



Highlights of [GAO-05-865](#), a report to congressional committees

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

Better Measures and Monitoring Could Improve the Performance of the VR Program

Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Education (Education) provides more than \$2.5 billion annually to the states for a federal-state vocational rehabilitation (VR) program to help individuals with disabilities become employed. This program is among a large number of federal programs intended to assist people with disabilities. In 2003 GAO placed federal disability programs on its list of high-risk programs because many of these programs have not kept up with scientific advances and economic and social changes. GAO prepared this report under the Comptroller General's authority as part of an effort to assist policy makers in determining how federal disability programs could more effectively meet the needs of individuals with disabilities and addressed it to each committee of jurisdiction. In this report, GAO assesses the (1) extent to which state VR agencies assist individuals in achieving employment, and (2) performance measures and monitoring practices Education uses to manage this decentralized program and achieve legislative goals.

What GAO Recommends

Education agreed that better measures and monitoring could improve the performance of the VR program, as GAO recommended. These recommendations included aligning performance measures with program goals and developing a better monitoring process that includes timelier feedback to state VR agencies.

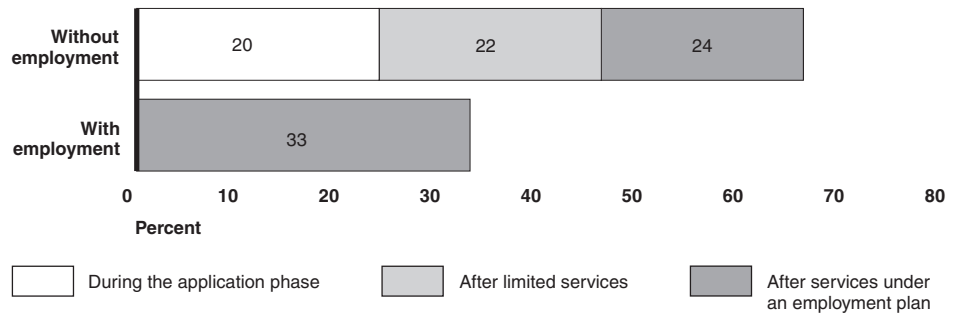
www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-865.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Robert E. Robertson at (202) 512-7215 or robertsonr@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

Of the more than 650,000 individuals exiting the state VR programs in fiscal year 2003, one-third (217,557) obtained a new job or maintained their existing job for at least 90 days after receiving services. Education's data showed that the remaining two-thirds exited the VR program without employment most often because the individual refused services or failed to cooperate with the VR counselor (46 percent of the time) or could not be located or contacted (24 percent). The VR program purchased more than \$1.3 billion in services for all individuals who exited the program in fiscal year 2003, two-thirds of which were used to provide services to individuals exiting with employment. Employment, earnings, and the amount of purchased services received while in the VR program varied significantly by individuals' disability type and other characteristics. In addition, state VR agencies varied substantially in the employment rates they achieved, the characteristics of individuals they served, their frequency of providing certain services, and their service expenditures.

Individuals Exiting the VR Program, Fiscal Year 2003



Source: GAO analysis of Education data.

Education's performance measures are not comprehensive, and its monitoring of state VR agencies has not resulted in timely feedback. Education does not comprehensively measure the performance of certain key populations, such as students transitioning from school to work, and tracks only the individuals who exit the program, not those still receiving services. In addition, Education's performance measures do not take into consideration all the variation among the state VR agencies or allow for comparisons with other workforce programs. Education's monitoring reports, which are its primary means of providing feedback to state VR agencies, are frequently late and based on data that are more than 2 years old. Consequently, state VR agencies do not receive the timely feedback needed to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their programs. In managing the performance of the VR program, Education also does not censure poorly performing state VR agencies, reward strong performance, or take full advantage of opportunities to disseminate best practices. Education recently decided to eliminate its regional offices, which conducted most of the monitoring of state VR agencies, making the details of the future monitoring process unclear.