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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-04-308](#), a report to the Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) has been in effect for several years and is currently undergoing reauthorization. In order to provide the Congress with information on the implementation and effectiveness of the WIA youth program, GAO was asked to explore how services have been delivered at the local level, whether the Department of Labor's guidance has addressed challenges faced by local areas, and how effective the program has been.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that the Departments of Labor and Education coordinate efforts to clarify how schools can work with workforce officials to help connect school dropouts to local WIA youth programs. GAO is also recommending that the Department of Labor provide states and local areas with technical assistance necessary to address ongoing implementation challenges and establish standard monitoring procedures to improve the quality of data reported by states.

In formal comments on a draft of this report, Education concurred with our recommendation to work with Labor to connect out-of-school youth to local WIA youth programs. In its informal comments, Labor said that many of the findings corroborated its own observations and that the recommendations are consistent with Labor's current program direction.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-308.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact David Bellis (415) 904-2272 or bellisd@gao.gov.

WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACT

Labor Actions Can Help States Improve Quality of Performance Outcome Data and Delivery of Youth Services

What GAO Found

Local areas primarily used the WIA program for dropout prevention and other efforts to improve academic achievement for in-school youth. Nationally, about 70 percent of youth served were in school, but percentages ranged from 38 to 86 percent by state. Officials in the five states GAO visited said that they focused on in-school youth because serving out-of-school youth was much more difficult and expensive, and less effective. Local areas emphasized learning-related summer employment for in-school youth and occupational skills training and supportive services for out-of-school youth. Over half of local boards nationwide used providers that had subcontracting arrangements with others to deliver youth services. The majority of youth were served primarily from educational institutions and community organizations.

Despite Labor's guidance, local areas continue to face implementation challenges in identifying and retaining out-of-school youth, providing youth with mentoring and follow-up services, and using interim measures for ongoing program assessment. While Labor supports information exchange forums, a promising practices Web site, and technical assistance, some local areas may have difficulties gaining access to and using these resources.

Little is known about the effectiveness of the WIA youth program because Labor has not yet conducted an impact evaluation. In addition, while the youth program exceeded most of its performance goals, these data were questionable because of problems with state information systems and inadequate oversight of data quality. While states will be required to verify data, concerns remain about their ability to fully implement the requirement and Labor's ability to monitor implementation consistently.



Source: GAO.

WIA youth gain summer work experience by landscaping a local high school's grounds.