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 qualifications of current teachers. 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.