

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-23-105589](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Job Corps centers must ensure federally illegal drugs are not permitted on campus, and are required to test students for drug use within 48 hours of their arrival. Students testing positive must receive intervention services and be retested 37 to 40 days later. A subsequent positive test result is grounds for termination from the program.

GAO was asked to review Job Corps. Among other objectives, GAO examined (1) the extent to which selected Job Corps centers' safety and security protocol documents included minimum requirements, (2) the progress of students testing positive for drug use, and (3) perspectives of staff at selected centers on challenges assisting students.

GAO analyzed program year 2018 (the most recent complete data prior to the COVID-19 pandemic) DOL and contractor data on drug testing and program completion. GAO also selected a nongeneralizable sample of six Job Corps centers to include a range of drug test rates, center sizes, and locations. GAO reviewed current center security protocols, interviewed officials, and distributed a student questionnaire from July through August 2022.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making three recommendations to DOL including developing procedures for reviewing and approving centers' security protocol documents and assessing actions to help centers recruit and retain drug intervention specialists. DOL agreed with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-23-105589](#). For more information, contact John D. Sawyer at (202) 512-7215 or sawyerj@gao.gov or Howard Arp at (202) 512-6722 or arpj@gao.gov.

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JOB CORPS

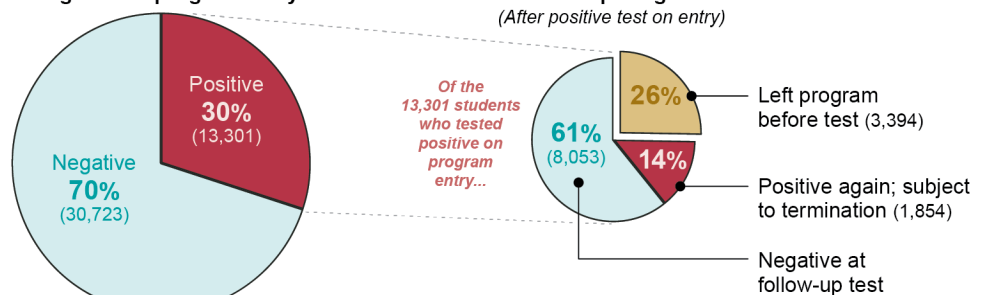
DOL Could Improve Center Safety and Security Procedures and Assess Hiring Flexibilities for Drug Intervention Specialists

What GAO Found

Although four of the six selected Job Corps centers' safety and security protocols GAO reviewed included required elements to prevent illegal drugs from entering their campuses, two centers' protocol documents did not, but were approved by the Department of Labor (DOL). DOL national officials told GAO that they provide guidance on minimum requirements for the protocol documents, and the regions should not approve documents omitting required elements. However, GAO found that the broad guidance lacked the written procedures needed for regional offices to identify missing elements. Without such procedures, regional officials may continue to approve incomplete protocol documents, diminishing centers' efforts to prevent drugs from entering their campuses.

In program year 2018, 30 percent of students tested positive for drug use on program entry, and 61 percent of these students subsequently tested negative during follow-up drug tests, according to GAO's analysis (see figure). About 51 percent of these students completed an educational or technical training credential, compared to about 58 percent of students who tested negative for drug use on entry. After drug tests administered at entry to all students and follow-up drug tests for students testing positive at entry, students are not tested again unless there is reasonable suspicion of drug use.

Drug Test Results for Students Who Enrolled in Job Corps in Program Year 2018



Note: Program year 2018 was July 1, 2018–June 30, 2019

Source: GAO analysis of data from the Department of Labor and its national drug testing lab contractor. | GAO-23-105589

Difficulties recruiting and retaining qualified specialists negatively affect a center's ability to provide intervention services to students who test positive for drugs, according to officials GAO interviewed in five of six selected centers. DOL requires intervention specialists to have a drug abuse counseling certification in the state where the center is located, but allows centers to waive the certification requirement for one year. Some centers used waivers over consecutive years, according to DOL information, indicating prolonged challenges recruiting certified specialists and retaining those hired using a waiver. DOL officials said the agency has not assessed specific options to address these hiring challenges. This would help ensure that centers are positioned to provide intervention services to help students successfully complete the program.