United States General Accounting Office

GAO

Testimony

Before the Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness, Committee on Education and the Workforce, U.S. House of Representatives

For Release on Delivery
Expected at 2:00 p.m.
Wednesday, October 9, 2002

TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMS

Activities Underway to Improve Teacher Training, but Information Collected To Assess Accountability Has Limitations

Statement of Cornelia M. Ashby, Director
Education, Workforce, and Income Security Issues

G A O
Accountability * Integrity * Reliability

GAO-03-197T

GAO
Accountability★Integrity★Reliability

Highlights

TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMS Activities Underway to Improve Teacher Training, but Information Collected to Assess Accountability Has Limitations

Highlights of GAO-03-197T, a testimony before the Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness, Committee on Education and the Workforce, U.S. 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 testimony 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. The Subcommittee asked that we provide information on (1) activities grantees supported and what results are associated with these activities and (2) whether the information collected under the accountability provisions provides the basis to assess the quality of teacher training programs and the qualifications of current teachers.

What GAO Found

Education has approved or awarded 123 grants to states and partnerships totaling over $460 million dollars. Grantees have used funds for activities they believe will improve teaching in their locality or state, but it is too early to determine the grants' effects on the quality of teaching in the classroom. While the law 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. However, within these general areas, grantees' efforts vary.

Early exposure to teaching is a recruitment strategy used by several grantees.

The information collected as part of the accountability provisions to report on the quality of teacher training programs and the qualifications of current teachers has limitations. The accountability provisions require that all institutions that train teachers who receive federal student financial aid provide information to their states on their teacher training programs and program graduates. In order to facilitate the collection of this information, the HEA required Education to develop definitions for terms and uniform reporting methods. Education officials told us that they made significant efforts to define these terms so that the terms incorporated the uniqueness of teacher training programs, state reporting procedures, and data availability. In doing so, Education defined some terms broadly. Education officials told us 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; making it difficult to assess accountability.

Our nation's teachers are inextricably linked to student achievement. This bond highlights the importance of teacher preparation programs. The grants and accountability provisions established by the HEA seek to improve teacher training, but information collected to assess accountability has limitations.

The full testimony statement is available at www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-197T. For additional information about this testimony, contact Cornelia M. Ashby, (202-512-8403).

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I appreciate the opportunity to testify on the preparation of teacher candidates and related provisions in Title II of the Higher Education Act (HEA). The Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics recently reported that most teacher training programs leave new teachers feeling unprepared for the classroom. Because recent research reports that teachers are the most important factor in increasing student achievement, the quality of teacher training is critical. In 1998, the Congress amended the HEA to enhance the quality of teaching in the classroom by improving training programs for prospective teachers and the qualifications of current teachers. Among other purposes, Title II of the legislation provides teacher quality enhancement grants to states or partnerships and, under the "accountability provisions," the legislation requires collecting and reporting information on the quality of teacher training programs and the qualifications of current teachers.

Mr. Chairman, as you know, the Ranking Minority Member of the full Committee along with the Chairman, Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, asked us to review some of the Title II provisions. We plan on issuing a report in December. Today I will briefly discuss our results relating to whether the grants and reporting requirements found in Title II of HEA are contributing to improving the quality of teaching in the classroom. Specifically, I will discuss (1) Title II grantee activities and what results are associated with these activities and (2) whether the information collected under the accountability provisions provide the basis to assess the quality of teacher training programs and the qualifications of current teachers. To learn about grant activities, we surveyed 91 grantees, the total at the time of our survey, and conducted 33 site visits[1] in 11 states—California, Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Massachusetts, Maryland, North Carolina, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas, and Wisconsin. Grantees in these states were selected because they represented almost half of the total grant funding at the time, were providing a range of grant activities, and were geographically dispersed. We also interviewed Education officials and experts on teaching and teacher training. In addition, we reviewed relevant literature, regulations, and department documents. We did our work between December 2001 and

[1]In addition to the site visits, we conducted a brief interview with the director of another grant, the Renaissance Partnership for Improving Teacher Quality, which consists of 30 institutions of higher education located in 10 different states.

