

**GAO**

Briefing Report to the Chairman,  
Subcommittee on Employment and  
Productivity, Committee on Labor and  
Human Resources, United States Senate

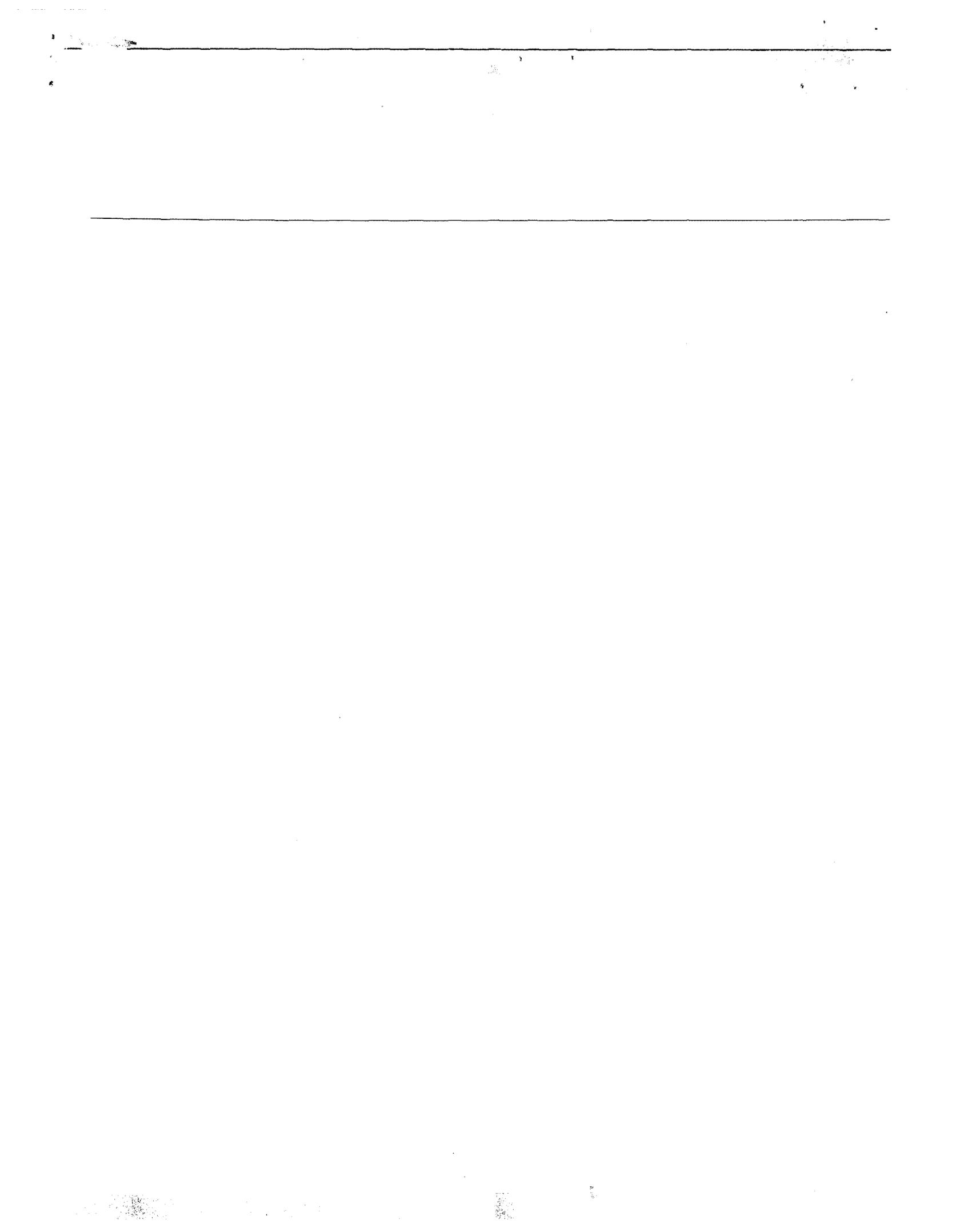
June 1987

# JOB TRAINING PARTNERSHIP ACT

## Summer Youth Programs Increase Emphasis on Education



133553





Human Resources Division

B-224035

June 30, 1987

The Honorable Paul Simon  
Chairman, Subcommittee on Employment  
and Productivity  
Committee on Labor and Human Resources  
United States Senate

