



November 2022

WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT

Additional Steps Needed to Help States Collect Complete Enrollment Information

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-23-104830](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act supports coordination among various federally funded workforce development programs. It seeks to help job seekers find work and employers find qualified employees. It also envisions aligned and coordinated service delivery across programs and prescribes common indicators of program performance. GAO was asked to review how information on program participants and performance is collected, and how DOL and Education use this information to assess program performance.

This report examines (1) what is known about DOL and Education efforts to collect required information on the Act's core program participation and performance outcomes, and (2) the extent to which DOL and Education have established performance targets and assessed core programs against them.

GAO reviewed guidance, the Act and its relevant regulations, other relevant department and state-submitted documents, and program-level information for July 2020 through June 2021. GAO also interviewed DOL and Education officials. Finally, GAO interviewed stakeholders from 10 organizations selected for their multi-state perspectives or other expertise on the Act's performance information.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making two recommendations that DOL and Education each work together to better collect complete information on co-enrollment. Both departments agreed with these recommendations.

View [GAO-23-104830](#). For more information, contact Dawn G. Locke at (202) 512-7215 or locked@gao.gov.

November 2022

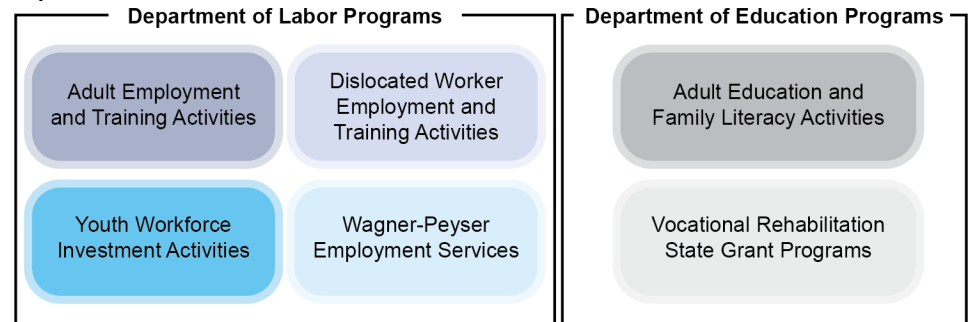
WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT

Additional Steps Needed to Help States Collect Complete Enrollment Information

What GAO Found

The U.S. Departments of Labor (DOL) and Education have created a common data structure that standardizes the information states are required to collect on the participants and performance of the six programs the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (the Act) identifies as core.

The Six Core Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Programs Overseen by the U.S. Departments of Labor and Education



Source: GAO analysis of information from the Congressional Research Service. | GAO-23-104830

According to officials from both departments and stakeholder groups GAO interviewed, it can be challenging for the six core programs to collect data on participants' employment and education outcomes. Reasons they cited for these challenges included decentralized data and the need to protect the confidentiality of program participant information. The departments have provided guidance and technical assistance to address such challenges, including data sharing strategies to obtain this information from outside agencies in ways that help protect confidentiality.

However, GAO found both departments lack complete information on participants enrolled in multiple programs. This is known as co-enrollment and is one strategy for achieving coordinated service delivery, according to DOL. For example, DOL program data did not include co-enrollment information for up to 67 percent of participants who may have also been enrolled in Education's programs. Officials said that reliance on participant self-reported information and limited data sharing across programs contributed to incomplete co-enrollment information. More complete co-enrollment information would help the departments better identify whether participants receive services from multiple programs and if doing so results in positive employment outcomes. It would also help evaluate whether the Act is achieving its vision of aligned and coordinated service delivery.

Both departments have made progress implementing the Act's performance assessment process. They have negotiated interim performance targets with the core programs they oversee and DOL assessed the performance of the core programs it oversees against two final employment outcome targets. Both departments plan to fully implement the performance assessment process in the future.

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Abbreviations

DOL	U.S. Department of Labor
GPRA	Government Performance and Results Act of 1993
Joint PIRL	Participant Individual Record Layout
NASWA	National Association of State Workforce Agencies
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
SWIS	State Wage Interchange System
WIOA	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

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November 16, 2022

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
United States Senate

The Honorable Robert C. “Bobby” Scott
Chair
Committee on Education and Labor
House of Representatives

The United States has not yet attained pre-pandemic levels of employment for all groups of people. For example, 872,000 more persons reported that they wanted a job but had ceased looking for work in September 2022 than in February 2020.¹ The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) is designed in part to help individuals—particularly those with barriers to employment—access employment, education, training, and support services needed to succeed in the labor market. It is also designed to help employers hire the qualified employees needed to succeed in the global economy. WIOA authorizes funding for certain employment and training programs in the nation’s publicly available workforce development system. It also provides mechanisms to support program accountability and coordination among a group of federal workforce development programs, including six that it defines as core programs.

The purposes of WIOA include bringing about increased alignment in service delivery across the workforce development system and helping individuals succeed in the labor market.² This can involve strategies such as determining whether individuals seeking assistance with finding employment would benefit from receiving an array of services offered by multiple programs (called co-enrollment). For the six core programs, WIOA requires the states to report a common set of information on program participants either to the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) or the U.S. Department of Education, depending on which department oversees

¹See News Release Bureau of Labor Statistics, Friday, October 7, 2022, USDL-22-1967, Table A-1 and News Release Bureau of Labor Statistics, Friday, April 3, 2020, USDL-20-0521, Table A-1.

² Pub. L. No. 113-128, § 2, 128 Stat. 1425, 1428-29 (2014).

the program.³ This includes information that the two departments use to assess the performance of each program.⁴ You asked us to review how the required information on WIOA program participants and performance is collected and used to assess the performance of WIOA programs.

In this report, we examined (1) what is known about DOL and Education efforts to collect required information on WIOA core program participation and performance outcomes, and (2) the extent to which DOL and Education have established performance targets and assessed performance of the core programs against these targets.

To address both of these objectives, we reviewed DOL and Education guidance and reports, as well as WIOA and its relevant regulations. We also interviewed DOL and Education officials.⁵ The interviews focused on how the departments support their respective WIOA core programs in collecting required information on program participants and performance, perceptions of the strengths and limitations of this information, and the quality review processes in place to ensure that the information reported is reliable and complete.⁶ The interviews also covered what is working well and what is challenging about how the departments establish performance targets and when the departments began or would begin to assess the extent to which programs met performance targets.

To collect other perspectives on the topics above, we also interviewed stakeholders from 10 organizations. We selected organizations that had multi-state perspectives on WIOA programs using a variety of approaches, including internet searches and reviewing information from stakeholders we interviewed on previous GAO engagements. Five of the groups we interviewed were national organizations of state WIOA officials

³We refer to the programs that DOL oversees as DOL programs and the programs that Education oversees as Education programs.

⁴WIOA requires that each of the state core programs measure performance generally using the same six indicators of performance and refers to these indicators as primary indicators of performance. 29 U.S.C. § 3141(b).

⁵In addition to interviewing officials at DOL headquarters, we also interviewed officials from three of six regional DOL offices, selecting the offices for geographic dispersion. DOL regional offices assist in overseeing the four core WIOA programs for which DOL is responsible. Education, which oversees the remaining two core programs, does not do so through regional offices.

⁶DOL, in its *PY 2020 Data Book: WIOA and Wagner-Peyser*, acknowledged substantial missing data in some items, particularly those newly required under WIOA. Therefore, we focused on describing department mitigation efforts to assist states with their reporting responsibilities. Similar acknowledgements were also made in previous data books.

and the other five groups had expertise in how states collect and report performance information to the departments. The perspectives obtained through these interviews are not generalizable to other organizations and experts.

For the first objective, we also reviewed additional DOL and Education data and documents to gain insight into how the WIOA core programs collect required information on program participants and performance. This included reviewing the following:

- DOL and Education information on the extent to which it was known whether program participants were co-enrolled in WIOA core programs. The departments provided this information for program year 2020—the most recent information available at the time of our review.⁷
- Seventeen DOL or Education annual state monitoring reports covering one or more of the six WIOA core programs. These reports—the most recent available at the time of our review—described on-site or virtual monitoring visits conducted from 2019 through 2021.
- State responses to DOL’s request for comment about approaches to more fully integrate and align computer systems across multiple programs, including the six WIOA core programs.⁸
- Applicable portions of seven state WIOA plans. Specifically, sections about how states integrate or plan to integrate the collection of program participant and performance information across their WIOA core programs. We selected plans in which the WIOA core programs had or were planning to develop computer linkages to share data in order to more fully understand the challenges and benefits states reported in developing such linkages. We identified these plans through analyzing National

⁷WIOA core programs operate on a program year, which runs from July 1st through June 30th.