October 2002 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

In summary

Grantees have used their funds for activities they believe will improve teaching in their locality or state. While the law 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. Within these general areas, grantees' efforts vary. However, it is too early to determine the grants' effects on the quality of teaching in the classroom.

The information collected as part of the accountability provisions to report on the quality of teacher training programs and the qualifications of current teachers has limitations. The accountability provisions require that all institutions that train teachers who receive federal student financial aid—not just those receiving teacher quality enhancement grants—provide information to their states on their teacher training programs and program graduates. In order to facilitate the collection of this information, the legislation required Education to develop key definitions for terms and uniform reporting methods, including the definitions for the consistent reporting of "pass rates." Education officials told us that they made significant efforts to define these terms so that the terms incorporated the uniqueness of teacher training programs, state reporting procedures, and data availability. In doing so, Education defined some terms broadly. Education officials told us 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; making it difficult to assess accountability.

Background

Over $460 million has been approved or awarded for grants under the 1998 HEA amendments to enhance the quality of teacher training programs and the qualifications of current teachers. Three types of grants were made available—state, partnership, and recruitment grants. State grants are available for states to implement activities to improve teacher quality in the state.[2] The legislation requires that states receive a state grant only

[2]All 50 states, Washington DC and 8 territories—the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, the U.S. Virgin Islands, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of Palau—are considered states under the HEA.

once and that the grants must be competitively awarded. Partnership grants must include at least three partners—teacher training programs, colleges of arts and sciences, and eligible local school districts[3]—to receive partnership grants to improve teacher quality through collaborative activities. Partnerships may also include other groups, such as state educational agencies, businesses and nonprofit educational organizations, as partners. Recruitment grants are available to states or partnerships for activities, such as scholarships, to help recruit teachers.

In addition to the grants, the 1998 HEA amendments include an annual reporting requirement on the quality of teacher training programs and the qualifications of current teachers. This component of the legislation, called the accountability provisions, requires an annual three-stage process to collect and report information in a uniform and comprehensible manner. The legislation requires that Education, in consultation with states and teacher training institutions, develop definitions and uniform reporting methods related to the performance of teacher training programs. In the first stage, nearly every institution that prepares teachers—not just those receiving teacher quality enhancement grants—is required to collect and report specific information to its state, including the pass rate of the institution's "graduates" on state teacher certification examinations. Then, in the second stage, states are required to report to Education the pass rate information institutions reported in the first stage, supplemented with additional statewide information, including a description of state certification examinations and the extent to which teachers in the state are teaching on waivers—teaching without being fully certified. The third and final stage is comprised of a report to the Congress from the Secretary of Education on the quality of teacher training programs and the qualifications of current teachers. The first round of institutional reports were submitted to states in April 2001; subsequently, state reports were submitted to Education in October 2001. Using this information, the Secretary of Education reported to the Congress in June 2002.[4]

[3]School district eligibility is limited to those with (1) a high percentage of students whose families fall below the poverty line and (2) a high percentage of secondary school teachers not teaching in the content area in which the teachers were trained to teach, or a high teacher turnover rate.

[4]U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, *Meeting the Highly Qualified Teachers Challenge: The Secretary's Annual Report on Teacher Quality*, June 2002.

