

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-13-567](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

In fiscal year 2012, various VA education programs provided nearly \$11 billion in education payments to almost 1 million veterans. The 2008 Post-9/11 GI Bill significantly increased education benefits for veterans and provided for separate payments for tuition and fees, for housing expenses, and for books. In fiscal year 2012, VA made about \$8.5 billion in tuition, housing, and other payments under the Post-9/11 GI Bill. GAO was asked to review data on VA's education programs. Specifically, GAO examined: (1) the distribution of VA education payments among schools; (2) how student characteristics and outcomes at highly VA-funded schools compare to those of other VA-funded schools; and (3) how student characteristics and outcomes compare at highly VA-funded public, nonprofit, and for-profit schools.

To address these topics, GAO collected fiscal year 2010 and 2011 data from VA (the most recent data available at the time of our study) and school year 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 data from the Department of Education. GAO used these data to compare VA payment amounts, as well as student characteristics and outcomes, at highly VA-funded schools and other schools. Veterans typically comprise a small proportion of a school's total enrollment. GAO also conducted regression analysis to compare student outcomes at public, nonprofit and for-profit schools after controlling for other factors, such as school enrollment and tuition.

What GAO Recommends

GAO makes no recommendations in this report.

View [GAO-13-567](#). For more information, contact Melissa Emrey-Arras at (617) 788-0534 or EmreyArrasM@gao.gov.

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VA EDUCATION BENEFITS

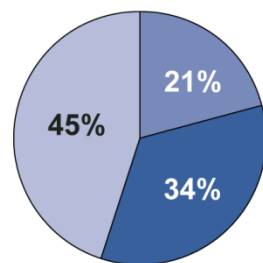
Student Characteristics and Outcomes Vary across Schools

What GAO Found

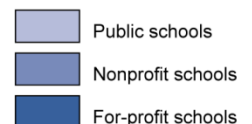
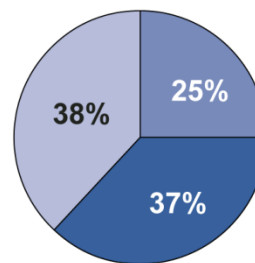
The majority of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) education payments were made to a small percentage of schools receiving VA funding in fiscal year 2011, primarily through the Post-9/11 GI Bill. About 5 percent of schools (654 schools) received more than \$3.8 billion in aggregate VA education payments used for tuition and fees in fiscal year 2011, over 60 percent of such funding. These 654 "highly VA-funded schools" each received at least \$2 million (and as much as \$113 million) in Post-9/11 GI Bill tuition and fee payments from fiscal year 2010 through fiscal year 2011 and enrolled more total students on average than other schools. Almost half of tuition and fee payments for all VA education programs were used at public schools. However, the breakdown of Post-9/11 GI Bill payments differed somewhat, with for-profit and public schools receiving about the same proportion of Post-9/11 GI Bill tuition and fee payments.

Fiscal Year 2011 Tuition and Fee Payments by Sector for All VA Education Programs and for the Post-9/11 GI Bill

All VA Education Programs, including Post-9/11 GI Bill



Post-9/11 GI Bill



Source: GAO analysis of VA data.

Note: For VA education programs that pay veterans a fixed monthly amount, payments include the total payments made to veterans because it was not possible to determine what portion was used for tuition payments to schools.

Highly VA-funded schools generally had more positive outcomes than other VA-funded schools. Compared to other schools, highly VA-funded schools generally had higher retention rates (percentage of students returning to the same school from 1 year to the next) and graduation rates. Because data on student veterans are limited, the student characteristics and outcomes in GAO's analyses are for school populations as a whole. Student outcomes were generally similar when GAO tested more narrow definitions of highly VA-funded schools (at least \$5 million and \$10 million in Post-9/11 GI Bill funding).

Among highly VA-funded schools, student characteristics and outcomes differed at public, nonprofit, and for-profit schools. For instance, highly VA-funded for-profit schools enrolled a higher percentage of low-income and minority students than public or nonprofit schools. After controlling for differences in school and student characteristics, for-profit schools had lower retention rates compared to public and nonprofit schools. However, for-profit schools had graduation rates that were higher than public schools and similar to nonprofit schools.