

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-15-598](#), a report to the Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Health, Employment, Labor, and Pensions, Committee on Education and the Workforce, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

TPPs play a vital role in preparing teachers, including helping them teach to new K-12 college- and career-ready standards recently adopted or under development in all states. Under Title II of the Higher Education Act, states collect information on TPPs and report it to Education, which reports it to the public. Education also administers competitive grant programs related to teacher preparation. In light of new K-12 standards and questions about TPP quality, GAO was asked to review TPP, state, and federal efforts.

This report examines: (1) state oversight activities, (2) state and TPP actions related to new K-12 standards, and (3) the extent to which Education shares information about TPP quality. GAO reviewed relevant federal laws and documents, surveyed all state oversight offices (with a 100 percent response rate), and interviewed Education officials and various stakeholders, as well as a non-generalizable sample of officials in five states with varied approaches to oversight and 14 TPPs in those states.

What GAO Recommends

Among other things, GAO recommends that Education monitor states to ensure their compliance with requirements to assess whether any TPPs are low-performing and develop mechanisms to share information about TPP quality within the agency and with states. Education agreed with our recommendations.

View [GAO-15-598](#). To view the related e-supplement, click: [GAO-15-599SP](#). For more information, contact Melissa Emrey-Arras at (617) 788-0534 or EmreyArrasM@gao.gov.

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TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS

Education Should Ensure States Identify Low-Performing Programs and Improve Information-Sharing

What GAO Found

State oversight officials reported that they approve teacher preparation programs (TPP) by assessing the quality of program design and analyzing candidate data such as program graduation rates, according to GAO's 2014-2015 survey of states and the District of Columbia. However, some states reported that they do not assess whether TPPs are low-performing, as required by federal law. To receive funding under the Higher Education Act, states are required to conduct an assessment to identify TPPs that are low-performing. Seven states reported to GAO that they do not have a process to do so. State officials who reported not having a process in GAO's survey cited several reasons including that they believed other oversight procedures were sufficient to ensure quality. Education officials told GAO they have not verified states' processes to identify low-performing TPPs. In accordance with federal internal control standards, Education should provide reasonable assurance of compliance with applicable laws. If states fail to assess whether TPPs are low-performing, potential teaching candidates may have difficulty identifying low-performing TPPs. This could result in teachers who are not fully prepared to educate children.

Officials in most surveyed states and all 14 of the TPPs GAO interviewed reported making changes to prepare teaching candidates for new state K-12 standards. Thirty-seven states reported providing TPPs with guidance about the new standards and a similar number of states reported adjusting their process for approving TPPs. Most states also required prospective teachers to pass licensing tests that have been modified in response to the new standards. Officials from all of the 14 TPPs GAO interviewed reported making changes that generally fell within the following three categories: (1) increasing subject-matter knowledge of teachers, (2) modifying coursework related to teaching techniques, and (3) using classroom training to provide real world experience.

Education missed opportunities to share information about TPP quality internally and with state oversight entities. Federal internal controls standards highlight the value of effective information-sharing with internal and external stakeholders. However, Education does not have mechanisms in place to promote regular, sustained information-sharing among its various program offices that support TPP quality because the workgroup that used to facilitate such information-sharing was discontinued. Without such a mechanism, Education cannot fully leverage information about TPP quality gathered by its various programs. Furthermore, Education's current efforts to share information about TPP quality with states only reach about a third of states, according to GAO's survey, although about half of all states reported that they wanted more of such information. Gaps in the agency's efforts to disseminate information result from information-sharing being left to individual offices' initiative rather than an agency-wide mechanism. Education officials acknowledged that more could be done to share information with states and other stakeholders. Without such efforts, Education may miss opportunities to support state efforts to improve TPP quality. For example, states may be unaware of good practices identified by Education that could assist them in their oversight.