⁸See Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, *Request for Public Comments: Exploration of a Multi-Program, Integrated Case Management System*, Docket Number: ETA-2021-0001.

Association of State Workforce Agencies state technology profiles.⁹

We reviewed relevant provisions of WIOA related to participation in multiple core programs (referred to as co-enrollment).¹⁰ WIOA identifies co-enrollment as one strategy for achieving aligned services across core programs and requires the two departments to collect information from the core programs on co-enrollment. We used Office of Management and Budget (OMB) guidance for implementing the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (Evidence Act) to identify how agencies should use evidence for making program decisions and strategies for building such evidence.¹¹

For the second objective, we also reviewed DOL and Education's plans to implement the performance assessment process described in WIOA. We did this by examining their guidance that establishes timeframes for implementing this process and interviewing officials to better understand how the departments have (and continue to) implement it. Additionally, we examined documentation on the statistical adjustment models that the departments and states use to inform negotiated and final performance targets for WIOA core programs. While we did not conduct an independent assessment of the soundness of the model and the results it generated, our review helped us to more fully understand implementation challenges that the departments face in establishing performance targets.

We conducted this performance audit from February 2021 to November 2022 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for

⁹The National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA) is the national organization representing all 50 state workforce agencies, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. territories. According to this organization's website and officials, the state technology profiles are high-level snapshots of the computer systems used by WIOA programs operating within a state. Among other things, these profiles contain information on the extent to which there are computer linkages across the core programs for the purposes of joint case management and performance reporting. According to officials, reporting these data is voluntary and most states report some or all of them to NASWA.

¹⁰We included co-enrollment in the scope of our work because of its relevance to aligning and coordinating WIOA programs.

¹¹According to this guidance, the Evidence Act urges the federal government to make decisions using the best available evidence from multiple sources and to commit to building evidence where it is lacking. It also defines evidence as the available body of facts or information indicating whether a belief or proposition is true or valid. This includes information on program participants and the services they receive (or could receive) and information on how the programs are performing.

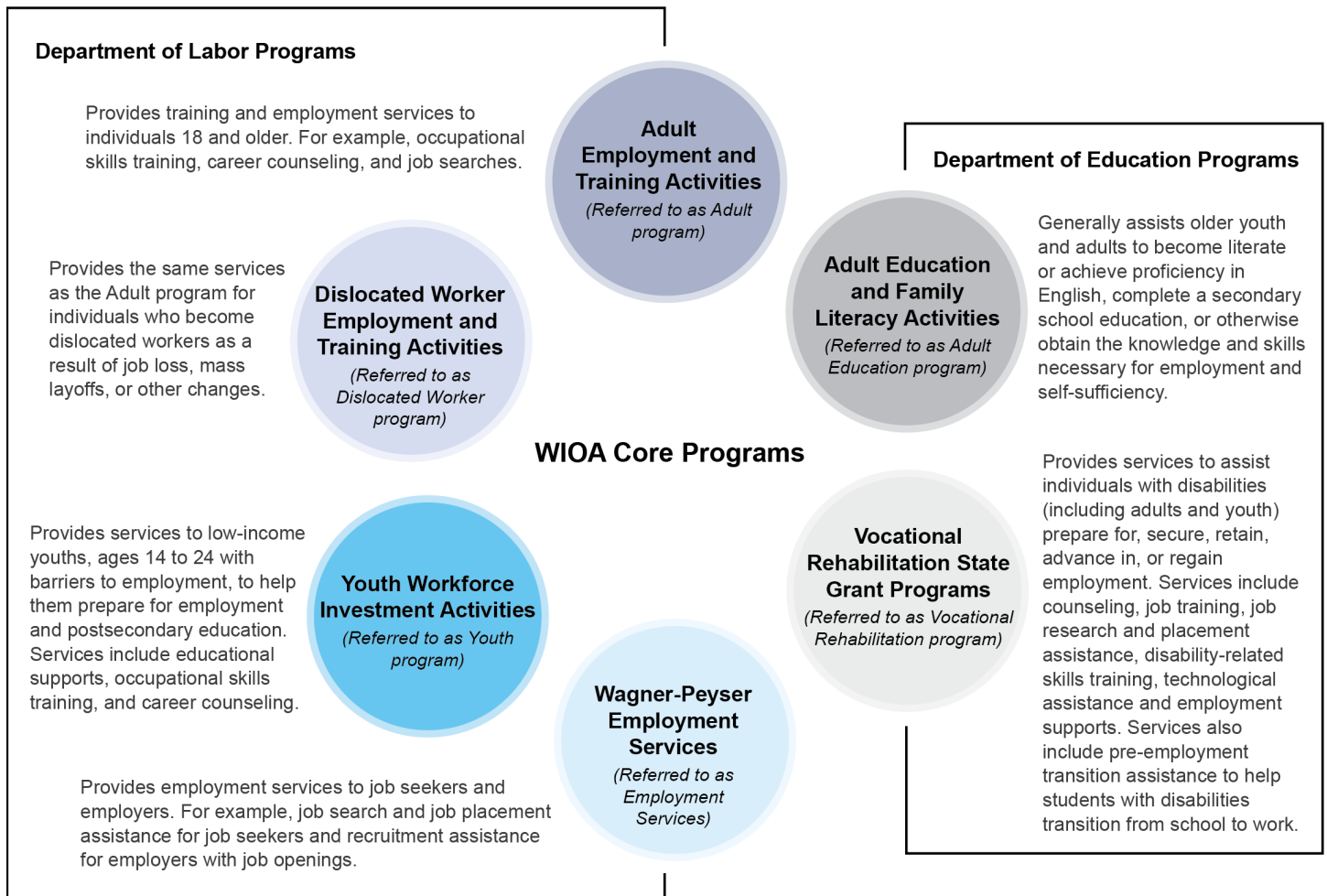
our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Background

The Six WIOA Core Programs

The six programs primarily provide services, such as job-search, education, and training assistance, to individuals experiencing different types of employment barriers as well as services to employers, such as recruitment assistance (see fig. 1). These programs target, among others, youths, workers who experience job loss or mass layoffs, and individuals with disabilities.

Figure 1: Description of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Core Programs Overseen by the U.S. Departments of Labor and Education



Source: GAO and GAO analysis of information from the Congressional Research Service. | GAO-23-104830

Alignment and Coordination of Services across Programs

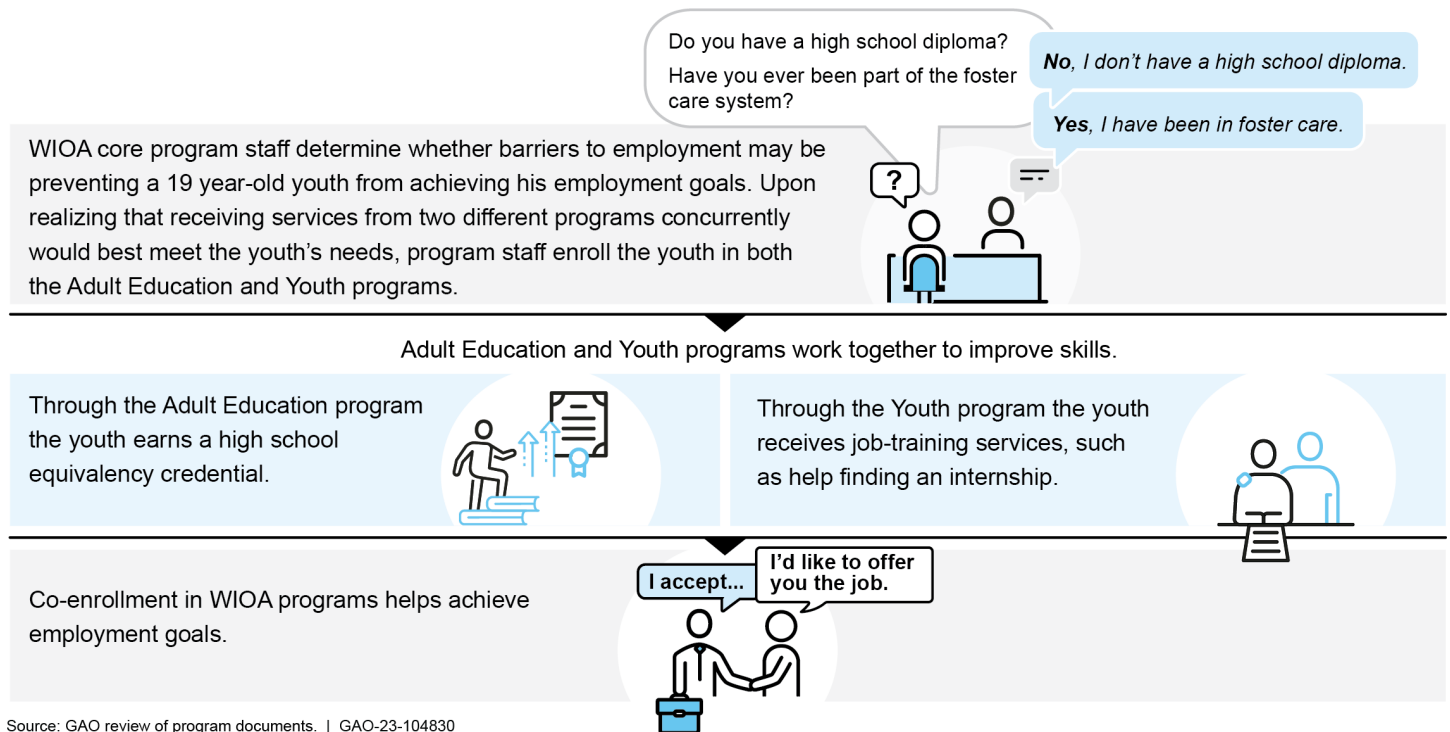
According to joint guidance issued by both departments, WIOA envisions a strategically aligned and coordinated workforce development system. One aspect of such a system is that individuals who seek one type of employment-related service can also be connected to others that may