How one determines the quality of teacher training programs and the qualifications of current teachers has long been debated. The debate is currently centered on the best way to train teachers: the traditional approach, which typically includes extensive courses in subject matter and pedagogy,[5] or alternative training methods that either 1) accelerate the process of training teachers by reducing courses in pedagogy or 2) allow uncertified teachers to teach while receiving their training at night or on weekends. This debate is further complicated because the requirements for teacher training programs and current teachers varies by state. Every state sets its own requirements for teacher certification, such as which certification examination(s)[6] a teacher candidate must take, what score is considered passing on this examination, and how many hours teacher candidates must spend student teaching—practice teaching during their teacher preparation program—in order to become a fully certified teacher in that state. In this way a teacher who is fully certified in one state may not meet the qualifications for certification in another state. For example, in Virginia and Mississippi, teacher candidates are required to take the same test to be certified to teach high school mathematics. But teacher candidates in Virginia must score 178 (50th percentile of all test takers) to pass the examination, whereas in Mississippi candidates must score 169 (20th percentile).

While the 1998 HEA amendments provided grants and established reporting requirements to improve the quality of teacher training programs and the qualifications of current teachers, it was not until the recent No Child Left Behind Act that the Congress defined a highly qualified teacher.[7] For the purposes of that act, the legislation defines highly qualified teachers as those who have demonstrated knowledge or competence in their subject matter, hold bachelors degrees, and are fully certified to teach in their state.[8]

[5]Pedagogy is defined as the study of teaching methods. Courses on pedagogy include training on how to best instruct students, but may also include course work on classroom management skills—such as how to maintain order in the classroom.

[6]Most states require teachers to take multiple state certification examinations in order to become certified to teach in certain subject areas.

[7]No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Public Law 107-110 sec. 9101 (23).

[8]Proposed departmental guidance on the definition of highly qualified teachers includes participants in an alternative training method who function as regular classroom teachers and are making satisfactory progress toward full state certification.

Grantees Used Funds for a Range of Activities, but It Is Not Yet Known if These Activities Will Affect the Quality of Teaching

Grantees used funds for activities they believe will improve teaching in their locality or state, but it is too early to determine the grants' effects on the quality of teaching in the classroom. While the law allows many activities to be funded, our survey and site visits showed that most grantees have focused their efforts on reforming requirements for teachers, providing professional development to current teachers, and recruiting new teachers. Some positive information about the results of these activities has been reported by grantees. For example, recruitment grantees have told us that they have been able to recruit more teachers into their programs since the inception of the grant program.

Grantees Used Funds for a Variety of Activities

The legislation outlines broad program goals for improving the quality of teaching with grant funds, but provides grantees with the flexibility to decide the most suitable approach for improving teaching. Grantees focused on a combination of activities, and in our survey, we found that 85 percent of the respondents were using their grant funds to reform the requirements for teachers, 85 percent were using their grant funds for professional development and support for current teachers, and 72 percent were using their grant funds for recruitment efforts. However, within these general areas, grantees' efforts varied.

Reforming Requirements for Teachers

Most grantees reported using their funds to reform requirements for teachers. Since every state sets its own requirements for teacher certification, such as how many hours a teacher candidate must spend student teaching to become a fully certified teacher in that state, some state grantees reported using their funds to reform the certification requirements for teachers in their state. Grantees also reported using their funds to allow teacher training programs, and colleges of arts and sciences to collaborate with local school districts to reform the requirements for teacher training programs to ensure that teacher candidates are trained appropriately. Some examples of these reforms include:

- Requirements for teacher certification. During our site visits we found that many state grantees are reforming their state certification requirements to ensure that new teachers have the necessary teaching skills and knowledge in the subject areas in which they will teach. For example, Illinois does not currently have a separate middle school (grades 5 through 9) certification. Most middle school teachers in Illinois are instead certified to teach elementary or high school. However, recognizing that this does not adequately address the preparation needs of middle school teachers, state officials intend to use the grant to create a new certification for middle school teachers. This new certification would require middle school teachers to

demonstrate specialized knowledge of how to best instruct adolescents.

