

HIGHER EDUCATION



Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-03-6](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, United States Senate, and Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Education and the Workforce, 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 report 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.

What GAO Recommends

In order to effectively manage the grant program, GAO recommends that the Secretary of Education

- further develop and maintain a system for regularly communicating program information with grantees and
- establish a systematic approach for evaluating all grant activities.

To improve the information collected under the accountability provisions, GAO recommends that the Secretary of Education

- define key terms from the legislation clearly and
- allow sufficient time for the verification of the required information.

GAO’s report also includes a matter for consideration by the Congress.

In commenting on a draft of GAO’s report, Education generally agreed with the findings.

<http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-6>

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Cornelia M. Ashby (202-512-8403).

What GAO Found

The Department of Education has approved or awarded 123 grants to states and partnerships totaling over \$460 million. Education awarded grants to applicants according to the legislation, but failed to maintain an effective system for communicating with grantees. Grantees have used funds for activities they believe will improve teaching in their locality or state. While HEA 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. The extent to which these activities will affect the quality of teaching in the classroom will be difficult to determine because Education does not have a systematic approach to evaluate all grant activities.

Early Exposure to Teaching is a Recruitment Strategy Used by Several Grantees.



Source: Department of Education archives.

The information collected as part of the accountability provisions did not allow Education to accurately report on the quality of teacher training programs and the qualifications of current teachers in each state. The accountability provisions require all institutions that enroll students who receive federal student financial assistance and train teachers to provide information to their states on their teacher training programs and program graduates. In order to facilitate the collection of this information, HEA required Education to develop definitions for terms and uniform reporting methods. Education officials told GAO that they made significant efforts to define these terms so that the terms reflected the uniqueness of teacher training programs, state reporting procedures, and data availability. In doing so, Education defined some terms broadly. The officials also told GAO 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 and thereby making it difficult to assess accountability.