help them reach their employment goals.¹² A strategy mentioned in WIOA to promote alignment across core programs is a process known as co-enrollment, where job seekers are enrolled in more than one WIOA program concurrently. For example, if a job seeker (hereafter referred to as a program participant) applies for services from one program, the staff directly assisting them can determine if they might also benefit from receiving services from other programs. To do this, staff determine which, if any, barriers to employment the program participant may be experiencing and, taking this and other information into account, may refer that individual to other programs (see fig. 2).¹³

¹²WIOA regulations generally define program participants as individuals who receive certain services after meeting all applicable programmatic requirements, including eligibility determination. Such services do not include self-service (where individuals independently access workforce development program information or activities) or information only services (where individuals receive readily available information from program staff that does not require staff to assess the individual's skills, education, or career objectives). This report refers to job seekers who meet program eligibility criteria as program participants.

¹³Staff may make referrals to other WIOA core programs or to non-core programs. We focused on the six WIOA core programs.

Figure 2: Example of Co-Enrollment in Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Core Programs



Source: GAO review of program documents. | GAO-23-104830

Note: WIOA designated six workforce development programs as core, including the Adult Education and Youth programs.

WIOA identifies numerous barriers to employment that staff who directly serve program participants can use to assess which services they should receive. Examples include low levels of literacy, ex-offender status, or long-term unemployment.¹⁴ Staff often gain information on these barriers by asking program participants a set of questions standard to the program's intake process in the state or area.

To promote aligned and coordinated service delivery, WIOA also requires the following:

- **One-stop centers.** WIOA requires that states make numerous workforce development programs available, including the six core

¹⁴29 U.S.C. § 3102(24).

programs, in one-stop centers known as American Job Centers.¹⁵ According to the departments, making multiple programs available in these centers, including co-locating programs, helps program participants more seamlessly access the career, education, training, and support services they need.

- **Unified state plans.** As a condition of receiving certain federal funds, WIOA requires each state to submit a 4-year plan outlining the strategies the WIOA core programs will use to advance aligned and coordinated service delivery.¹⁶ States are to draft their plans using jointly issued instructions from DOL and Education on what elements are to be included, such as a section on how information on program participants and program performance is shared or integrated across the programs.¹⁷
- **Common performance indicators.** WIOA requires that the core programs use indicators of performance to assess the extent to which these programs effectively help program participants and employers achieve positive outcomes (see fig. 3).¹⁸ WIOA defines five of the six primary indicators, those that assess whether participants enrolled in the core programs attain positive employment and education outcomes. The remaining indicator is to assess how effectively the core programs serve employers.




¹⁵Examples of workforce development programs (other than the core programs) that must provide access to services through one-stop job centers are Job Corps, the Senior Community Service Employment Program, and postsecondary Career and Technical Education programs. Other programs can also provide access to services through these job centers. For example, employment and training programs administered by the Social Security Administration, carried out by the Small Business Administration, and within the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program may provide access to services through these job centers. Job centers may provide in-person or virtual services to program participants.

¹⁶States can also include additional programs in their state plans. These additional programs are referred to as partner programs and examples of them include Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program employment and training programs, certain veterans programs, and the Career and Technical Education programs at the postsecondary level authorized under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006.

¹⁷States are required to update their 4-year state plans at the end of the first 2 years of every 4-year plan period. Both DOL and Education approve the initial and updated plans.

¹⁸WIOA also requires that other programs that DOL oversees report on these same performance indicators. These include the Indian and Native American Program, the National Farmworker Jobs Program, YouthBuild, and Job Corps.

Figure 3: The Six Performance Indicators in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)

Type of outcome	Indicator name	Description of indicator
Employment outcomes of program participants 	Employment rate 2nd quarter after exit	The percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment the 2nd quarter after exiting the WIOA core program. ^a
	Employment rate 4th quarter after exit	The percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment the 4th quarter after exiting the WIOA core program. ^a
	Median earnings 2nd quarter after exit	The median earnings of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the 2nd quarter after exiting the WIOA core program.
Education outcomes of program participants 	Credential attainment rate	The percentage of program participants who obtained a recognized postsecondary credential, or a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, either while enrolled in the WIOA core program or within 1 year of exiting the program. ^b
	Measurable skill gains rate	The percentage of program participants who, during a program year, are in an education or training program that leads to a recognized postsecondary credential or employment and who are achieving measurable skill gains toward such a credential or employment.
Employer outcomes 	Effectiveness in serving employers	The Secretaries of Labor and Education should jointly develop one or more indicators of performance that measure the effectiveness of the core programs in serving employers. ^c

Source: GAO review of program documents. | GAO-23-104830

^aFor the Youth program, this indicator also includes the percentage of program participants who are in education or training activities during the second or fourth quarter after exit from the program. 29 U.S.C. § 3141(b)(2)(A)(ii).

^bIn order to count toward this indicator, participants obtaining a secondary school diploma or its equivalent must also obtain or retain employment or be in an education or training program leading to a recognized postsecondary credential within one year after exiting the WIOA core program. 29 U.S.C. § 3141(b)(2)(A)(iii).

^cIn September 2022, the departments issued a proposed rule to establish how to measure this indicator, after having piloted three approaches.

Performance Assessment Process

WIOA requires that the states, in conjunction with the departments, establish performance targets and determine the extent to which each core program meets them. The performance assessment process consists of two parts: negotiating interim performance targets and establishing finalized performance targets.

-
- **Negotiated interim performance targets.**¹⁹ For each program, states, in conjunction with the departments, negotiate to set annual interim performance targets for each indicator that is applicable to the program. The two departments generally use these negotiated levels of performance to monitor performance throughout the upcoming program year. The departments are to consider certain factors during the negotiations, including the output from a statistical adjustment model that accounts for program participant characteristics and differences among states in economic conditions.²⁰
 - **Final performance targets.**²¹ After the program year ends, the departments are to determine final performance targets for each WIOA core program on each of its applicable performance indicators. These final targets adjust negotiated targets to account for economic and program participant changes that programs may have experienced over the course of the year. Adjustments may result in targets going up or down, depending on changes that occurred since interim targets were negotiated.

Eligible Training Providers

WIOA requires that states also report the extent to which training programs approved to receive specific types of WIOA funds successfully help students attain academic credentials and employment.²² Providers of these programs are known as Eligible Training Providers, and may include, but are not limited to, certain community colleges, universities, adult education program providers, and entities that carry out registered apprenticeships. WIOA requires that states submit performance reports to DOL that include information for each eligible program of an Eligible Training Provider.²³ According to WIOA and DOL guidance, states are to

¹⁹Department regulations refer to negotiated interim performance targets as negotiated levels of performance.

²⁰Other factors the departments are to consider include (1) how the performance levels involved compare to the levels established for other states and (2) the extent to which the performance levels involved promote continuous improvement in performance accountability and ensure optimal return on the investment of federal funds.

²¹Department regulations refer to final performance targets as adjusted levels of performance.

