

Highlights of [GAO-09-573](#), a report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on Higher Education, Lifelong Learning, and Competitiveness, Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives

**Why GAO Did This Study**

In 2005-2006, students with disabilities comprised 9 percent of the student population in the United States, and English language learners comprised about 10 percent. Many of these students spend a majority of their time in the general classroom setting in elementary and secondary schools. Most teachers are initially trained through teacher preparation programs at institutions of higher education. GAO was asked to examine (1) the extent to which teacher preparation programs require preparation for general classroom teachers to instruct these student subgroups; (2) the role selected states play in preparing general classroom teachers to instruct these student subgroups; and (3) funding and other assistance provided by the U.S. Department of Education (Education) to help general classroom teachers instruct these student subgroups. To address these issues, GAO conducted a nationally representative survey of teacher preparation programs and interviewed officials from state and local educational agencies in four states and Education.

**What GAO Recommends**

GAO recommends that the Secretary of Education develop and implement a mechanism to ensure more systematic coordination among program offices that oversee assistance that can help general classroom teachers to instruct these student subgroups. Education agreed that coordination is beneficial and will explore the benefits of creating such a mechanism.

View [GAO-09-573](#) or [key components](#). For more information, contact Cornelia Ashby at (202) 512-7215 or [ashbyc@gao.gov](mailto:ashbyc@gao.gov).

**TEACHER PREPARATION**

**Multiple Federal Education Offices Support Teacher Preparation for Instructing Students with Disabilities and English Language Learners, but Systematic Departmentwide Coordination Could Enhance This Assistance**

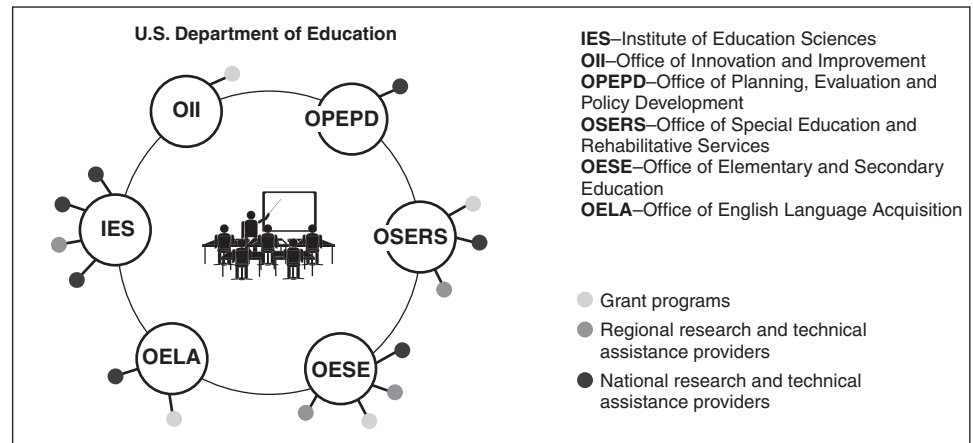
**What GAO Found**

According to GAO’s survey results, most traditional teacher preparation programs at institutions of higher education nationwide required at least some training for prospective general classroom teachers on instructing students with disabilities and English language learners. While the majority of programs required at least one course entirely focused on students with disabilities, no more than 20 percent of programs required at least one course entirely focused on English language learners. Additionally, more than half the programs required field experiences with students with disabilities, while less than a third did so for English language learners. Despite recent steps by the majority of programs to better prepare teachers for instructing both of these student subgroups, many programs faced challenges in providing this training.

The four states GAO visited—California, Georgia, Nebraska, and Texas—set varying requirements for teacher preparation programs. However, all of the states and school districts visited provided assistance to general classroom teachers to help them instruct these student subgroups. Nevertheless, these states and school districts cited challenges providing this training, such as time constraints and identifying appropriate instructional strategies.

Six Education offices provide funding and other assistance that can help general classroom teachers instruct students with disabilities and English language learners, but no departmentwide mechanism exists to coordinate among the offices. Ten grant programs allow grantees to use funds to help general classroom teachers instruct these students; Education offices also support research and technical assistance providers that serve policymakers and educators. However, Education lacks a mechanism to facilitate information sharing among the offices on a regular basis that could assist offices that have less experience with these subgroups to better understand student needs or integrate research findings into ongoing programming.

**Six Education Offices Oversee Grants and Research and Technical Assistance Providers**



Sources: GAO analysis of Education documents and interviews with officials, Art Explosion (images).