



Highlights of [GAO-09-593](#), a report to the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Higher Education, Lifelong Learning, and Competitiveness, Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Policymakers and researchers have focused on improving the quality of our nation's 3 million teachers to raise the achievement of students in key academic areas, such as reading and mathematics. Given the importance of teacher quality to student achievement and the key role federal and state governments play in supporting teacher quality, GAO's objectives included examining (1) the extent that the U.S. Department of Education (Education) funds and coordinates teacher quality programs, (2) studies that Education conducts on teacher quality and how it provides and coordinates research-related assistance to states and school districts, and (3) challenges to collaboration within states and how Education helps address those challenges. GAO interviewed experts and Education officials, administered surveys to officials at state educational agencies and state agencies for higher education in the fall of 2008, and conducted site visits to three states.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of Education implement a strategy for sustained coordination among program offices. A key purpose would be to aid information and resource sharing, and strengthen linkages among its efforts to help improve teacher quality. While Education will consider forming a cross-program group, it favors short-term, issue-specific coordination. We continue to believe sustained coordination is needed.

View [GAO-09-593](#) or [key components](#). For more information, contact Cornelia Ashby at (202) 512-7215 or AshbyC@gao.gov. To view the e-supplement online, click on [GAO-09-594SP](#).

TEACHER QUALITY

Sustained Coordination among Key Federal Education Programs Could Enhance State Efforts to Improve Teacher Quality

What GAO Found

Education allocates billions of federal dollars for teacher quality improvement efforts through many statutorily authorized programs that nine offices administer. Education officials said these offices share information with one another as needed, and from time to time Education has established and completed broader collaborative efforts. Yet, GAO found little sustained coordination and no strategy for working systematically across program lines. Education also has not described how it will coordinate crosscutting teacher quality improvement activities intended to support its goal of improving student achievement in its annual performance plan. Our previous work has identified the use of strategic and annual plans as a practice that can help enhance and sustain collaboration. Without clear strategies for sustained coordination, Education may be missing key opportunities to leverage and align its resources, activities, and processes to assist states, school districts, and institutions of higher education improve teacher quality.

Education has conducted evaluations for some of its teacher quality programs and has awarded grants to researchers for a variety of research on teacher quality interventions, which are intended to inform policymakers and educators about program operations and which programs or interventions are having an impact. While evaluations have been done or are under way for about two-fifths of these programs, little is known about whether most of the programs are achieving their desired results. Education provides information from evaluations and also from research through the Internet and a system of regional and national providers. These providers also either conduct or synthesize research and provide assistance mainly to states and school districts. These providers coordinate among themselves and with one another in various ways.

State agency officials reported through our surveys that limited resources and incompatible data systems were the greatest challenges to their collaborative efforts to improve teacher quality. State officials reported that data systems could be used to inform teacher quality policy efforts by linking student and teacher data, or linking data from kindergarten through 12th grade and the postsecondary education systems. To help address these challenges, Education provides some financial support and other assistance. For example, one \$65 million program that helps states develop statewide data systems also received another \$250 million in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. Also, the act requires states to report on the progress they are making toward linking statewide data systems that allow matching of individual student achievement to individual teachers. This additional funding could help states defray costs associated with these efforts.