²²These training programs receive funds from the DOL Adult and Dislocated Worker programs. Certain program participants enrolled in these programs and the Youth Program can select training programs from a list of state-approved trainers. Training programs prepare individuals for a range of careers, including nursing and accounting.

²³Outcomes of students are to be reported on a program basis, so an Eligible Training Provider that offers several programs must provide student outcome information for each program.

include in their reports (1) program cost, program description, and credential(s); and (2) various employment and education outcomes of the students who exited the program, for WIOA-funded students and other students.

DOL and Education Help States Collect Data on Program Participant and Performance Outcomes, but Challenges in Collecting Co-Enrollment Information Persist

The Departments Have Standardized Data Collection Requirements for Participants and Performance across WIOA Core Programs

The departments have created a common data structure that standardizes the information states are required to collect on WIOA core program participants and performance outcomes.²⁴ According to the departments and one stakeholder group we interviewed, standardizing the data elements that the core programs collect has been a significant step towards achieving alignment across core programs. According to Education officials, for example, collecting the same data on program participants has enabled the reporting of common performance indicators, which enables the comparison of performance across core programs. Another stakeholder told us that common data elements across core programs standardizes information that would otherwise be state-specific.

The common data elements that all core programs are to collect on their program participants, according to DOL and Education officials and

²⁴These data on program participants are reported through the WIOA Participant Individual Record Layout (Joint PIRL). See Department of Labor Training and Employment Guidance Letter WIOA No. 10-16, Change 1 (August 23, 2017); Department of Education Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education Program Memorandum 17-2 (August 23, 2017); and Department of Education Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration Technical Assistance Circular RSA-TAC-17-01 (August 17, 2017). Additionally, DOL has a supplemental PIRL that outlines other required data elements for its workforce programs including the WIOA core programs.

guidance, include data on (1) participant characteristics (such as race) and barriers to employment (such as ex-offender status); (2) services participants receive (such as education or training services); (3) the outcomes of these services (such as credentials earned or employment obtained); and (4) whether participants are enrolled in more than one core program.

States Face Challenges in Reporting Certain Education and Employment Outcome Information and the Departments Have Helped States Mitigate These Challenges

During interviews, stakeholder groups and officials from both departments identified challenges the core programs face in collecting certain standardized data elements that the departments require they collect—specifically data on program participants’ education and employment outcomes. Table 1 below categorizes these challenges into three groups and describes some mitigating steps the departments have taken to help states address these challenges. Education officials told us that state collection of this information has improved and that they, along with DOL, continue to take steps to help states mitigate these challenges. The three groups of challenges are

1. core program challenges in collecting required data on program participant educational outcomes due to decentralized data sources;
2. core program challenges in collecting required data on program participant employment outcomes while protecting confidential program participant information; and
3. state and Eligible Training Provider challenges in collecting required data on the employment outcomes of certain students enrolled in WIOA eligible training programs while protecting confidential program participant information.

Table 1: Data Collection Challenges and DOL and Education Mitigation Efforts

	Data collection challenge	Examples of efforts on the part of the U.S. Departments of Labor (DOL) and Education to mitigate challenges
<p>Collecting data on Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) program participant educational outcomes—measurable skill gains and credential attainment</p>	<p>Although some existing databases have data on certain types of credentials, no single, comprehensive data source exists for all types of credentials that core programs are required to track.^a The lack of a centralized source makes it resource-intensive for program staff to collect these data, according to officials from both departments and five stakeholder groups we interviewed.</p>	<p>The departments issued technical assistance materials that describe how states can leverage data from educational entities.</p> <p>The departments also jointly convened a group of states in 2019 to discuss credential attainment reporting challenges and the participating states developed state-specific action plans.</p>
	<p>Another potential source of credential information is surveying program participants. According to DOL officials, Education guidance, a past GAO report, and one stakeholder group we interviewed, this approach may be challenging because some participants can be unresponsive.^b Further, one stakeholder group told us that tracking down past program participants to obtain information on credentials earned is time-consuming for program staff, thus it can interfere with providing services to current participants.</p>	<p>According to Education technical assistance materials, program staff should ensure that contact information on participants is accurate prior to the participants exiting a program. These materials also suggests that staff tell participants that the program may be seeking information on their education and employment outcomes after they have exited the program.</p>
<p>Collecting data on program participant employment outcomes— in-state (when participant receives services and works in the same state) and inter-state (when the participant receives services in one state and works in another)</p>	<p><i>In-state:</i> WIOA standardizes data on employment outcomes by requiring states to use quarterly wage records to obtain employment outcome information on program participants.^c According to DOL and Education guidance and four stakeholder groups we interviewed, protecting the confidentiality of program participant information has been a concern.</p> <p>States cannot always use the Unemployment Insurance data match to obtain quarterly wage records. For example, state Unemployment Insurance data does not include information on federal or military employees. Also, program participants might not provide a Social Security Number, which is used to complete the Unemployment Insurance data match.</p>	<p>To address concerns about the confidentiality of personal information when making data matches to Unemployment Insurance records, the departments issued joint guidance providing states with specific procedures for conducting these matches.</p> <p>DOL and Education guidance provides information on sources of supplemental wage information, such as federal employment records, that states can use for program participants who would not appear in Unemployment Insurance records. The guidance also provides supplemental methods for obtaining employment outcome information that do not require a Social Security Number, such as pay stubs or participant surveys.</p>

	<p><i>Interstate:</i> Program staff directly assisting participants can face challenges in accessing employment outcome information on participants when those participants receive services in one state and work in a different state, according to three stakeholder groups we interviewed. The departments manage a State Wage Interchange System (SWIS) that results in states receiving interstate employment and earnings data on such participants.^d According to one state official, a provision of the SWIS agreement is that states cannot share these individual-level data with program staff directly assisting participants because of confidentiality restrictions. This official also said that these staff need these data because they are held accountable for their program participants' outcomes. This official further explained that, since these staff cannot access these data through the SWIS agreement, they may spend time trying to document the same outcomes contained in the SWIS by phoning participants.</p>	<p>According to DOL documentation, the states of Texas, Georgia, Tennessee, and Illinois have proposed an amendment to the SWIS agreement that would allow program staff assisting participants to access employment outcome information in a manner that, one state official told us, will protect program participant confidentiality.^e DOL and Education facilitate the amendment process by establishing comment periods and organizing conference calls where states can voice concerns about the amendment. According to DOL officials, the two departments are currently developing responses to the comments received from the first comment period.</p>
<p>Collecting data on outcomes for students enrolled in Eligible Training Provider programs</p>	<p>WIOA requires that states report to DOL the employment and education outcomes of all students who participate in Eligible Training Provider programs.^f Some states have found it challenging to provide this information on students who are not WIOA program participants. According to DOL officials and a WIOA implementation study, this is because Eligible Training Providers can be unwilling to share personally identifiable information on their students due to privacy concerns.^g Personally identifiable information is needed, for example, on students who are not WIOA program participants to obtain information on their employment outcomes from the quarterly wage record match.</p>	<p>Both DOL and Education have provided technical assistance to aid the states in meeting Eligible Training Provider reporting requirements. For example, the departments developed joint guidance on data matching that addresses confidentiality requirements. Additionally, DOL hosted webinars on Eligible Training Provider reporting and a roundtable that included Education and state staff presentations on the topic. DOL officials also told us that the department provided direct technical assistance to states that requested it.</p>

Source: GAO analysis of DOL, Education, and stakeholder interviews; DOL and Education guidance and technical assistance, and selected reports. | GAO-23-104830

^aFor example, the [National Student Clearinghouse](#) houses data on postsecondary degrees. One participant in a stakeholder group we spoke with also said that his state is considering obtaining data on secondary degrees from its state education agency. Lastly, according to two stakeholder groups and a National Skills Coalition 2018 report, there is a lack of state systems for data on non-degree credentials. Examples of non-degree credentials include certificates issued by educational institutions, industry certifications, and licenses awarded by government licensing agencies. Jenna Leventoff, Measuring Non-Degree Credential Attainment (National Skills Coalition and Workforce Data Quality Campaign, May 2018).

^bGAO, Workforce Investment Act: Strategies Needed to Improve Certain Training Outcome Data, [GAO-14-137](#) (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 31, 2014).

^c29 U.S.C. § 3141(i)(2). States use quarterly wage records for the indicators on employment status during the second and fourth quarters after program exit and median earnings during the second quarter after program exit. According to DOL and Education guidance, state unemployment agencies maintain these data.

