

States are increasingly struggling to meet their obligations under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, with federal officials labeling a growing number of states as deficient multiple years in a row.

The U.S. Department of Education says that the performance of only 20 states “meets requirements” for serving students with disabilities ages 3 to 21 under federal special education law. The agency deemed all other states as “needs assistance,” with most having earned that label for at least two years in a row.

Under IDEA, the Education Department is required to assess how well each state provides special education services annually and assign it to one of four categories: meets requirements, needs assistance, needs intervention and needs substantial intervention.

The documents released this month are based on a review of the 2022-2023 school year.

Among states that were found to need assistance, 25 and Washington, D.C. have received the designation for two or more years consecutively, the Education Department said. That’s three more states than last year.

Failing to achieve the status of “meets requirements” for multiple years is significant. Under the law, the Education Department must take enforcement action, which can include requiring the state to access technical assistance or directing funds to the areas deemed inadequate, among other things.

No states were labeled “needs intervention” or “needs substantial intervention.”

The states that did satisfy the “meets requirements” standard were Alabama, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin and Wyoming.

A separate evaluation of programs serving infants and toddlers with disabilities through age 2 designated 29 states as “meets requirements.” Two states were labeled “needs intervention” and the remaining ones were placed in the “needs assistance” category.

The Education Department said that it will release more detailed information about each state’s performance in August.