- Requirements for teacher training programs. Many teacher training programs reported that they were reforming the requirements for teacher candidates by revising the required coursework. For example, the grant officials from the Massachusetts Coalition for Teacher Quality and Student Achievement reported that they wanted to provide teacher candidates with exposure to schools earlier than was typical in training programs. To do so, they revised their curriculum so that some of their required teacher preparation courses were set in public schools, giving teacher candidates an opportunity to experience the school environment prior to student teaching. Boston College officials expressed that this strategy would increase the chances that these teachers would be successful.

Professional Development and Support for Current Teachers

Many grantees reported having high teacher turnover and saw a need for providing professional development and other support in order to retain current teachers. The primary goal of professional development activities is to provide training and support for current teachers with the intention of improving their skills and retaining them in the classroom. Grantees supported a variety of activities that provided professional development and support, such as providing coursework towards an advanced degree and assigning mentor teachers to new teachers.

During our site visits, we found that mentoring was the most common professional development activity. Of the 33 grant sites we visited, 23 grants (70 percent) were conducting mentoring activities. Many of the grantees we visited reported that mentoring programs are beneficial to the mentor teacher as well as the new teacher. The mentor can coach the new teacher on how best to instruct students and adjust to his or her job. In return, a mentor teacher may benefit from additional training and compensation. Some grantees used their funds to establish a mentor training program to ensure that mentors had consistent guidance on ways to help new teachers. For example, Rhode Island used its grant funds to allow two experienced teachers to tour the state to provide training to future mentor teachers and help schools set up mentoring programs. Officials in Rhode Island believed this was an effective way to ensure that new teachers receive quality support.

Recruiting New Teachers

Many grantees reported having a teacher shortage in their area and used the grant funds to develop various teacher-recruiting programs. Of the grant sites we visited, most grantees were using their funds to fill teachers

shortages in urban schools or to recruit new teachers from non-traditional sources—mid-career professionals, community college students, and middle and high school students.

The following are examples of grantees using their funds to fill shortages in urban areas or to recruit new teachers from non-traditional sources:

- Recruiting for urban school districts. Grantees that were experiencing a teacher shortage in their urban schools often provided various incentives for teacher candidates to commit to teaching in urban environments. For example, "Project SITE SUPPORT"[9] housed at the Johns Hopkins University recruits teacher candidates with an undergraduate degree to teach in a local school district with a critical need for teachers while, at the same time, earning their masters in education. The program offers tuition assistance and in some cases, the district pays a full teacher salary. As part of the terms of the stipend, teachers are required to continue teaching in the local school district for 3 years after completing the program. Grant officials told us that this program prepares teacher candidates for teaching in an urban environment and makes it more likely that they will remain in the profession.

- Recruiting mid-career professionals. Many grantees targeted mid-career professionals by offering an accelerated teacher training program. For example, the Teacher Recruitment and Induction Project at Southwest Texas State University offered scholarships to mid-career professionals to offset the cost of classes required for teacher certification. The scholarships paid for a 1-year, full-time program that results in a teaching certificates and 18 hours of graduate level credits for teacher candidates. Grantee officials told us that because the grant covers the Austin, Texas area—an area with many technology organizations—they have been able to recruit highly skilled individuals who can offer a variety of real-life applications to many of the classes they teach.

- Recruiting from community colleges. Some grantees have used their funds to recruit teacher candidates at community colleges. For example, National Louis University, one of the largest teacher training institutions in Illinois, has partnered with six community colleges

[9]The acronym SITE SUPPORT stands for "School Immersion Teacher Education and School University Partnership to Prepare Outstanding and Responsive Teachers."

around the state of Illinois so that the community colleges can offer training that was not previously available. The grant pays for a University faculty member to teach on each of the community college campuses. This program allows community colleges in smaller, rural communities to provide teacher training without teacher candidates incurring the cost of attending National Louis University—a large private university. The grant program official told us that school districts in these areas will have a greater chance of recruiting new teachers trained at one of these community colleges because they were most likely to be from that community.

