

BRIEFLY...

Highlights of Report Number: 09-06-001-03-370, to the Assistant Secretary, Employment and Training. November 3, 2005

WHY READ THE REPORT

This report discusses why we found that improving efforts to assess and account for students with unknown or undisclosed cognitive disabilities would help Job Corps achieve its mission to teach eligible young adults the skills they need to become employable and independent and help them secure meaningful jobs or opportunities for further education.

WHY OIG DID THE AUDIT

The Office of Inspector General (OIG), Office of Audit, conducted a performance audit to evaluate Job Corps' processes for assessing students for unknown or undisclosed cognitive disabilities, such as learning disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), mental retardation, and traumatic brain injury. We conducted this audit because Job Corps students are at high risk for cognitive disabilities. National and regional studies suggest certain characteristics are prevalent in both cognitively disabled youth and Job Corps' student population. Such characteristics include – economically disadvantaged, high school drop out, below eighth grade reading level, and never held a full-time job. Therefore, we conducted an audit to determine (1) if Job Corps should strengthen its efforts to identify students with unknown or undisclosed cognitive disabilities; (2) what impact an improved assessment process would have on student outcomes and program cost; (3) if Federal law requires Job Corps to assess students for cognitive disabilities, and if so, whether Job Corps has an effective process to ensure compliance with the law; and (4) if Job Corps' data on student cognitive disabilities are reliable.

READ THE FULL REPORT

To view the report, including the scope, methodology, and full agency response, go to:

<http://www.oig.dol.gov/public/reports/oa/2006/09-001-03-370.pdf>.

November 2005

STRENGTHENING EFFORTS TO ASSESS AND ACCOUNT FOR STUDENTS WITH COGNITIVE DISABILITIES WOULD HELP JOB CORPS ACHIEVE ITS MISSION

WHAT OIG FOUND

We found: (1) Job Corps should strengthen efforts to identify students with unknown or undisclosed cognitive disabilities; (2) assessing all Job Corps students for cognitive disabilities would improve student outcomes but increase program costs; (3) Federal law requires assessment under specific circumstances and Job Corps had not ensured compliance; and (4) Job Corps cognitive disability data were not reliable.

WHAT OIG RECOMMENDED

We recommended the Assistant Secretary for Employment and Training require that Job Corps strengthen efforts to identify students with unknown or undisclosed cognitive disabilities. Our recommendations include: conduct a pilot program to develop appropriate screening and formal evaluation methodology and assess the impact on performance and costs; then implement national policies and procedures as appropriate. Other recommendations included: ensure center schools subject to legislation requiring cognitive disability assessment comply with such requirements and ensure cognitive disabled student data submitted by centers are accurate and complete.

ETA management did not agree with the recommendations related to the pilot program. ETA management stated that a Job Corps pilot program was not acceptable because (1) it may not benefit, and could potentially stigmatize, students and (2) no legislation requires screening/assessing all students specifically for cognitive disabilities in public or alternative schools or training programs.

The OIG is not convinced cognitive disability identification and accommodation is harmful and could potentially stigmatize students and act as a disincentive to participating in the program. Additionally, Job Corps has a responsibility to go beyond what the public school systems are required to do in this area because it is a Federally funded residential program and the student population generally consists of high school dropouts.

ETA management neither agreed nor disagreed with the OIG's remaining recommendations. However, Job Corps' planned or implemented corrective actions meet the intent of those recommendations.