Dear Mr. Chairman:

In your letter of December 19, 1986, you expressed a concern about the deficiencies in basic education skills among young people. You noted that the Congress had addressed this by requiring that--as of 1987--local Summer Youth Employment and Training Programs (SYETPs), which are funded under title II-B of the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), must assess the reading and mathematics skills of participants and give some youths remedial education. You asked that we review service delivery areas' (SDAs') plans for providing remedial education in 1987--sources of assistance and obstacles encountered in developing plans, what they expect the educational component to be like in 1987, and how that compares to remedial education in 1986.

To respond to your request, we conducted telephone interviews with program officials at 200 SDAs, selected randomly to represent all 568 SDAs in the states and the District of Columbia that will serve the same geographical area in 1987 as in 1986. We completed most of the interviews between March 16 and March 31, 1987. We used an extensive set of internal checks to verify the information obtained and made follow-up telephone calls to clarify any apparent inconsistencies or inaccuracies. Although time constraints prevented us from verifying much of the information we obtained against other sources, we expect to compare SDAs' reported plans to actual implementation in 1987 in a follow-on review.

**SCHOOLS HELP OVERCOME  
PLANNING OBSTACLES**

Local school districts were the primary sources of advice in developing 1987 remediation plans for 41 percent of the SDAs and provided some assistance to 72 percent of them. Private Industry Councils, literacy groups, state offices, and national organizations in the job training community also helped.

SDAs cited a wide range of factors as their biggest problem in developing remediation plans. Uncertainty about funding and

about what a good program should be like were most frequently cited (19 and 17 percent, respectively) as well as estimating how many youths would need remediation (15 percent). Fewer than 10 percent of the SDAs described lack of federal or state guidance as their biggest problem even though the Department of Labor had not yet issued regulations or other guidance. (Labor issued a Training and Employment Guidance Letter that reached SDAs after most of our interviews had been conducted.) But about half said that they had received insufficient guidance from the federal or state government.

Labor informed states and SDAs that the act requires them to assess the reading and math skills of all participants in summer youth programs. To meet this requirement, most SDAs (83 percent) expected to obtain grades or test scores from schools. Some SDAs, however, had had or anticipated difficulties in doing so because of questions of confidentiality and access to records. Many SDAs (76 percent) also expected to give participants written reading or math tests. Test performance was to be the primary criterion for selecting youths for remediation, but other factors also were to be used. For example, almost a third of the SDAs planned to provide remediation only to students rather than to dropouts or high school graduates.

#### MORE YOUTHS TO GET REMEDIATION DESPITE FUNDING CUTS

More youths will receive remediation in 1987, survey results indicate, and more title II-B funds will be spent to provide it. More than twice as many youths are expected to receive remediation in the summer of 1987 as in 1986 (116,000 compared to 55,000)--an increase from 8 percent of all program participants to 21 percent. In part, this is because more SDAs are providing remedial education--from 57 percent in 1986, before enactment of the legislation, to 100 percent in 1987. Also, SDAs that provided remedial education in 1986 plan to provide it to more youths in 1987 than in prior years.

SDAs that provided remedial education in 1986 had higher title II-B allocations, served more youths, and had a more urban population than SDAs that provided no such education. Urban and rural SDAs differed also in their reasons for limiting remediation to some, rather than all, youths in need. Rural SDAs emphasized lack of service providers and transportation difficulties; urban SDAs more often were hampered by insufficient funds to provide the services. Providing summer remediation generally means using an increased proportion of title II-B funds for it even though almost a third of the SDAs (31 percent) expected to use funds from other sources, such as title II-A. By projecting our survey responses to the universe of SDAs (93 percent of all SDAs) from which we selected our sample, we estimated an increase of about

\$30 million in title II-B expenditures on remedial education in those SDAs from 1986 to 1987, as shown below.

