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).