

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-16-287](#), a report to congressional committees

## Why GAO Did This Study

Enacted in 2014, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act brought numerous changes to existing federal employment and training programs, including requiring DOL and Education to implement a common performance accountability system across the six WIOA-designated core programs.

WIOA includes a provision for GAO to issue an interim and final report on issues related to job training databases and data exchange agreements. This final report addresses (1) changes selected states plan to make in how they collect and report performance information for core programs; (2) challenges these states face related to performance reporting and how they might be addressed; and (3) whether these states have reported breaches to core program data systems and what practices they have to safeguard personal information.

GAO reviewed relevant federal laws, regulations, and policy guidance; and obtained information on the efforts under way in three states (Illinois, New Hampshire, and Texas) selected in part based on variation in level of experience with sharing data across programs. The views of these officials provide in-depth examples but are not generalizable to all states. GAO also interviewed DOL and Education officials, including selected DOL regional officials and Education state liaisons and area coordinators to obtain perspectives on more states.

GAO makes no recommendations in this report. In its comments on a draft of this report, DOL highlighted its efforts with Education to promote a unified vision of performance accountability.

View [GAO-16-287](#). For more information, contact Andrew Sherrill at (202) 512-7215 or [sherrilla@gao.gov](mailto:sherrilla@gao.gov).

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## WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT

### Information on Planned Changes to State Performance Reporting and Related Challenges

## What GAO Found

To implement the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), the 2014 law governing the nation's employment and training programs, the three states GAO visited are considering performance reporting changes such as integrating data systems and using new data sources. GAO selected states with varying levels of experience sharing data across programs. According to the Departments of Education (Education) and Labor (DOL), WIOA is intended, in part, to improve the consistency of states' performance reporting compared to reporting under the law it replaced, the Workforce Investment Act of 1998. For six core DOL and Education programs, WIOA establishes common indicators of performance in areas such as employment and earnings, and encourages states to integrate data systems related to these indicators. In the states GAO visited—Illinois, New Hampshire, and Texas—efforts to integrate data systems varied. For example, Texas is consolidating programs in one agency and building an integrated data system and Illinois is discussing integration options across the four agencies housing its programs. Officials in all three states expect changes in how they collect and report performance information. Though specific reporting requirements are not yet final, core programs—especially those administered by Education—face substantial changes. For example, Education programs in these states are exploring new ways to collect earnings data, such as adding survey questions or obtaining greater access to unemployment insurance wage records.

Program officials in the three states GAO visited identified challenges to WIOA performance reporting, including:

- **Limited guidance.** Officials in all three states said early implementation was slowed because WIOA regulations are not yet final and certain details about performance reporting are not yet resolved. In the interim, DOL and Education have offered states additional guidance.
- **Cost and complexity of integrating data systems.** Officials in Illinois and New Hampshire said that resource constraints pose challenges to integrating data systems. Among efforts to help defray integration costs, DOL and Education have sought additional federal funding for states.
- **Data quality concerns.** Missing participant data may continue to affect the quality of information states report to federal agencies. For example, some states reported using participant surveys to collect employment data due to challenges with state privacy laws. In addition, federal law generally allows participants to opt out of providing Social Security numbers (SSNs). Officials in the states GAO visited said many participants in one of the Education-administered programs do not provide SSNs, making it harder to match data to track their outcomes and participation in other programs.

Officials in the three states GAO visited reported no intrusions into their data systems in recent years. Officials in two states did report other occasional security breaches that may have resulted in inappropriate exposure of personally identifiable information for small numbers of people in limited circumstances; for example, emails that included participant SSNs. Officials in all three states reported taking steps to limit and protect the participant information they collect, such as monitoring and controlling data access.