	1986	1987 (Planned)
Total II-B funds (millions)	\$710	\$560
Title II-B funds for remediation (millions)	\$37	\$67
Percent of title II-B funds for remediation	5.2	12.1

#### DELIVERY METHODS UNCHANGED

SDAs expect to provide remediation in about the same way in 1987 as in 1986. Last year, local school districts provided some or all of the educational services in about 75 percent of the SDAs offering remediation, and they will do so in the same proportion in 1987. As in 1986, youths getting remediation in 1987 will have, on average, about 12 hours of remediation and 20 hours of work per week, compared with an average of 32 hours of work for other youths. SDAs are also similar in delivery approaches and incentives for participants, as shown below.

	<u>Percent of SDAs</u>	
	<u>1986</u>	<u>1987</u>
Delivery approaches:		
Taught individually	69	72
Lecture and discussion only	13	7
Individualized, self-paced only	21	26
Both lecture/discussion and individualized/self-paced	64	61
Computers as teaching tools	70	73
Instruction tied to work	57	60
Incentives for participants:		
Academic credit	56	55
Wages, bonuses, stipends, or other payments	76	81

#### REQUIREMENT CONSIDERED APPROPRIATE ALTHOUGH CAUSING PROGRAM REDUCTIONS

The majority of SDA officials knowledgeable about the summer youth programs (67 percent) said the requirement to provide remedial education in the summer youth program is appropriate. But almost a third (29 percent) called it inappropriate, often saying they viewed remedial education as the role of the school system, not the summer youth program. Even in SDAs that provided some remediation in 1986, program officials expected that adding educational services would cause reductions to certain aspects of the summer program. For example, as a result of the requirement to provide remediation, 76 percent of the SDAs expected to reduce the hours of work provided to the

community or employers; 52 percent, the number of work sites in the community; and 49 percent, the number of youth served.

GAO OBSERVATIONS

For this first summer after enactment of the remedial education requirement, SDAs expect the number of youths and the percentage of title II-B funds spent on remediation to be more than twice those of 1986. But this will change the nature of the summer youth program in ways that may or may not be acceptable to the Congress. To have enough money to provide remediation, SDAs expect to reduce the number of youths served and hours worked. To provide more information for the Congress to decide whether these program changes--if they occur--are acceptable or whether legislative revisions are needed, we will, as agreed with your office, review SDAs' summer youth programs in 1987, giving special attention to their remedial education activities. We expect to report to you on this matter early in 1988.

AGENCY COMMENTS

In comments dated June 23, 1987 (see app. IV), Labor described a draft version of this report as "thorough and well-balanced" and said it gave a good "first look" at how the assessment/remedial education provisions are being implemented. Labor described the report as helpful for consideration of relevant policy issues. In addition, Labor provided specific comments on details in the report (which we incorporated where appropriate), and offered suggestions that we will consider in planning our follow-on review. Labor also stated its intention to review youths' willingness to attend remedial classes instead of accepting wage-paying jobs that Labor believes are readily available.

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As agreed with your office, unless you publicly announce the contents of this report earlier, we plan no further distribution until 7 days after its issue date. At that time, we will send copies to the Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources, the House Committee on Education and Labor, the Secretary of Labor, and other interested parties. Should you have questions or wish to discuss the information provided, please call me on 275-5451.

Sincerely yours,

  
William J. Gainer  
Associate Director

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Abbreviations

CATI	computer-aided telephone interview
CETA	Comprehensive Employment and Training Program
JTPA	Job Training Partnership Act
SDA	service delivery area
SYETP	Summer Youth Employment and Training Program

**JOB TRAINING PARTNERSHIP ACT:**  
**SUMMER YOUTH PROGRAMS INCREASE EMPHASIS ON EDUCATION**

**BACKGROUND**

As a group, youth have a higher unemployment rate than adults, but unemployment is not for most youth a long-term problem. Many economically disadvantaged youth, however, have difficulty obtaining and keeping a job that will move them out of poverty. And a major employment obstacle for many--even some who are high school graduates--is their reading, writing, and mathematics deficiencies.

The Summer Youth Employment and Training Program (SYETP), a federally funded job training program specifically for youth, is intended to address these needs of economically disadvantaged youth. It does so by (1) enhancing their basic educational skills, (2) encouraging school completion, or enrollment in supplementary or alternative school programs, and (3) providing eligible youth with exposure to the world of work. Economically disadvantaged individuals 16 through 21 years old are eligible to participate, and local programs may choose to provide services to 14- and 15-year-olds as well.

