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United States Government Accountability Office
Washington, DC 20548

October 28, 2005

The Honorable Edward M. Kennedy
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Health, Education,
Labor, and Pensions
United States Senate

Subject: National Assessment of Educational Progress Exclusion Rates for Students with Disabilities

Dear Senator Kennedy:

In July 2005, we issued a report entitled *No Child Left Behind Act: Most Students with Disabilities Participated in Statewide Assessments, but Inclusion Options Could Be Improved* (GAO-05-618) in response to your request for information about inclusion of students with disabilities in the statewide assessments. We found that most states were including these students in the assessments. In addition, we reviewed the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) data to determine the extent to which students with disabilities were included in this assessment. Also called “The Nation’s Report Card,” the NAEP has been used to track trends in student achievement over time or to compare student performance in a particular state with the national average. With the assistance of Department of Education (Education) officials, we interpreted that in 2002 five percent of students with disabilities were excluded from the NAEP reading assessment.

Two months after the report’s issuance, Education provided us with new information regarding how the NAEP data concerning the exclusion of students with disabilities should be interpreted. In reviewing this information, we determined that the exclusion rate for students with disabilities was much higher than previously reported, with about 40 percent of the students with disabilities who were part of the 2002 NAEP reading assessment sample excluded from the actual testing. In addition, the percentages of students with disabilities who were excluded from the testing varied by grade. For example:

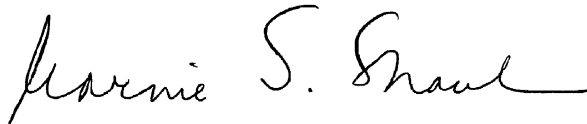
- 40 percent of students with disabilities were excluded from the grade 4 assessment,
- 37 percent of students with disabilities were excluded from the grade 8 assessment, and
- 43 percent of students with disabilities were excluded from the grade 12 assessment.

This high exclusion rate underscores the importance of the recommendation in our report that NAEP explore strategies to reduce the number of students with disabilities who are excluded from the assessment. Education indicated in its comment letter that it intends to do a better job of including all students in the assessment.

We provided a draft of this correspondence to Education for review. Education officials provided technical comments that we incorporated into the correspondence as appropriate.

For information on the inclusion of students with disabilities in statewide assessments and NAEP, go to <http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-618> or call me at (202) 512-7215.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marnie S. Shaul". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "M".

Marnie S. Shaul
Director, Education, Workforce,
and Income Security Issues