIE has fully met two of GAO's five criteria for addressing high-risk management weaknesses. Specifically, it demonstrated strong and sustained leadership commitment to addressing its weaknesses and developed action plans that define sound approaches to following through on corrective measures.

BIE continues to face persistent management weaknesses in three areas: building staff capacity for supporting and overseeing schools, monitoring corrective measures, and demonstrating sustained progress in resolving high-risk issues. Remaining focused on resolving these underlying issues is essential for BIE to effectively fulfill its mission of providing high-quality education opportunities for American Indian students.