Authorized under title II-B of the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA, Public Law 97-300), the summer youth program is administered by the Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration. Labor allocates funds to states and territories. They, in turn, allocate these funds to service delivery areas (SDAs) that operate the programs. In the summer of 1986, service delivery areas expended about \$765 million of title II-B funds and served 748,000 young people at an average cost of \$1,023 per participant.<sup>1</sup> Funds are used for (1) income payments to youth and (2) program services such as staff and materials.

Since its beginning in September 1983, SYETP has been funded under JTPA and is similar to a program operated under the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), which preceded JTPA. But no specific program goals were stated in the JTPA legislation until the JTPA Amendments of 1986, Public Law 99-496, established the goals cited above. Job training programs can have a variety of short- or long-term goals. For example, programs may be immediately useful as a way to keep youths off

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<sup>1</sup>The title II-B funds had to be used for programs in the summer months. An additional \$1.78 billion was allocated in program year 1986 (July 1, 1986 - June 30, 1987) for year-round job training services for youths and adults under JTPA block grants to the states (title II-A).

the streets or give them some income over the summer months. Their work activities also can have a short-term advantage to the community in providing such services as working with children in a summer recreation program. In recent years, however, support has grown for using SYETP to improve youths' long-term employability.

As an expression of this desire to enhance long-term employability, the 1986 JTPA amendments revised the summer program to require that SDAs (1) assess the reading and math abilities of eligible youth and (2) provide basic and remedial education programs. A statement by the congressional committees that acted on this legislation clarified, however, that SDAs need not conduct new tests to assess basic educational skills; existing data and information may be used. In addition, SDAs may use JTPA or other available funds to provide the educational services, and neither a governor nor the Secretary of Labor may require a specific service level or expenditure of funds to satisfy this mandate. This legislation is based on bills considered separately in the Senate and House in 1986. The Senate bill did include a provision that would have required SDAs to spend at least 25 percent of their title II-B allocation for remedial education, while the bill considered in the House encouraged and provided incentives to provide remediation but required no specific level of expenditures or enrollment.

As of June 1, 1987, the Department of Labor had published no regulations related to this legislation and did not expect to do so until after the end of the 1987 summer program. To give states more timely guidance in what it considered sufficient time for planning and preparation, Labor transmitted a Training and Employment Guidance Letter to the states on March 23, 1987. In it, Labor indicated that, as the Congress had strongly stated its concern about illiteracy, the states should take immediate action to implement these requirements in their 1987 SYETPs. States were directed to review and approve modifications to SDA plans, which institute the statutory changes to the 1986 amendments. SDAs were to assess the reading and math levels of all SYETP participants, expend funds for basic and remedial education, and develop written goals and objectives for the summer component, according to the Labor letter.

Although SDAs were not required to include remedial education in their summer youth programs before 1987, Labor, in a Training and Employment Information Notice to state JTPA liaisons dated March 13, 1986, had encouraged operators of summer youth programs to include literacy training as a component of such programs. Labor does not have information on how many SDAs provided remediation in 1986 or how they did so, but other groups have estimated that between a half and two-thirds provided remediation to some youths.

## OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

In a letter dated December 19, 1986, Senator Paul Simon, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Employment and Productivity, Committee on Labor and Human Resources, requested GAO to conduct a study of how SDAs planned to provide remedial education in the 1987 summer youth program. Specifically, we were asked to provide information on

- SDAs' sources of assistance in developing plans to provide remedial education,
- any obstacles they were encountering in developing plans for an educational component,
- what they expected the educational component to be like, and
- how their plans for 1987 differed from the 1986 program.

Our response to this request is based on interviews with program officials at 200 SDAs in 44 states. These SDAs were selected to be representative of all 568 SDAs that were both (1) in the states and the District of Columbia (i.e., not in the territories) and (2) expecting to serve the same geographical area in 1987 as in 1986. (SDAs with boundary changes--and thus changes in eligible population--were deleted because for these we could not validly compare the 1986 and 1987 programs.) The 568 SDAs in the universe from which our sample of 200 was selected represented 93 percent of all SDAs in 1986. (See app. I for the names and locations of the 200 SDAs by state.) Because we wanted to compare SDAs with more and less urban populations, we randomly selected SDAs from three groups with different percentages of the SDAs' population living in an area defined as urban by the Census Bureau. (Sample selection, sampling errors, and survey development are described in more detail in app. II.)

