



Highlights of [GAO-04-5](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

The 1998 Head Start Act mandated that 50 percent of all Head Start teachers nationwide have a minimum of an associate degree in early childhood education, or, in a related field with preschool teaching experience, by September 30, 2003. This law also required that each classroom in center-based programs (those that primarily provide services in classroom settings) without such a degreed teacher have a teacher with a Child Development Associate credential or an equivalent state certificate. In preparation for the reauthorization of Head Start in fiscal year 2003, GAO was asked to examine: (1) the extent to which Head Start has met legislative mandates concerning teacher qualifications; (2) whether Head Start teachers' salaries have increased and enabled grantees to attract and retain teachers with degrees; and (3) the extent to which degree and other programs in early childhood education are available for Head Start teachers and if grantees have taken steps to enhance access to them.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of Health and Human Services require that ACF, at least annually, collect data from Head Start grantees and report to the Secretary on whether each classroom in Head Start centers has at least one teacher with at least the minimum credentials required by law.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-5.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Marnie Shaul at (202) 512-7215 or shaulm@gao.gov.

HEAD START

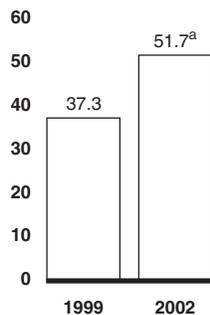
Increased Percentage of Teachers Nationwide Have Required Degrees, but Better Information on Classroom Teachers' Qualifications Needed

What GAO Found

Head Start appears to meet the 1998 mandate because about 52 percent of Head Start teachers nationwide had, at a minimum, an associate degree in early childhood education or in a related field based on Administration for Children and Families (ACF) 2002 data. This represented more than a 14-percentage point increase in teachers with such degrees since 1999.

Head Start Teachers with Degrees Increased Significantly between 1999 and 2002

Percent of teachers with degrees



Source: GAO analysis of ACF data. (These data are self-reported by grantees.)

Note: Head Start data on the percent of teachers with degrees were collected somewhat differently in 1998, limiting their comparability with data collected in subsequent years.

^aThe percentage of teachers with degrees in 2002 includes 3.8 percent with graduate degrees, 24.8 percent with bachelor's degrees, and 23 percent with associate degrees. (Does not add to 51.7 percent due to rounding.)

Although ACF requested grantees to report both the numbers of teachers by type of degree or credential, and the numbers of classrooms, it is not possible to determine if there was a teacher with the credentials required by law in each classroom in Head Start centers since ACF did not ask grantees to report this specific information. Furthermore, the ACF monitoring instrument used did not have a separate question that asked whether each classroom had at least one teacher with at least minimum credentials.

Quality improvement funds, which have declined sharply in recent years, enabled Head Start to increase teacher salaries to levels comparable to other preschool teachers during the 1999-2001 period, although they remained at about half of what kindergarten teachers earned nationally. Some Head Start grantees continue to identify difficulties in competing for teachers with degrees with existing salaries.

Early childhood education and similar programs were available in all states and in one in five postsecondary institutions. However, as expected, the more rural, less populous states had few of these programs. Head Start grantees used a number of methods to make early childhood education accessible to their teachers, such as offering on-site classes, but access to these programs in rural areas sometimes was a problem.