- Recruiting middle and high school students. Other grantees target middle and high school students. For example, the Los Angeles Unified School District develops programs to attract high school students to the field of teaching. The majority of its grant resources has been used to fund a paid 6-week high school internship for students to work in the classroom with a teacher.[10] The high school intern spends most days with a teacher in the classroom. The intern's activities could include helping the teacher correct papers and plan activities. Once a week, interns have a class with a grant-funded teacher on curriculum and lesson planning. The grant official told us that the internship introduces younger people to teaching as a profession and, therefore, may increase the chances that they will become teachers in the future.

[10]The Los Angeles Unified School District operates on a year-round basis, with staggered vacation schedules for students. Internships occur during scheduled student vacations, allowing some students to participate as interns during their vacation in other schools that are in session.

Figure 1: Recruitment Efforts to Attract Young People to the Field of Teaching.

Note: Early exposure to the classroom is a recruitment strategy used by several grantees to introduce teaching as a profession.

Source: Archives from the U.S. Department of Education.

It Is Too Early to Determine Grants' Effect on the Quality of Teaching in the Classroom

While grantees are using their funds on a number of activities, it is too early to know whether these activities will affect the quality of teaching in the classroom. Based on our survey, grantees reported that some of the activities are having positive effects and that their grant allowed them to support activities that would not have been possible without grant funds. For example, some grantees have been able to report on the number of teacher candidates served through their grant programs. Many grantees also reported that the partnerships and alliances formed through the grant program have had and will continue to have positive effects on their ability to address the quality of teaching in the classroom.

While the reported positive activities are encouraging, it is too early to know how or if they will translate into high quality teaching in the classroom. Many grantees we visited have not collected the types of data, such as student achievement scores, needed to show the impact of these activities on student learning. Those that have attempted to collect these data needed to judge results are not yet in a position to report their findings because these types of data require time to collect, and the grant program is relatively new. Because these activities address the quality of teaching, it will take time to see the effects on student achievement.

Information Collected to Assess the Quality of Teacher Training Programs and the Qualifications of Teachers has Limitations

The information collected as part of the accountability provisions to report on the quality of teacher training programs and the qualifications of current teachers has limitations. The accountability provisions require that all institutions that train teachers who receive federal student financial aid—not just those receiving grants—provide information to their states on their teacher training programs and program graduates.[11] In order to facilitate the collection of this information, the legislation required Education to develop key definitions for terms and uniform reporting methods, including the definitions for the consistent reporting of pass rates. Education officials told us that they made significant efforts to define these terms so that the terms incorporated the uniqueness of teacher training programs, state reporting procedures, and data availability. In doing so, Education defined some terms broadly. Education officials told us 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; making it difficult to assess accountability.

The accountability provisions required states and institutions to report information, such as the percentage of an institution's graduates who pass the state certification examination, also known as the pass rate. In order to gather information on the pass rate, Education first needed to define graduate. Education officials told us that in many teacher training programs, candidates do not graduate with a degree in teacher training, but rather receive a certificate. Therefore Education did not define graduate but rather created the term "program completer" to encompass all teacher training candidates. The table below explains our analysis of the information the legislation required to be collected, the way that Education defined selected terms to collect the information, and the reporting implications of Education's definitions.

[11]Institutions are required to report to their states on the following: (1) pass rates, (2) program information—number of students in the program, average number of hours of supervised practice teaching required for those in the program, and the faculty-student ratio in supervised practice teaching, and (3) a statement of whether the institution's program is accredited by the state.

