

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-19-448](#), a report to the Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

The U.S. government has funded education assistance to Palestinians. The State Department oversees U.S. contributions to UNRWA, and USAID provides assistance to Palestinian Authority schools. UNRWA generally administers schools for Palestine refugees. The Palestinian Authority generally administers schools for non-refugee Palestinians who live in the West Bank. During the 2016-2017 school year, it issued new pilot textbooks for grades 1 through 4 for use in both its and UNRWA's schools. GAO was asked to review issues related to U.S. education assistance to the West Bank.

This report examines (1) the funding the U.S. government provided for education assistance to the West Bank for fiscal years 2015 through 2017, (2) how UNRWA and State have identified and addressed potentially problematic content in textbooks, and (3) whether State has submitted required annual reports to Congress including information on educational materials used in UNRWA schools. To address these objectives, GAO reviewed documents and interviewed U.S. government, UNRWA, and Palestinian Authority officials. For this report, GAO refers to potentially problematic content as that which State defined as inappropriate and that UNRWA defined as not aligned with UN values.

What GAO Recommends

GAO made four recommendations in our April 2018 report that State improve its reports to Congress, including to ensure the information presented is accurate and to provide additional information on the textbook content UNRWA identified as not aligned with UN values. State implemented all of GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-19-448](#). For more information, contact Thomas Melito at (202) 512-9601 or melitot@gao.gov.

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WEST BANK AND GAZA

State Has Taken Actions to Address Potentially Problematic Textbook Content but Should Improve Its Reporting to Congress

What GAO Found

The U.S. government funded an estimated \$243 million for education assistance in the West Bank and Gaza (WBG) for fiscal years 2015 through 2017, including an estimated \$193 million from the Department of State (State) and about \$50 million from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Of State's contribution of approximately \$193 million, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) estimated that about \$187 million was provided for its education assistance. State provided the remaining approximately \$6 million for non-UNRWA education projects. UNRWA purchased English language textbooks used in UNRWA schools with funds that consist of contributions from donor countries, including the United States. The U.S. government and UNRWA did not fund textbooks published by the Palestinian Authority because the Palestinian Authority provided these textbooks free of charge, according to agency officials.

UNRWA and State have taken steps to identify and address potentially problematic content of textbooks used in UNRWA schools, such as maps that exclude Israel. UNRWA reviewed textbooks, including English language textbooks, and took actions to address content it deemed as not aligned with UN values. For example, UNRWA created complementary teaching materials, such as alternate photos, examples, and guidance for teachers to use with the textbooks in UNRWA schools. However, due to financial shortfalls and other constraints, UNRWA officials told GAO that UNRWA did not train teachers or distribute the complementary teaching materials to classrooms. As a result, these materials were not used in UNRWA classrooms. To address textbook content deemed problematic, State examined nongovernmental organizations' studies, encouraged Palestinian Authority officials to address the issue, and monitored UNRWA's efforts.

The annual appropriations acts for fiscal years 2015 through 2017 require State to report to Congress on several topics, including steps UNRWA has taken to ensure that the content of all educational materials taught in UNRWA schools is consistent with the values of human rights, dignity, and tolerance, and do not induce incitement. Although State submitted its required reports to Congress on time, State included inaccurate information in the 2017 report and omitted potentially useful information in all three reports. In its 2017 report, State noted incorrectly that UNRWA had completed training teachers and distributed complementary teaching materials to address textbook content that UNRWA deemed as not complying with UN values. In all three of the reports, State omitted information concerning whether UNRWA found that any educational materials used in its schools do not comply with two of four elements, dignity and not inducing incitement. *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government* states that management should use quality information to achieve the entity's objectives and communicate it in a way that is useful to users. Without a fuller explanation, Congress may not have the information it needs to oversee efforts to identify and address potentially problematic textbook content.

This is a public version of a classified report that GAO issued in April 2018. Information that State deemed classified has been omitted from this report.