

June 1996

Education and Employment Issue Area Plan

Fiscal Years 1996-98



Foreword

As the investigative arm of the Congress and the nation's auditor, the General Accounting Office is charged with following the federal dollar wherever it goes. Reflecting stringent standards for objectivity and independence, GAO's audits, evaluations, and investigations promote a more efficient and cost-effective government; expose waste, fraud, abuse, and mismanagement in federal programs; help the Congress target budget reductions; assess financial and information management; and alert the Congress to developing trends that may have significant fiscal or budgetary consequences. In fulfilling its responsibilities, GAO performs original research and uses hundreds of databases or creates its own databases when information is unavailable elsewhere.

To ensure that GAO's resources are directed toward the most important issues facing the Congress, each of GAO's 35 issue areas develops a strategic plan that describes the significance of the issues it addresses, its objectives, and the focus of its work. Each issue area relies heavily on input from congressional committees, agency officials, and subject-matter experts in developing its strategic plan.

The work of the Education and Employment issue area focuses on the education provided in early childhood and elementary and secondary education programs, youths' and adults' access to higher education and employment training, employers' efforts to locate qualified job candidates, and the quality of the nation's workplaces. The principal issues are

- using federal resources to support and encourage state and local efforts to provide education programs that will enable all youth to obtain skilled jobs and be informed and actively involved citizens;
- ensuring that eligible students have access to quality higher education, while encouraging cost containment and protecting federal funds from fraud and abuse;
- helping individuals acquire the skills needed to become productively employed and helping employers locate qualified job candidates; and
- improving protection for workers while reducing the burden for employers in complying with workplace regulations.

In the pages that follow, we describe our key planned work on these important issues.

Because events may significantly affect even the best of plans, our planning process allows for updating and has the flexibility to respond

quickly to emerging issues. If you have any questions or suggestions about this plan, please call me at (202) 512-7014.

Carlotta C. Joyner

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Director
Education and Employment Issues

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Table I: Key Issues

Issue	Significance
Preparatory Education: Is the federal government using its education resources effectively to support and encourage state and local efforts to provide education programs that will enable all youth to obtain skilled jobs in the economy of the 21st century and to be informed and actively involved citizens?	In school year 1995-96, the nation will spend about \$326 billion on elementary and secondary education, including \$22 billion in federal money. Total spending is up, but per-pupil spending has leveled off since 1989. At the same time, the proportion of poor school-aged children has steadily increased. The challenge facing all levels of government is how to approach the problem of diminishing resources in the most cost-effective manner. Among the issues of interest to the Congress and the White House in this planning period are improved targeting of federal funds (Title I and IDEA) to disadvantaged students, improved classroom technology and teacher preparation programs, and alternative methods for financing and providing education services. The Congress will also consider streamlining various federal education programs and consolidating some program funding into block grants to give states more discretion in spending.
Higher Education: How can the federal government's goal of ensuring that eligible students have access to quality higher education be met while encouraging cost containment and preventing fraud and abuse with respect to federal resources?	The Department of Education is concurrently operating the new direct loan program and the existing guaranteed loan program. The Department faces the challenge of efficiently and effectively implementing both programs along with other student aid programs. The demand for federal financial aid resources has grown as increased tuition at both public and private schools has placed a greater financial burden on students and their families. Between 1980 and 1994, the cost to attend a 4-year public college or university rose by 235 percent, nearly three times the 79-percent increase in the median household income.
Workforce Skills and Jobs: How can the United States better assist workers in acquiring the skills needed to become productively employed and help employers locate qualified job candidates?	A strong, internationally competitive economy depends, in part, on effectively preparing workers to compete in the workforce and efficiently helping employers locate qualified job candidates. The federal government has invested considerable effort and resources towards this end, spending about \$20 billion supporting at least 163 employment and training programs spread across 15 different agencies. However, serious questions have been raised about the efficiency and effectiveness of these efforts, and concerns have surfaced about the need to simplify and streamline this complex array of programs.
Workplace Quality: What changes in workplace regulatory strategies would improve the level of worker protection while reducing employers' compliance burden?	Technological and organizational change, the globalization of the economy, and reduced federal resources are calling into question the strategies many federal agencies use to regulate the workplace. To maintain the nation's continued world economic leadership, we need to identify strategies that effectively combine basic worker protections with autonomous employee participation and enhanced employer flexibility. Ensuring the rights of workers, while reducing the regulatory burden on employers, is a subject of considerable congressional interest. The Congress is also concerned about whether the Department of Labor could be better organized to carry out its multiple workplace regulation functions.

