



TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMS

Activities Underway to Improve Teacher Training, but Information Collected to Assess Accountability Has Limitations

Highlights of GAO-03-197T, a testimony before the Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness, Committee on Education and the Workforce, U.S. House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

In 1998, the Congress amended the Higher Education Act (HEA) to enhance the quality of teaching in the classroom by improving training programs for prospective teachers and the qualifications of current teachers. This testimony focuses on two components of the legislation: one that provides grants and another, called the “accountability provisions,” that requires collecting and reporting information on the quality of all teacher training programs and qualifications of current teachers. The Subcommittee asked that we provide information on (1) activities grantees supported and what results are associated with these activities and (2) whether the information collected under the accountability provisions provides the basis to assess the quality of teacher training programs and the qualifications of current teachers.

What GAO Found

Education has approved or awarded 123 grants to states and partnerships totaling over \$460 million dollars. Grantees have used funds for activities they believe will improve teaching in their locality or state, but it is too early to determine the grants’ effects on the quality of teaching in the classroom. While the law allows many activities to be funded under broad program goals outlined in the legislation, most grantees have focused their efforts on reforming requirements for teachers, providing professional development to current teachers, and recruiting new teachers. However, within these general areas, grantees’ efforts vary.



Early exposure to teaching is a recruitment strategy used by several grantees.

The information collected as part of the accountability provisions to report on the quality of teacher training programs and the qualifications of current teachers has limitations. The accountability provisions require that all institutions that train teachers who receive federal student financial aid provide information to their states on their teacher training programs and program graduates. In order to facilitate the collection of this information, the HEA required Education to develop definitions for terms and uniform reporting methods. Education officials told us that they made significant efforts to define these terms so that the terms incorporated the uniqueness of teacher training programs, state reporting procedures, and data availability. In doing so, Education defined some terms broadly. Education officials told us that this gave states and institutions discretion to interpret some terms as they wished—resulting in the collection and reporting of information that was not uniform; making it difficult to assess accountability.

Our nation’s teachers are inextricably linked to student achievement. This bond highlights the importance of teacher preparation programs. The grants and accountability provisions established by the HEA seek to improve teacher training, but information collected to assess accountability has limitations.