^dSWIS is a data sharing agreement that allows states to collect information on the employment and earnings of participants who receive program services in one state, but work in another state, from the Unemployment Insurance agency in the state where the participant works. See [Wage Interchange Systems | U.S. Department of Labor \(dol.gov\)](#).

^eAccording to DOL documentation, the SWIS agreement includes a section outlining an amendment process. An amendment is adopted when all parties have signed off on it.

^fEligible Training Provider programs receive WIOA funds to provide training services to certain types of WIOA program participants. See [TrainingProviderResults.gov](#).

^gMelissa Mack and Kate Dunham, Implementation Study of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Regarding Title I and Title III Core Programs: Performance Accountability, Eligible Training Providers, Labor Market Information and Evaluation Requirements under WIOA, a report prepared at the request of the U.S. Department of Labor by Mathematica and Social Policy Research Associates, November 2020.

DOL and Education Do Not Have Complete Information on Co-Enrollment

WIOA identifies co-enrollment as a strategy for achieving aligned services across the six core programs and requires states to report co-enrollment information about participants to DOL and Education.²⁵ DOL and Education officials and seven stakeholder groups told us that the departments do not have complete information on co-enrollment. They said that reasons include the core programs not always determining instances in which co-enrollment could occur or has occurred. States face two general challenges in trying to collect such complete co-enrollment information:

- **Identifying all programs for which a participant may be eligible.** One challenge, according to DOL and Education officials and three stakeholder groups, is detecting all the circumstances in which co-enrollment may be appropriate to meet participants' needs. For example, DOL officials told us that the current intake processes in some states may not adequately identify when participants may be eligible for other programs.
- **Tracking all instances of existing co-enrollment.** Another challenge that officials from both departments and six stakeholder groups identified is tracking instances of co-enrollment when co-enrollment does occur.

DOL identified instances where co-enrollment information across the core programs was incomplete. DOL gathers information on participants in a core program whose co-enrollment status with another core program has

²⁵According to DOL and Education guidance, WIOA envisions a strategically aligned and coordinated workforce development system such that individuals who seek one particular type of employment-related service can also be connected to other services that may help them reach their employment goals. Enrolling participants in more than one core WIOA program is one way to achieve such alignment.

been flagged as unknown.²⁶ These data demonstrate that obtaining complete information on co-enrollment may be particularly challenging between DOL and Education programs. Specifically:

- Among DOL Adult, Youth, and Dislocated Worker programs and the DOL Employment Service program, the percentage of participants whose co-enrollment status was unknown in program year 2020 ranged from about 3 percent to 5 percent.
- For DOL programs, the percentage of participants whose co-enrollment in Education programs was unknown ranged from about 12 percent to 67 percent.

Further, our review of annual co-enrollment information for program year 2020 found that out of a total of 306 WIOA core programs nationwide, 45 reported either no participants co-enrolled in another core program or did not report any co-enrollment information to the departments.²⁷ This included 14 DOL core programs operating in a total of 11 states that did not report any co-enrollment information to the departments. According to DOL officials, such programs are most likely unable to, or simply do not track, this information. Further, 30 state Adult Education programs and one state Vocational Rehabilitation program did not report any co-enrollment with any other core program. Education officials told us that this can mean either no co-enrollment occurred or that the state did not track this information. Officials also mentioned that, during a recent on-site monitoring visit to a state, they discovered that the state was not reporting co-enrollment figures to Education for the Adult Education program, although these data were being tracked at the local level.

DOL also flagged concerns about co-enrollment among the WIOA core programs in two of the recent 17 annual state monitoring reports we reviewed. For example, one monitoring report stated that it was unclear if

²⁶Specifically, DOL requires its core programs to record for each program participant whether co-enrollment in each of three other core programs is “yes,” “no,” or “unknown.” These three programs are the Adult Education, Vocational Rehabilitation, or Employment Services programs. This information is not tracked among DOL title I core programs (that is, Adult, Youth and Dislocated Worker programs). The extent of co-enrollment tends to be known among these programs, according to DOL officials, since they automatically share information on their participants with each other.

²⁷Each state and the District of Columbia have six core programs, thus nationwide there are a total 306 such programs. As part of performance reporting to the departments, each core program reports the total percent of its program participants who are enrolled in more than one core program.

the state's Youth program participants were co-enrolled in the Adult Education program despite attending adult education classes.

Co-enrollment information can be incomplete between DOL programs and Education programs for two related reasons:

- First, according to officials from both of the departments, co-enrollment between these two groups of programs is often self-reported by program participants during the intake process and these reports may be unreliable.
- Second, according to officials from both departments, a WIOA implementation study, and three stakeholder groups, there is often limited capacity to share information on participants between DOL and Education programs.²⁸

According to one stakeholder group and DOL and Education officials, reasons for limited data sharing include that DOL and Education programs are often administered by different state agencies using different data systems. Therefore, it can be difficult to track whether co-enrollment occurs across DOL and Education programs, and program staff must rely on program participant self-reporting, according to DOL and Education officials. According to five of 12 states responding to a DOL request for comment about developing computer systems linking the core programs, limited data sharing can impact a program's ability to serve program participants who would benefit from co-enrollment.²⁹

Data sharing is also limited by a lack of a common participant identifier across core programs, according to DOL regional officials, the WIOA implementation study, one stakeholder group we interviewed, and our prior work.³⁰ Although DOL and Education guidance on program

²⁸Melissa Mack and Kate Dunham, *Implementation Study of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Regarding Title I and Title III Core Programs: Performance Accountability, Eligible Training Providers, Labor Market Information and Evaluation Requirements under WIOA*, a report prepared at the request of the U.S. Department of Labor by Mathematica and Social Policy Research Associates, November 2020.

²⁹DOL's Employment and Training Administration issued a request for comment to explore the possibility of an integrated case management system to improve WIOA service delivery at the local level. According to the request for comment, DOL plans to use the comments to inform its implementation of WIOA and the technical assistance it provides to states to help them align technology and data systems across programs.

³⁰Mack and Dunham, *Implementation Study of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)*. GAO, *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act: Information on Planned Changes to State Performance Reporting and Related Challenges*, [GAO-16-287](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 7, 2016).

participants states that participants must be assigned a unique identifier, officials from both departments indicated that it has been difficult to have the same participant identifier across all core programs. DOL officials explained for example that, at the time that the departments were developing the common data structure for states to use to collect information on WIOA core program participants, requiring them to have a common identifier was not feasible because of the way that most of the programs issued these identifiers.³¹ Our review of seven program year 2020 state plans, however, found that two states specifically mentioned plans for developing common identifiers across their workforce development programs.

DOL and Education officials, five stakeholder groups, and 11 states indicated that improved data sharing across the core programs could help states obtain more complete information on co-enrollment. For example, the seven state plans we reviewed indicated that improved sharing of program participant information across core programs has provided or could provide more complete co-enrollment information. For example, Michigan's state plan indicated that the sharing of co-enrollment information is the most immediate return expected from improved data sharing across the core programs. It describes existing data sharing among the Adult, Youth, Dislocated Worker, Employment Service, and Adult Education programs that allows program staff to track a participant's co-enrollment across these programs. Moreover, five of 12 states responding to a DOL request for comment about an integrated case management system across programs listed improved co-enrollment as a positive effect when programs share data. One state said, for example, that shared data would facilitate identifying participants who could benefit from being co-enrolled in other programs. Another state said that shared data would allow program staff to track all programs from which a participant receives services.

Although DOL and Education have provided technical assistance on data sharing, two states and a WIOA implementation study mentioned that additional assistance would be helpful.³² One state, responding to the DOL request for comment about developing computer systems linking the

³¹The departments first issued this guidance in December 2016 and updated it in August 2017. See, for example, Training and Employment Guidance Letter WIOA No. 10-16, Change 1, Operating Guidance for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. According to DOL and Education officials, this guidance does not require that the same identifier be used across all core programs.

³²Mack and Dunham, *Implementation Study of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)*.

core programs, indicated that it would be helpful if DOL provided best practices and guidance on ways to improve data sharing across programs. DOL officials told us that, based on the responses they received from their request for comment, they will provide technical assistance to promote best practices in sharing data across core programs. They also told us that, although they will continue to consult with various stakeholders (including Education) while developing this assistance, when implemented, this assistance will be DOL-led. Given that officials from both departments have acknowledged that data sharing between DOL and Education programs can be challenging, coordinated technical assistance in this area may be warranted. Moreover, the request for comment was authored solely by DOL and eight of 12 states providing comments were state workforce agencies that did not house one or both of the Education core programs in their agency.³³ Developing joint technical assistance may be a way to more fully bring Education core programs into the discussion.

