STUDENT MENTORING PROGRAMS

Education's Monitoring and Information Sharing Could Be Improved

Why GAO Did This Study

As part of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) of 2001, the Congress authorized a 3-year, $17 million per year school-based mentoring grant program. For fiscal year 2004, Congress has increased funding to about $50 million to fund additional mentoring efforts. Congress requested that GAO provide information on the student mentoring program. To do this, GAO answered the following questions:

(1) What are the basic elements, policies, and procedures of successful mentoring programs? (2) What are the key characteristics of NCLBA-funded mentoring efforts, including the extent to which they have the basic elements, policies, and procedures of successful mentoring programs? (3) How does the Department of Education monitor program implementation? (4) What are Education's and grantees' plans to assess program outcomes?

What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that Education

- explore ways to facilitate the sharing of successful practices and lessons learned,
- ensure that the office monitoring mentoring grantees uses grantees' single audit reports, and
- undertake a national study of its mentoring program outcomes.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-581.

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

What GAO Found

According to the literature GAO reviewed, successful mentoring programs (1) plan their programs carefully prior to implementation; (2) develop policies and procedures to effectively manage their programs, including mentor screening and training; (3) ensure program sustainability through marketing; and (4) evaluate program outcomes and disseminate their evaluation findings.

Most of the 121 mentoring grantees that Education funded shared many characteristics--most had 5 years or more of experience mentoring youth, had similar goals, and offered "one-to-one" mentoring. All mentoring grantees listed in their applications that they had some elements of successful programs, but established grantees GAO visited reported fewer implementation challenges, such as problems recruiting mentors, than did newer grantees. Most of the 11 grantees GAO visited said they would benefit from learning about other implementation strategies through information sharing. However, Education has not facilitated information sharing among mentoring grantees, although it is considering doing so.

School-age mentoring

Source: Digial Vision.

Education used multiple methods to monitor grantees, including expenditure tracking, but the office responsible for monitoring mentoring grants did not review single audit reports as required by its guidance. Education's Chief Financial Officer reviewed the audits but did not forward audits to the office overseeing the mentoring grants because findings did not pertain to these new grants. However, GAO found that 8 percent of the mentoring grantees had audit findings related to how well they handled other Education grants.

Education is currently assessing whether it will conduct an overall evaluation of its mentoring program. Education required that all grantees have evaluation plans, and most plan to report on youth outcomes related to academic achievement and attendance. However, grantees plan to use different methodologies, making it difficult for Education to have a cohesive picture of its mentoring program as a whole.

_____ **United States General Accounting Office**