The interviews were conducted by telephone, using a computer-aided structured interview procedure to assure comparability across interviewers. (See app. III for a summary of the responses to interview questions.) In each case, we interviewed the person identified by both the SDA director and by the potential interviewee as the person in their SDA "most knowledgeable" about the remedial education efforts in their summer youth program. Over 90 percent of the interviews were completed between March 16 and March 31, 1987. We used a combination of steps (described in app. II) to verify, where possible, the accuracy of the information obtained in the interviews.

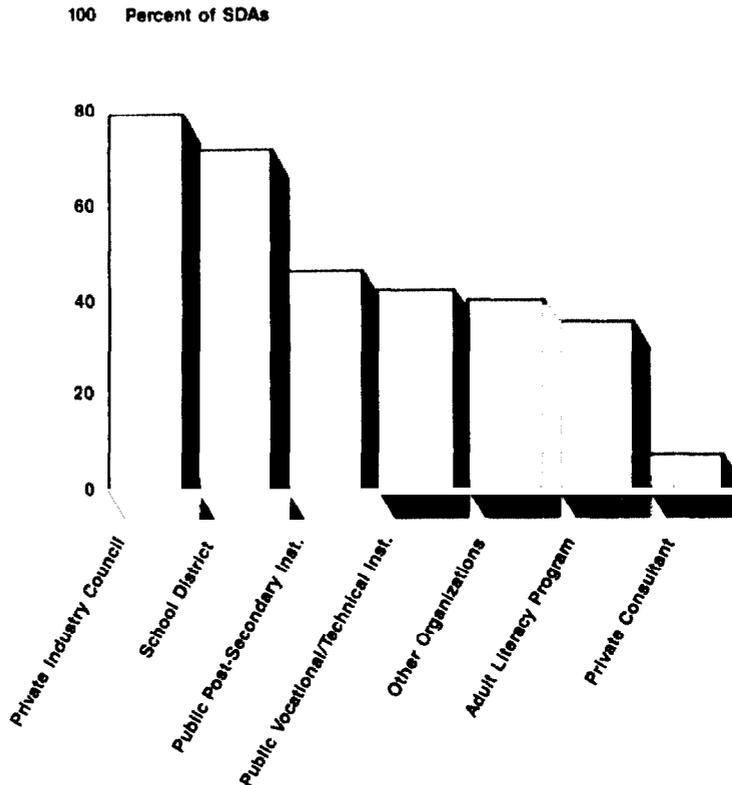
**LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS HELPED,  
BUT SOME SDAs HAD DIFFICULTY  
DEVELOPING REMEDIATION PLANS**

In developing their plans to provide remedial education, SDAs received advice from a number of sources. Major providers of advice were the local school districts and Private Industry Councils, the local policy-making bodies for SDAs. Also, the majority of SDAs reported receiving advice from their states. But SDAs experienced several problems in planning, such as uncertainty about funding and knowing what a good remedial education program should be like.

**Guidance and Assistance  
Received**

Local school districts apparently played a major role in providing advice on how to provide remediation: 41 percent of the SDAs described them as their primary source of advice, and 72 percent received some assistance from them in developing plans. The Private Industry Councils were next most frequently cited, with 13 percent of SDAs describing them as the primary source and 79 percent reporting some advice from them. All organizations cited as providing any advice are shown in figure 1.

