



Highlights of [GAO-07-861T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Higher Education, Lifelong Learning, and Competitiveness, Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Teachers are the single largest resource in our nation's elementary and secondary education system. However, according to recent research, many teachers lack competency in the subjects they teach. In addition, research shows that most teacher training programs leave new teachers feeling unprepared for the classroom.

While the hiring and training of teachers is primarily the responsibility of state and local governments and institutions of higher education, the federal investment in enhancing teacher quality is substantial and growing. In 1998, the Congress amended the Higher Education Act (HEA) to enhance the quality of teaching in the classroom and in 2001 the Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA), which established federal requirements that all teachers of core academic subjects be highly qualified.

This testimony focuses on (1) approaches used in teacher quality programs under HEA and NCLBA, (2) the allowable activities under these acts and how recipients are using the funds, and (3) how Education supports and evaluates these activities.

This testimony is based on prior GAO reports. We updated information where appropriate.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-861T.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact George Scott, (202) 512-5932, scottg@gao.gov.

TEACHER QUALITY

Approaches, Implementation, and Evaluation of Key Federal Efforts

What GAO Found

While the overall goal of Title II in both HEA and NCLBA is to improve teacher quality, some of their specific approaches differ. For example, a major focus of HEA provisions is on the training of prospective teachers while NCLBA provisions focus more on improving teacher quality in the classroom and hiring highly qualified teachers. Both laws use reporting mechanisms to increase accountability; however, HEA focuses more on institutions of higher education while NCLBA focuses on schools and districts. In addition, HEA and NCLBA grants are funded differently, with HEA funds distributed through one-time competitive grants, while Title II under NCLBA provides funds annually to all states through a formula.

Both acts provide states, districts, or grantees with the flexibility to use funds for a broad range of activities to improve teacher quality, including many activities that are similar, such as professional development and recruitment. A difference is that NCLBA's Title II specifies that teachers can be hired to reduce class-size while HEA does not specifically mention class-size reduction. Districts chose to spend about one-half of their NCLBA Title II funds on class-size reduction in 2004-2005. On the other hand, professional development and recruitment efforts were the two broad areas where recipients used funds for similar activities, although the specific activities varied somewhat. Many HEA grantees we visited used their funds to fill teacher shortages in urban schools or recruit teachers from nontraditional sources, such as mid-career professionals. Districts we visited used NCLBA funds to provide bonuses, advertise open teaching positions, and attend recruitment events, among other activities.

Under both HEA and NCLBA, Education has provided assistance and guidance to recipients of these funds and is responsible for holding recipients accountable for the quality of their activities. GAO's previous work identified areas where Education could improve its assistance on teacher quality efforts and more effectively measure the results of these activities. Education has made progress in addressing GAO's concerns by disseminating more information to recipients, particularly on teacher quality requirements, and improving how the department measures the results of teacher quality activities by establishing definitions and performance targets under HEA.

While HEA and NCLBA share the goal of improving teacher quality, it is not clear the extent to which they complement each other. States, districts, schools, and grantees under both laws engage in similar activities. However, not much is known about how well, if at all, these two laws are aligned. Thus, there may be opportunities to better understand how the two laws are working together at the federal, state, and local level.