Similarly, the departments have also provided some technical assistance related to co-enrollment, but this assistance has not fully addressed the challenges with obtaining complete information on co-enrollment from all programs. In 2018, for example, the departments jointly assisted seven states in developing action plans surrounding co-enrollment practices. Although these seven states reported co-enrollment information for all DOL core programs and the Vocational Rehabilitation program, four of them reported no or unknown co-enrollment for the Adult Education program in program year 2020. This may indicate continued challenges with the assessment and tracking of co-enrollment between the Adult Education and other core programs in these states. It also presents both departments with an opportunity to (1) learn more about why co-enrollment was not reported between the Adult Education and other core programs in these states and (2) use this information to further refine future technical assistance around co-enrollment. Lastly, DOL held its own webinar in March 2021 that presented co-enrollment information and provided an opportunity for attendees to discuss their experiences with co-enrollment. Although the webinar included a discussion about obstacles to making co-enrollment a focus, because it was DOL-sponsored, any discussion about co-enrolling participants between DOL

³³Education oversees the Adult Education and Vocational Rehabilitation core programs. Of the remaining four states that provided comments, two were state agencies that housed Education's Vocational Rehabilitation program and two were state workforce agencies that housed both DOL and Education WIOA core programs.

and Education programs may not have been as useful as it could have been if it was co-sponsored by both departments.

WIOA identifies co-enrollment as one strategy for achieving aligned and coordinated service delivery.³⁴ Relatedly, DOL issued a Notice in 2021 advancing a one workforce vision and strategy and discussed the importance of co-enrollment as one strategy for achieving coordinated and integrated service delivery.³⁵ WIOA also requires states to report co-enrollment data as part of their performance reporting and includes general provisions relating to the departments being required to provide assistance to the states.³⁶ Lastly, WIOA requires DOL to conduct evaluations, including the assessment of coordination and integration of services across its programs.³⁷ Federal law also requires Education to conduct evaluations.

In addition, according to Office of Management and Budget guidance, the Evidence Act urges the federal government to make decisions using the best available evidence from multiple sources and to commit to building evidence where it is lacking.³⁸ This guidance also says that evidence can include information on program participants and how programs are performing. According to Education officials, co-enrollment evidence provides a measure of program alignment. In addition, DOL officials told us that co-enrollment evidence can provide insight into the correlation between different combinations of services and program participant outcomes. By working together to better assist state WIOA core programs with collecting more complete evidence on co-enrollment, DOL and Education will have a better understanding of co-enrollment, as well as the education and employment outcomes of those co-enrolled. The departments may also be better positioned to determine whether co-enrollment is working as an intended strategy for achieving aligned and coordinated service delivery across the core programs or if changes are needed.

³⁴29 U.S.C. § 3112(b)(2)(B)(i).

³⁵Training and Employment Notice No. 13-20, Advancing a One Workforce Vision and Strategy, January 4, 2021.

³⁶See, e.g., 29 U.S.C. §§ 3141, 3223.

³⁷29 U.S.C. § 3224(a)(2)(C).

³⁸Office of Management and Budget, Memorandum for Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies, *Evidence-Based Policymaking: Learning Agendas and Annual Evaluation Plans*, OMB, M-21-27 (June 30, 2021).

DOL and Education Have Made Progress in Implementing the Two-Part Performance Assessment Process

As of program year 2022, both DOL and Education have implemented the first part of the performance assessment process, whereby, with the exception of the employer indicator, they have negotiated interim performance targets with core programs they oversee on all applicable indicators. Further, for program year 2020, DOL has partially implemented the second part, by assessing the core programs it oversees against final targets on some employment outcomes. Both departments plan to implement the entire performance assessment process in the future.

DOL and Education Have Negotiated Interim Performance Targets with WIOA Core Programs They Oversee

According to DOL and Education guidance, for program year 2022, the departments negotiated targets with all WIOA core programs on all relevant indicators, except the effectiveness in serving employers indicator.³⁹ As discussed previously, the negotiated targets are interim agreed-upon levels of performance WIOA core programs should aim to meet during the program year (see sidebar). Each department negotiates separately with the WIOA core programs it oversees, and generally, they use the negotiated interim targets for monitoring purposes over the course of the year. The two departments and WIOA core programs needed historical

performance data to appropriately set the negotiated interim targets, according to DOL and Education guidance. The programs took varying amounts of time to initially accumulate these data due, in part, to different levels of experience in collecting them. DOL began negotiating targets with WIOA core programs it oversees on a number of indicators 2 years

Using the Statistical Adjustment Model to Set Performance Targets

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requires that the Departments of Labor and Education develop and disseminate an objective statistical model that will be used to make adjustments in states' performance targets based on economic conditions in the state as well as characteristics of participants the state serves.

Negotiated interim performance targets: Prior to the start of the program year, WIOA requires the model be used as one of various factors in the negotiations between the departments and core programs. It is to account for economic conditions in the state and the characteristics of participants when the participants entered the relevant programs. Examples of economic conditions include levels of unemployment, as well as job gains and losses in specific industries. Examples of participant characteristics include homelessness, lack of educational attainment or work experience, and ex-offender status. In addition to the inputs WIOA required they use in the model, the two departments also included other inputs, such as age, gender, and race, as well as some program-specific factors, such as disability type and severity (for the Vocational Rehabilitation program) and level of literacy and numeracy (for the Adult Education program). For the most part, data about participants and the barriers they face is expressed as a proportion of participants formerly enrolled in a program. The model's estimates are one factor used to inform negotiations with the state, but they are not the sole consideration. Other factors taken into account during negotiations include comparisons to the targets established for other states, and the extent to which the targets promote continuous improvement in performance accountability.

Final performance targets: After the program year ends, WIOA requires the departments use the model to set what we refer to as "final performance targets." Per WIOA, the negotiated interim targets are adjusted to account for actual economic conditions and characteristics of participants served during the year. Unlike at the beginning of the program year, when interim targets are negotiated using a variety of factors, the law only specifies one factor (the model) be used to establish the final targets.

Source: 29 U.S.C. § 3141(b)(3)(A) and GAO review of program documents. | GAO-23-104830

³⁹In September 2022, the departments issued a proposed rule to establish how to measure the effectiveness in serving employers indicator, with final comments due by November 14, 2022.

after the enactment of WIOA, as did Education with one of the two programs it oversees, on one indicator.⁴⁰ For other indicators with which the programs had less experience collecting data, the departments took more time to begin the negotiations process.⁴¹ For example, Education initially took longer to negotiate targets with Vocational Rehabilitation programs because, in order to collect the data, Vocational Rehabilitation programs needed to make more significant computer system infrastructure changes than the other WIOA core programs, according to Education officials. The other programs had—before the enactment of WIOA—collected data in a manner that made their case management systems more compatible with the data collection WIOA eventually required.

DOL and Education officials told us that negotiating interim targets is useful from a performance accountability standpoint. For example, officials told us that states may use the negotiated interim targets for their own accountability purposes. Moreover, the departments sometimes use the negotiated interim targets to monitor WIOA core programs. For example:

- DOL regional officials we interviewed said that they monitor DOL programs and data quality by doing quarterly desk reviews of performance data states report. Through this process, they said that they detect if WIOA core programs are making progress towards meeting the negotiated interim targets and determine if there are anomalies in participant data which underlie the performance outcomes. The regional officials said that they provide technical assistance to remediate concerns identified during quarterly monitoring. For example, according to officials in one region, WIOA Youth program experts at DOL provided technical assistance to one state's officials when the region detected the state's Youth program participation rate was low.
- Education uses the negotiated interim targets to informally monitor Adult Education program performance. Education annually compares actual performance to negotiated interim targets and ranks states nationally, with the purpose of providing technical assistance to those states that are performing poorly compared to their negotiated targets or to other states.

⁴⁰WIOA was enacted in 2014.

⁴¹WIOA permitted the departments to take such actions as they determine appropriate to provide for the orderly transition from the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 to the new authorities under WIOA. 29 U.S.C. § 3343.

