



Highlights of [GAO-08-547](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

In the future, businesses will demand workers with higher-level skills and more education. Community colleges are key providers of career and technical training as well as traditional academic education. These colleges can also play important roles in the one-stop system created by the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), through which a variety of federally funded employment and training programs provide services. Given the importance of community colleges to workforce development, GAO was asked to examine (1) how community colleges meet the workforce training needs of their communities; (2) what community colleges do to integrate with the nation's one-stop system; (3) the conditions or practices that enhance or impede these efforts; and (4) the actions the Departments of Labor and Education have taken to encourage linkages between community colleges and the workforce investment system, including one-stops. To address these objectives, GAO visited 20 community colleges, surveyed one-stop centers and their associated workforce investment boards, and talked to Labor and Education officials.

Labor and Education generally agreed with GAO's findings.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-547](#). For more information, contact George A. Scott at (202) 512-7215 or scottg@gao.gov.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Community Colleges and One-Stop Centers Collaborate to Meet 21st Century Workforce Needs

What GAO Found

The community colleges that GAO visited developed various approaches and programs for career and technical training to meet the needs of industry sectors, individual employers, and certain types of students and workers. Through a variety of outreach, relationship building, and data collection efforts, community colleges have come to understand the specific training needs of key industries in their regions and use this information to keep programs current or develop new programs to address these needs. Community college activities include providing contract or customized training to the employees of specific employers; working with small businesses; and targeting training and education programs to specific populations, such as disadvantaged adults, high-school students transitioning to college, and one-stop clients.

Many of the community colleges that GAO visited integrate with their one-stops by operating the one-stop centers, colocating college staff at the one-stop, and participating on workforce investment boards. Nationwide, GAO estimated that about 11 percent of one-stops are operated solely or jointly by a community college, while 34 percent have community college staff colocated at the center. Similarly, GAO estimated that, nationwide, 49 percent of local workforce investment boards have community college presidents represented on their boards. Some of the benefits of these arrangements include cost sharing and improved communication among participating programs. Officials at the colleges and one-stops that GAO visited reported also conducting other joint activities, such as strategic planning and data sharing.

Community college and workforce officials cited state funding and leadership as factors that help integration between community colleges and the workforce system but identified WIA performance system measures and WIA funding issues as impediments. Under WIA, states and local workforce areas must meet performance levels in their Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs that can be difficult to obtain when serving some populations, such as those on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families or youth, causing disincentives for the one-stops to serve them. In a 2004 report, GAO recommended that Labor develop a systematic way to account for differences in the population groups served by states' one-stop centers and apply it to all states when establishing their performance levels. Labor has not taken action on this recommendation; however, Labor officials stated that states may use their own adjustment models and that the department has worked to ensure consistency in the process.

It is uncertain whether Labor and Education's efforts to build linkages between community colleges and the workforce system will be successful in encouraging community colleges to focus on workforce development. Labor's WIRED, High Growth, and Community Based grants aim, in part, to help community colleges and other workforce entities collaborate. As discussed in GAO's recent report on these grants, Labor's evaluations do not fully measure their effectiveness, and GAO recommends that Labor take steps to do so. Labor and Education jointly funded a \$1.5 million initiative in 2006 to help build linkages between community colleges and the workforce system. The agencies did not conduct an evaluation, but plan to issue a report in 2008 about the participants' challenges and successes.