**Figure 1: Organizations That Provided Any Advice to SDAs on Their Remedial Education Plans (1987)**

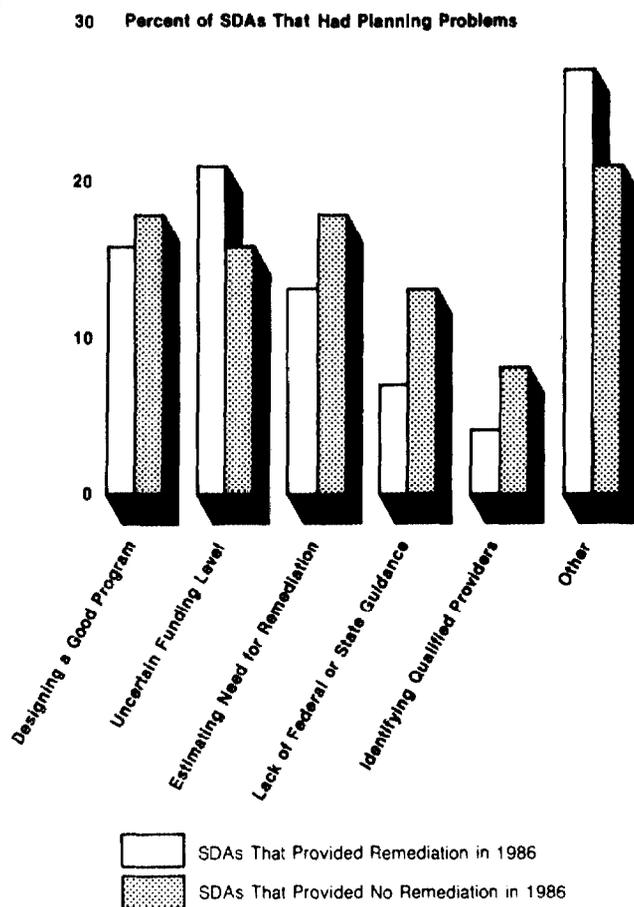


The majority of SDAs reported some assistance from their states. Sixty-four percent said they had been given written guidance or instructions on how to implement the new federal remedial education requirements. Nearly half (49 percent) noted that their state had helped them develop their remediation programs: 40 percent received seminars or workshops; 25 percent, sample education plans; 11 percent, on-site technical assistance; and 9 percent, written step-by-step instructions.

### Difficulties in Developing Implementation Plans

When we asked SDAs to identify their most significant problem in developing plans for providing remedial education, a wide variety of obstacles was mentioned, as shown in figure 2, with no single difficulty being most pervasive. Nineteen percent of the SDAs cited as their "biggest problem" uncertainty about funding levels. (When they began planning for the summer, some SDAs did not know what their title II-B allocation would be. In addition, at the time of our interviews, legislation was being

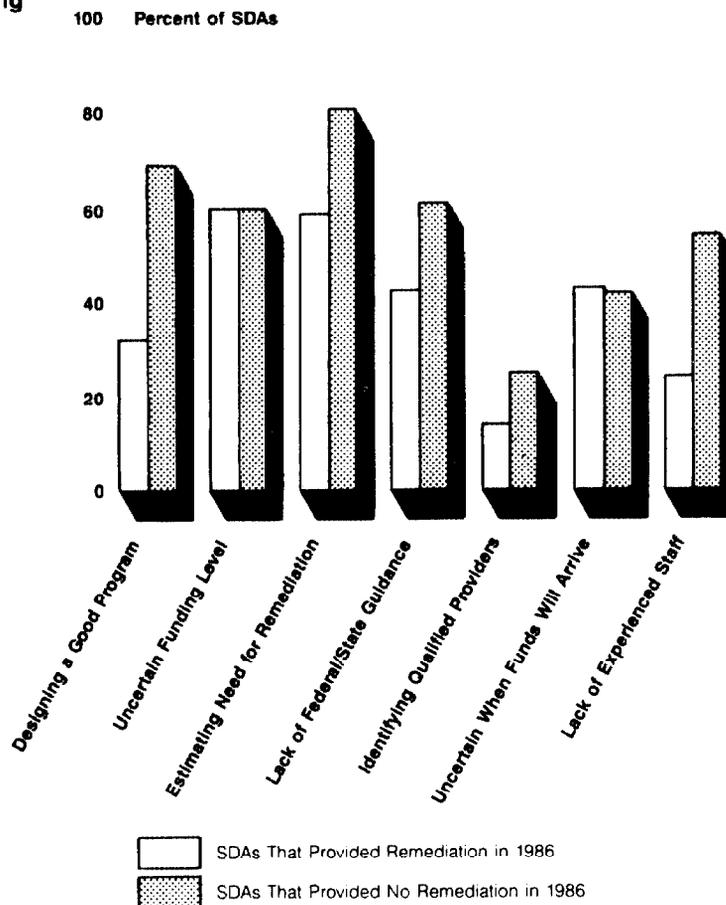
Figure 2: Most Significant Problem SDAs Had Preparing 1987 Remedial Education Plans



considered to provide a supplemental appropriation, but SDAs did not know if it would be enacted or, if it was, whether it would be after the summer program began--as happened in 1986.) Uncertainty about what a good program should be like was cited by 17 percent. Estimating how many youths needed remedial education was considered the most significant problem by 15 percent of the SDAs, while 6 percent reported no major problems.