DOL Has Begun to Assess WIOA Core Programs against Final Targets on Some Outcomes, and Both Departments Have Plans to Fully Implement Performance Accountability

For program year 2020, DOL assessed WIOA core program performance against final targets for the first time on two indicators related to employment and earnings (see table 2). Moreover, both DOL and Education have evolving plans to fully implement performance accountability under WIOA. According to DOL and Education officials, the departments have been able to set and revise timeframes for assessing whether WIOA core programs met final performance targets because the transition authority in WIOA permits the departments to take appropriate measures to enable an orderly transition from previous requirements.⁴²

⁴²While DOL was able to move forward with assessing WIOA core program performance against final targets in some instances in program years 2020 and 2021, both DOL and Education delayed assessing some or all indicators they originally intended to assess. Moreover, for the indicators employment 4th quarter after exit and credential attainment, neither department had planned to assess whether WIOA core programs met final targets in program year 2020 or 2021, because they knew in advance that they lacked data needed to estimate final targets using the statistical models. They lacked data because these indicators are reported at least a year and a half after participants exit, resulting in a time lag before the departments obtain the data. Additionally, Education had not planned to assess Vocational Rehabilitation programs' performance against final targets on any indicators in program year 2020, except measurable skill gains, because it did not have sufficient data to establish negotiated targets, as described previously.

Table 2: Status of the Departments of Labor and Education’s Assessment of WIOA Core Program Performance, Program Years 2020 and 2021

Type of outcome measured	Performance indicator	Status of Department of Labor’s final assessments of the programs it oversees ^a (assessed/not assessed)	Status of Department of Education’s final assessments of the programs it oversees ^b (assessed/not assessed)
Employment outcomes of program participants	Employment rate 2nd quarter after exit	Assessed	Not assessed
	Median earnings 2nd quarter after exit	Assessed	Not assessed
	Employment rate 4th quarter after exit	Not assessed	Not assessed
Education outcomes of program participants ^c	Credential attainment rate	Not assessed	Not assessed
	Measurable skill gains rate	Not assessed	Not assessed
Employer outcome	Effectiveness in serving employers	Not assessed	Not assessed

Source: GAO analysis of program documents from the Departments of Labor and Education. | GAO-23-104830

Note: The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) designated six workforce development programs as core. The Departments of Labor and Education announced which WIOA core programs they would assess against final targets for program year 2020 in October 2021. In the announcement, they said that they will assess the same WIOA core programs for program year 2021, ending June 30, 2022.

^aDepartment of Labor core programs are Dislocated Worker, Adult, Youth, and Employment Services.

^bDepartment of Education core programs are Adult Education and Vocational Rehabilitation.

^cThe performance indicators for education outcomes do not apply to the Employment Services program.

In joint October 2021 memos, the two departments said that it would be inappropriate to assess WIOA core programs against final targets on certain indicators for the previous program year (ending June 30, 2021)—despite having intended to do so—because the input data were not sufficient to produce reliable estimates using the statistical adjustment model.⁴³ DOL and Education officials told us that the estimates were unreliable in part because data used in the models—that is, outcome data as well as economic and participant data—were subject to variability. Officials attributed the variability in data to the newness of data collection

⁴³Training and Employment Notice 14-21 / Rehabilitation Services Administration FAQ 22-01 / Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education Program Memorandum 22-1, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Core Program Performance Accountability Assessment for Program Years 2020 and 2021.

and to the pandemic.⁴⁴ They further explained that the variability weakened the model's ability to adjust at the end of the program year for economic and demographic changes that could affect WIOA core program performance. The consequence, according to Education officials, was that the final targets fluctuated implausibly from the negotiated targets. Education officials said that they expect data collection to improve in subsequent years as it becomes a more standard part of WIOA core program operations. DOL officials said that its data may have begun to stabilize. Further, while the effects of the pandemic may be reflected in data for program years 2022 and 2023, officials of both departments reported intentions to assess WIOA core program performance on some or all indicators using final targets in these years and on all indicators in the future.⁴⁵

Officials from both departments told us that having reasonable final performance targets is crucial, citing the role the final targets play in whether or not the departments impose financial sanctions. Under DOL and Education regulation, financial sanctions are to be levied if a WIOA core program fails to achieve 50 percent of its final target on the same indicator for 2 consecutive years.⁴⁶ For the two indicators for which DOL has set final targets—employment and median earnings 2nd quarter after exit—DOL ran tests of the statistical adjustment model to assess whether the estimates that the model generated sufficiently adjusted the negotiated interim targets. Specifically, DOL's analysis demonstrated that actual WIOA core program performance levels were closer to the final

⁴⁴According to DOL and Education officials, while DOL-overseen programs had collected data on employment outcomes in a similar manner prior to the enactment of WIOA, such data collection was newer for the Adult Education program. These officials also explained that collecting data on the measurable skills gain performance indicator was also new, in at least some respects, for all programs. Officials also told us that the pandemic further contributed to the variable economic and demographic data used in the statistical adjustment model. For example, unemployment rates changed dramatically during the pandemic, and enrollment in workforce development programs dropped.

⁴⁵To decide whether to assess if WIOA core programs met final targets, the departments described steps they take to review the data to ensure estimates of final targets are reliable, including checking the magnitude of the model's estimated adjustment to the negotiated target.

⁴⁶The departments said that the 50 percent threshold is meant to hold states accountable for significant shortcomings in performance. The departments are to provide technical assistance in the first year that the program does not meet the performance threshold. If the state does not meet the same threshold on the same indicator in the second year, the departments are to withhold 5 percent of a specified WIOA discretionary reserve fund. States may appeal the decision to issue sanctions to the DOL Office of Administrative Law Judges.

targets than to the negotiated targets.⁴⁷ In program year 2020, according to DOL documents, all DOL-overseen core programs achieved performance outcomes of at least 50 percent of their final targets, the required threshold to pass.

Officials from both departments said that they plan to assess performance on more indicators in the future. DOL officials said that they anticipate assessing WIOA core program performance against final targets on all employment and education indicators for program year 2022 and 2023. Education officials said they would evaluate data as they come in (such as in October 2023, when program year 2022 data are due) to determine whether they can be used to generate final program targets.

DOL and Education Plan to Assess Overall State Performance

The departments plan to calculate overall performance scores related to the employment and education outcomes of program participants, and use them to measure overall state performance. The departments said that these scores will help ensure alignment and integration across all of the core programs. The overall scores will measure how

- the six programs perform on a single indicator. An example of this score is performance of all programs on Employment 2nd quarter after exit. There will be at least five such scores, one for each of the five indicators that measure employment and education outcomes.
- a single program performs on all indicators relevant to it. An example of this score is performance of the Youth program across all indicators. There will be one such score for each program.

The departments said in the joint October 2021 memo that it would not be reasonable to assess state performance on the two types of overall scores in program year 2020 and 2021.⁴⁸ According to both departments, this is because the departments have not yet assessed whether WIOA core programs met final targets on all underlying indicators measuring employment and education outcomes. Once assessment on the overall

⁴⁷DOL officials told us that the pandemic presented challenges in service delivery, which led to decreases in some performance outcomes. Nonetheless, DOL found that the model sufficiently adjusted for these impacts for the indicators it assessed.

⁴⁸Training and Employment Notice 14-21 / Rehabilitation Services Administration FAQ 22-01 / Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education Program Memorandum 22-1, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Core Program Performance Accountability Assessment for Program Years 2020 and 2021.

scores commences, states will be required to meet a 90 percent threshold to be considered successful, according to joint DOL and Education regulations.⁴⁹ In contrast, WIOA core programs are required to meet the lower 50 percent threshold for all five employment and education indicators.

DOL and Education Are Taking Steps to Measure How Effectively the WIOA Core Programs Are Serving Employers

On September 14, 2022, the two departments issued a joint proposed rule for how to measure the effectiveness in serving employers indicator.⁵⁰ The issuance of this joint proposed rule follows a 6 year process to establish a standardized approach for measuring the indicator.⁵¹ Unlike the other indicators, WIOA left it to the departments to determine how to measure effectiveness in serving employers. The departments are proposing to use Retention with the Same Employer as the measurement, which is the percentage of participants with wage records in the second quarter after exit who were employed by the same employer in the second and fourth quarter after program exit.⁵² According to the departments, using this approach demonstrates the success in preparing participants to fill jobs that meet employer needs.

The departments have proposed that the employer indicator be a statewide indicator reported by one core program on behalf of all six core

⁴⁹The departments are to provide technical assistance or impose sanctions if a program within the state does not meet the 50 percent threshold on a particular indicator or if the state does not meet the 90 percent threshold on the overall scores. Additionally, the departments are to impose sanctions if a state fails to submit the required performance reports. The departments will withhold up to 10 percent of the WIOA discretionary reserve fund, 5 percent for failure to report and 5 percent if a state does not meet the 50 or 90 percent performance thresholds.

⁵⁰Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Effectiveness in Serving Employers Performance Indicator, 87 Fed. Reg. 56,318 (Sept. 14, 2022). Comments on the proposed rule were due by November 14, 2022.

