Additional Assistance and Better Coordination Needed among Education Offices to Help States Meet the NCLBA Teacher Requirements

What GAO Found

In the 2002-2003 school year, all states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico required that special education teachers have a bachelor's degree and be certified to teach—two of NCLBA's teacher qualification requirements—and half required special education teachers to demonstrate subject matter competency in core academic subjects, which is the third requirement. Specifically, 24 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico required their teachers to demonstrate some level of subject matter competency by having a degree or passing state tests in the core academic subjects that they wished to teach. Teachers of core academic subjects in the remaining states that did not have such requirements might not be positioned to meet the NCLBA requirements. To meet NCLBA teacher requirements, teachers would need to demonstrate competency in core academic subjects by the end of the 2005-2006 school year.

Status of Special Education Teacher Subject Matter Competency Requirements for School Year 2002-2003, by State

State education officials reported that the availability of funds to support professional development facilitated implementation of the NCLBA teacher requirements, while other factors, such as uncertainty about how to apply the subject matter competency requirement to special education teachers, impeded implementation. State education officials and national education organizations' representatives we interviewed cited the need for more assistance from Education in explaining NCLBA's teacher requirements and identifying implementation strategies.

Education has provided a range of assistance, such as site visits, Web-based guidance, and financial assistance, to help states implement the highly qualified teacher requirements. However, department coordination related to the implementation of NCLBA’s teacher requirements for special education teachers has been limited.