Factors cited by SDAs as being a problem to some extent, even though not necessarily the most significant problem, are shown in figure 3. Estimating the number of youths in need of remedial education was cited by 69 percent as a problem to some extent. More than half the respondents also found "being unsure about how much funding you'll have" and "getting enough guidance from the federal or state government on what you should do" to be problems. Several of these factors were more problematic in SDAs that had provided no remediation in 1986, as figures 2 and 3 show. For example, estimating the number of youth who would need remediation was a problem for 81 percent of SDAs without remediation in 1986 compared with 59 percent for other SDAs.

**Figure 3: Factors That Were a Problem to any Extent in Developing 1987 Remedial Education Plans**



Fewer than 10 percent of the SDAs identified lack of federal or state guidance as their biggest problem. However, about half of the SDAs said that having insufficient guidance from the federal or state government had made development of their plans difficult. The amount of guidance was more important to SDAs that had no remedial education component in their 1986 summer youth programs: more than half (52 percent) of those that provided no remediation in 1986 were dissatisfied with the extent of Labor's guidance on how to implement the new requirements.<sup>2</sup>

**MORE YOUTH ARE EXPECTED TO  
RECEIVE REMEDIAL EDUCATION  
DESPITE FUNDING CUTS**

About twice as many youths were expected to receive remediation in SYETP nationally in 1987 (116,000) as in 1986 (55,000).<sup>3</sup> This represents an increase from 8 to 21 percent of summer program participants receiving remedial education. The increase comes in part from more SDAs providing remediation to youths--all SDAs doing so compared with the 57 percent providing remediation in 1986--and in part from remediation being provided to more youths in SDAs that provided some remediation in 1986--21 percent in those SDAs instead of 8 percent. These increases are planned despite an overall 20-percent reduction in title II-B funds to SDAs (from about \$710 million to about \$560 million for the SDAs in the universe from which our sample was selected).

**Number of SDAs Providing  
Remedial Education To  
Increase in 1987**

Although 43 percent of the SDAs provided no remediation to youths in the 1986 summer programs, all the SDAs we surveyed said they would do so in 1987. On average, SDAs that provided remedial education in 1986 had larger title II-B allocations than those that provided none (\$1.53 million compared with \$.88 million) and served more youth (1,504 compared with 757). In addition, SDAs that provided remediation were more often urban: 64 percent of those SDAs served predominantly urban populations, while 47 percent had a predominantly rural population.

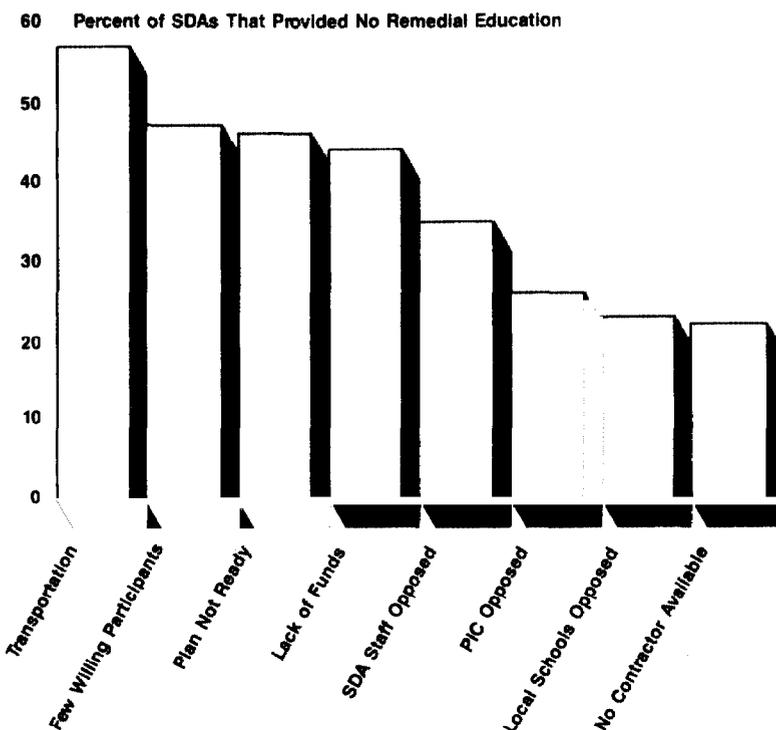
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<sup>2</sup>At the time most of our interviews were conducted, SDAs had not received the Training and Employment Guidance Letter from Labor.