⁵¹Since 2016, the departments have been piloting three potential approaches to measure the effectiveness in serving employers indicator, including one similar to the approach they are now proposing to use. The three piloted approaches were (1) the percentage of WIOA program participants with wage records who were employed with the same employer in the 2nd and 4th quarters after exiting the program, (2) the percentage of employers who use WIOA core program services more than once during the last three reporting periods, and (3) the percentage of employers within a state using WIOA core program services. States have been required to use two of the three approaches when reporting on this indicator to the departments. According to department officials, the pilot came about in part as a result of input they received after they issued a notice of proposed rulemaking in April 2015.

⁵²As described above, according to DOL and Education guidance, state unemployment agencies maintain these records.

programs within each state. This is unlike the other indicators, for which each core program reports separately on the applicable indicators. The departments stated that they intend to encourage cross-program collaboration, coordination, and a holistic approach to serving employers, and that requiring this performance indicator be reported by one core program on behalf of all six core programs furthers this collaborative approach. The departments also stated that the indicator would not be included in sanctions determinations until the departments collect a minimum of 2 years of performance data, develop a statistical adjustment model that yields reliable estimates for the indicator, and negotiate performance levels for the indicator.

Conclusions

WIOA envisions aligned and coordinated service delivery across workforce development programs and seeks to help employers fill positions and job seekers succeed in the labor market. One way to achieve this streamlined service delivery is to co-enroll participants in all programs that may benefit them. DOL and Education officials acknowledge that information on co-enrollment can be incomplete, particularly between DOL and Education programs, due to limited sharing of participant information across programs. Issuing improved technical assistance or taking other actions that promote collecting complete information on co-enrollment would enable the core programs to systematically assess whether participants should be co-enrolled and better track the extent to which such enrollment occurs. More complete information on co-enrollment would help the departments better identify the extent to which participants receive multiple program services and whether doing so results in positive employment outcomes. It would also help the departments evaluate the extent to which WIOA is achieving its vision of aligned and coordinated service delivery across the core programs or if changes are needed.

Recommendations for Executive Action

We are making two recommendations, one to DOL and the other to Education:

The Secretary of Labor should work with the Secretary of Education to determine how to better assist WIOA core programs in collecting complete information on co-enrollment, for example, by providing additional information or technical assistance to help states better share information on participants across programs. (Recommendation 1)

The Secretary of Education should work with the Secretary of Labor to determine how to better assist WIOA core programs in collecting

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complete information on co-enrollment, for example, by providing additional information or technical assistance to help states better share information on participants across programs. (Recommendation 2)

We provided a draft of this report to the Department of Labor (DOL) and the Department of Education for review and comment. DOL comments are reproduced in appendix I and Education comments are reproduced in appendix II.

Both Departments agreed with our recommendations. DOL stated that it will continue to partner with Education to emphasize the importance of collecting complete and accurate co-enrollment information and provide additional support to states. Education said that as part of its continued partnership to promote effective WIOA implementation, it will work with DOL to determine how to better assist states in ensuring the accuracy and completeness of co-enrollment data that states report to the Department. Both Departments also provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-7215 or locked@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs are on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are listed in appendix III.



Dawn G. Locke, Acting Director
Education, Workforce, and Income Security Issues

Appendix I: Comments from the Department of Labor

U.S. Department of Labor

Employment and Training Administration
200 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20210



Ms. Dawn G. Locke
Acting Director
Education, Workforce, and Income Security Issues
U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO)
441 G Street, NW
Washington, District of Columbia 20548

Dear Ms. Locke:

On behalf of the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the Government Accountability Office's (GAO) draft report entitled: "*Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Additional Steps Needed to Help States Collect Complete Enrollment Information*" (GAO-23-104830).

The GAO report recommends the following:

- *The Secretary of Labor should work with the Secretary of Education to determine how to better assist WIOA core programs in collecting complete information on co-enrollment, for example, by providing additional information or technical assistance on helping states better share information on participants across programs.*

The Department agrees with this recommendation and has provided technical assistance and guidance to states on the challenges of obtaining co-enrollment data. For example, in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Education (ED), DOL convened a cohort of state teams representing WIOA's core programs to explore ways to operationalize co-enrollment of program participants. Through this engagement, states were able to strategize and develop co-enrollment action plans.¹ In the [WIOA 2019 Performance Accountability Training](#) and the [2021 Virtual WIOA Performance Accountability Training](#), DOL featured sessions on co-enrollment that included strategies for sharing data across programs and examining co-enrollment data. DOL has also partnered with ED to provide states guidance on co-enrollment among other topics.

The report acknowledges that DOL has already taken steps to mitigate risks associated with co-enrollment data collection. DOL will continue to partner with ED to emphasize the importance of collecting complete and accurate co-enrollment data and provide additional support to states on this endeavor.

¹ <https://www.workforcegps.org/events/2018/06/21/15/09/WIOA-Co-Enrollment-Cohort-Lessons-Learned>

**Appendix I: Comments from the Department of
Labor**

In addition, we have enclosed technical comments on the draft report. We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the draft report and would be glad to work with your office as you finalize the report.

Sincerely,



for

Brent Parton
Acting Assistant Secretary

Appendix II: Comments from the Department of Education



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

October 7, 2022

Ms. Dawn G. Locke
Acting Director, Education, Workforce,
and Income Security
Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Ms. Locke:

Thank you for providing the U.S. Department of Education (Department) the opportunity to review and comment on the Government Accountability Office (GAO) draft report: “Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act: Additional Steps Needed to Help States Submit Complete Enrollment Information” (GAO- 22-104830). This draft GAO report has one recommendation for the Department.

Recommendation 2: The Secretary of Education should work with the Secretary of Labor to determine how to better assist WIOA core programs in collecting complete information on co-enrollment, for example, by providing additional information or technical assistance on helping states better share information on participants across programs.

Response: As noted in the report, the Department and the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) have worked closely together to provide joint guidance and technical assistance to states to support the implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and promote the alignment in service delivery across the education and workforce development system to help individuals succeed in the labor market. WIOA emphasizes the importance of coordination of service delivery and co-enrollment, across programs, as necessary to meet the education and workforce needs of participants. WIOA envisions an education and workforce system in which programs partner to support participants’ learning and career goals.

Through co-enrollment, WIOA programs, at the state and local levels, can comprehensively meet the needs of all jobseekers and workers, especially those with barriers to employment who are served by the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) programs. Further, section 116(d)(2)(I) of WIOA and the joint regulations require that WIOA core programs collect, and report data related to co-enrollment (see section 116(d)(2)(I) of WIOA and 20 C.F.R. § 677.160(a)(1)(ii) and 34 C.F.R. §§ 361.160(a)(1)(ii) and 463.160(a)(1)(ii)). These data are published in the WIOA Statewide Annual Performance Reports each year.

It is important to note that the joint regulations do not require the six core programs to report co-enrollment data with other partner programs, such as the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and other programs administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). This may result in undercounting of actual instances of co-

**Appendix II: Comments from the Department
of Education**

enrollment. For example, the co-enrollment data reported for the VR program may be low because the program itself is a comprehensive one, providing many of the services also offered by the other five core programs. If the VR program were to report co-enrollment with TANF and other programs administered by HHS, the co-enrollment data reported by states could be significantly higher.

As part of our continuing partnership to promote the effective implementation of WIOA, the Department will work with DOL to determine how to better assist states in ensuring the accuracy and completeness of the co-enrollment data that states report to us, such as by providing additional information or technical assistance on sharing participant information across programs in a manner that is consistent with federal and state privacy protections.

In addition, we have enclosed technical comments on the draft report. We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the draft report and would be glad to work with your office as you finalize the report.

Sincerely,

/s/

Amy Loyd, Ed.L.D.
Assistant Secretary for Career, Technical, and
Adult Education

/s/

Katherine Neas
Deputy Assistant Secretary Delegated
the authority to perform the functions and duties
of the Assistant Secretary for the Office of
Special Education and Rehabilitative Services

Enclosure

Appendix III: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Dawn G. Locke, (202) 512-7215 or LockeD@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Betty Ward Zukerman (Assistant Director), Nancy Cosentino (Analyst-in-Charge), Kate Lenart, and Srinidhi Vijaykumar made key contributions to this report. Also contributing to this report were Ted Burik, Alex Galuten, Kirsten Lauber, Won Lee, Jessica Orr, Sam Portnow, Paul Schearf, Curtia Taylor, and Margaret Weber.

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