Definitions for Collection of Accountability Provision Information

Term	Legislative Requirements	Education's Definition	Reporting Implications
Graduate	To identify the percentage of all graduates at a teacher training institution who successfully passed the state certification examination(s).	Education did not define the term graduate, but rather used the term "program completer" and defined it as someone who has met the requirements of a state approved teacher-training program.	Some institutions only reported candidates who completed all course work and passed the state certification examination. In calculating the pass rate, these institutions did not include those students who passed the course work but failed the examination. As a result institutions reported a 100% pass rate, which is not informative to the Congress or the public on the quality of the teacher training programs at those institutions.
Waiver	To identify the number of teachers who are teaching without state certification, including those on temporary or emergency permits, those pursuing an alternative route to certification or those teaching as long-term substitutes.	Any temporary or emergency permit, license or other authorization that permits an individual to teach in a public school classroom without having received an initial certificate or license (as defined by the state) from that state or any other state.	Some states defined an initial certificate or license so broadly that it allowed them to report few or no teachers as teaching on waivers.
Alternative route to certification or licensure	To identify a route to certification that is not a regular teacher training program.	As defined by the state.	Some states defined alternative route so narrowly, which allowed them to report that few teachers had taken an alternative route to certification.

Source: GAO Analysis of legislation, Department regulations, and state Title II reports.

Thus, using definitions provided by Education, states and institutions could report information that made their programs seem more successful than they might have been. Institutions could inflate their pass rate by reporting only on those teacher candidates who completed all coursework and passed the state teacher certification examination without including any information on teacher candidates who completed all coursework but failed the examination—thus ensuring a 100-percent pass rate. During our review, we found that a few states and many institutions are inflating their pass rates to 100-percent. For instance, we found that in at least three state reports to Education, every institution reported 100-percent pass rates. Those institutions included in their calculations only those teacher candidates they determined to be program completers—those who passed the state certification examination and met the state's other requirements—excluding those who failed the examination. While requiring teacher candidates to pass the state certification examination as part of a teacher training program is not, in and of itself a problem, reporting on only those candidates who pass the test does not provide the

basis to assess the quality of teacher training programs and the qualifications of current teachers.

In other instances, Education allowed states to define some terms from the legislation in a way that was applicable to their state because of the variability in how states defined and collected information on some terms. This allowed states to define some terms so that they could cast the quality of their teacher training programs and the qualifications of their current teachers in the most positive light. For example, the accountability provisions required that states report on the number of teachers on waivers. Because Education allowed each state to define initial certificate or license for itself, each state reported different information in its waiver count. Figure 2 presents information from three neighboring states—Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, D.C.—with different definitions of certification leading to variations in who was included in their waiver count. The degree of this variation from state to state is unknown. Thus, the data collected for the Congress does not present an accurate account of teachers who are not fully certified.

Figure 2: Criteria for Waiver Calculations Varies among Three Neighboring States

Maryland

- Waiver count includes individuals who are issued a provisional certificate or an alternative certificate
- Waiver count includes long term substitute teachers
- Reported 13% of individuals teaching on waivers in Maryland

Washington, D.C.

- Waiver count does not include individuals who are issued a provisional certificate
- Waiver count does not include long term substitute teachers
- Reported 0% of individuals teaching on waivers in the District of Columbia

Virginia

- Waiver count includes individuals pursuing an alternative route to licensure and individuals issued a local eligibility license
- Waiver count includes long term substitutes
- Reported 7% of individuals teaching on waivers in Virginia

Source: GAO Analysis of School Year 2000 State Title II Reports

In closing, Mr. Chairman, our nation's teachers are inextricably linked to student achievement. This bond highlights the importance of teacher preparation programs. During our review, we saw many examples of how grant funds are being used to either recruit and prepare new teachers, or

develop and retain current teachers. However, due to the lack of clearly defined terms by the Department, the information Education collected and reported to the Congress under the accountability provisions does not portray the quality of teacher training programs and the qualifications of current teachers. At the request of the full Committee and the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, we will continue our study of these issues and issue a report in December.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. I will be happy to respond to any questions you or other members of the Committee may have.

Contacts and Acknowledgments

For further information, please contact Cornelia M. Ashby at (202) 512-8403. Individuals making key contributions to this testimony include Kelsey Bright, Sonya Harmeyer, Tamara Harris, and Anjali Tekchandani.