<sup>3</sup>This estimate, as it is based on data projected from the sample in our study, excludes all youths in the territories and in the SDAs that will serve different geographical areas in 1987 than in 1986. The 1987 figure also may be an underestimate as about 4 percent of SDAs that intend to provide remediation did not know the number they would serve.

SDAs reported problems and situations that contributed to their decision to provide no remedial education. Many (57 percent) of those providing no remediation noted difficulty in arranging transportation. This problem was more prevalent with rural SDAs (65 percent) than urban SDAs (50 percent). Other reasons included having an incomplete plan for how to do so (46 percent) and having few youth willing to participate in remediation (47 percent). The lack of interested youth was more of a problem in the urban SDAs (53 percent) than in rural SDAs (30 percent). The reasons SDAs gave for providing no remedial education in the 1986 program are shown in figure 4.

**Figure 4: Reasons SDAs Gave for Providing No Remedial Education in 1986**



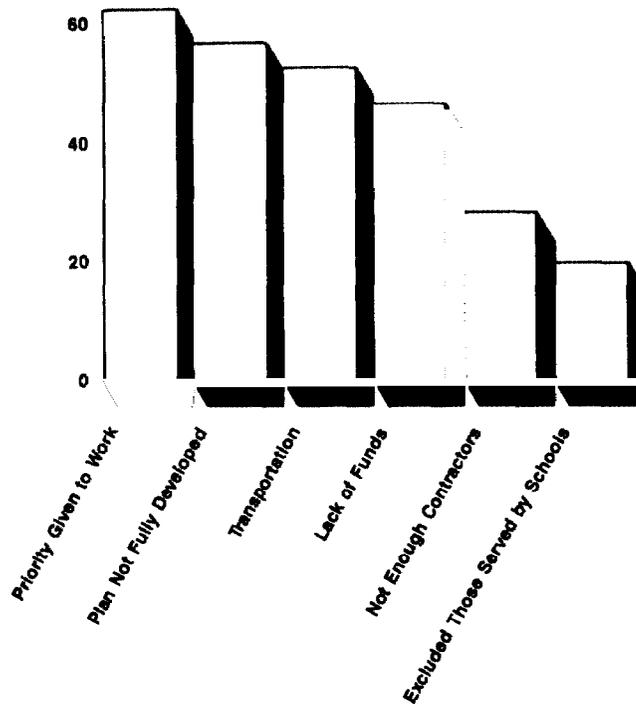
**Some SDAs in 1986 Provided Remedial Education To Fewer Than All Youths Who Needed It**

SDAs that provided remediation as part of their summer program differed in the extensiveness of the educational services provided. About a third (37 percent) said they provided some remediation to 100 percent of the youths they found or knew to be deficient in reading or math--on average, about 20 percent of all youth in their summer programs. The remaining SDAs that provided remedial education served, on average, an estimated 44 percent of

youths with an identified need. Three-fourths of these SDAs said that they provided remediation to 20 percent or more of the program participants who needed remediation. These SDAs cited a number of reasons for providing this service to fewer than all youths in need, as shown in figure 5. More than half said they gave greater priority to providing work experience, had an incompletely developed plan, or had difficulty arranging transportation. Also, 47 percent of the SDAs said that inadequate funding was a factor in their decision to provide remedial education to fewer than all in need.

**Figure 5: Reasons SDAs Gave For Providing Remediation to Fewer Than All Who Needed It in 1986**

80 Percent of SDAs Providing Remediation to Less Than All



SDAs serving urban populations frequently cited different reasons than did rural SDAs for providing remedial education to fewer than all youths needing remediation, as table 1 illustrates. Rural SDAs emphasized the lack of providers for remedial education services and difficulty getting youths to the educational services; urban SDAs were more often hampered by insufficient funds to provide the services.