Table I: Key Issues

Objectives	Focus of Work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Assess how well federal, state, and local management practices contribute to the effective use of federal education funds. •Identify ways various federal education funding formulas and state school finance systems could better target resources to special-needs students. •Assess how well teacher training institutions prepare their enrollees to teach a diverse student population and use modern technology in their teaching. •Identify ways to encourage effective use of classroom technology that supports the achievement of high academic standards for all students. •Identify issues associated with alternative methods for financing and providing elementary and secondary education services. •Identify ways to consolidate overlapping programs, functions, and units to eliminate duplication and unnecessary costs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Management practices and internal controls of federal education programs •Education achievement and accountability •Targeting in federal and state school funding formulas •Adequacy of teacher preparation programs •Technology needs of educational institutions •Parental choice in schools and roles in school management •Promising public/private partnerships in the delivery of education services •Consolidation of federal education programs serving children and youth
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Identify ways the Department of Education can more effectively and efficiently operate its student financial aid system. •Assess how Department of Education financial and management information systems can better support student aid programs and minimize potential fraud and abuse. •Identify improvements to help the Department effectively implement the direct student loan program without detracting from other student aid programs. •Identify alternatives to minimize the cost of education to students and the government, while ensuring needy students access to appropriate postsecondary education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Operation of the student aid systems •Student aid data systems • Efforts to collect student loans and prevent defaults • Better targeting of financial aid • Escalating costs of higher education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Identify ways to improve the effectiveness of employment training programs for economically disadvantaged youths and adults, veterans, dislocated workers, and the disabled population. •Identify options for improving the role of employers and other private-sector stakeholders in employment and training programs. •Describe state experiences in developing consolidated employment training systems. •Identify changes in the labor market that may have implications for employment training programs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Efficiency and effectiveness of existing job training programs •State and private-sector involvement in job training •Changes in the labor market •Use of labor market information •Consolidating federal job training programs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Describe and evaluate current and alternative workplace regulatory strategies. •Identify the implications for regulation of emerging trends in private-sector workplace practices and organization. •Analyze the relationships and interactions among multiple labor laws at the federal and state level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Current regulatory strategies and their implementation •Alternative regulatory strategies •Changes in workplace practices and organization
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Multiple federal and state labor laws

Table II: Planned Major Work

Issue	Planned Major Job Starts
Preparatory Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Review the management practices and internal controls of Head Start programs •Review how states and districts used funds made available under the Goals 2000: Improve America Schools Act. •Evaluate options for revising Title I's funding formula. •Evaluate federal efforts to target funding to neglected or delinquent children through Title I. •Evaluate state and federal efforts to target funding to districts with high proportions of poor students. •Describe successful teacher preparation programs and their characteristics. •Identify effective classroom technologies and the infrastructure and processes that led to their development. •Review the effects of implementing charter schools. •Evaluate the potential cost savings associated with consolidating funding for federal teacher training programs.
Higher Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Assess the use of wage garnishment for collecting defaulted student loans. •Assess the Department of Education's efforts to integrate the separate student aid data systems. •Evaluate the effectiveness, accuracy, and security of the Department of Education's National Student Loan Data System. •Evaluate the implementation of the direct student loan program. •Assess what the federal role should be in reducing the rate increase in college tuitions. •Determine how to ensure that proprietary school students receiving federal financial aid get marketable skills. •Evaluate alternatives for reducing the need for college remediation courses.
Workforce Skills and Jobs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Evaluate job training assistance provided to veterans by the Labor Department and the integration of these services with those available through the Department of Veterans' Affairs. •Assess the effectiveness of selected business-focused employment training programs in serving the disabled population. •Assess the availability of local labor market information and its usefulness to local employment and training programs. •Assess Job Corps contracting for recruitment and placement services. •Assess the role of employers at the state and local levels in designing and implementing job training assistance. •Identify lessons learned from states that are reforming and consolidating their employment training systems. •Identify implications, for job training programs and policies, of changes in the structure of employment, such as use of leased and temporary employees.
Workplace Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Examine the best private-sector practices that protect workers from repetitive motion injuries so as to identify an appropriate federal role in their prevention. •Identify and evaluate the effectiveness of selected alternative approaches to workplace regulation enforcement. •Identify labor organizations that receive federal funds but violate federal labor laws. •Assess the current use of debarment from future federal contracts (based on noncompliance with key labor and environmental laws) as an enforcement tool. •Assess the usefulness of EEO reporting forms as an enforcement tool. •Examine the characteristics and dynamics of the employee-leasing industry and its implications for workplace regulation. •Analyze the interaction of federal and state minimum wage and overtime laws and the resulting level of protection provided to workers. •Assess the efficiency of EEO efforts by federal and state agencies, in light of their overlapping missions, responsibilities, and geographic locations.

Table III: GAO Contacts

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