

**EDUCATION INSPECTORATE
SYSTEMS IN NEW ZEALAND
AND THE NETHERLANDS**

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Abstract

The United States is an outlier with respect to its heavy emphasis on student test scores for the purposes of school accountability. Many other countries instead use school inspection systems that pay more attention to a school's internal processes and practices. This policy note focuses on the school inspection systems of New Zealand and the Netherlands, with the goal of drawing lessons for the United States. It addresses three main policy issues: For what should individual schools be held accountable? Should inspectors be more like coaches or more like judges? And how independent should they be of policy-making bodies?

INTRODUCTION

The federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (NCLB) requires U.S. states to annually test all students in grades 3–8 in math and reading, as well as once in high school, and to use those test results to evaluate the effectiveness of individual schools. Although many other countries have long attached high stakes to test scores for individual students, the United States is an outlier with respect to its use of student test scores as the central basis for evaluating and monitoring schools. Many other countries rely instead on some form of school inspectorate. Under such an approach, a team of professional inspectors visits each school on a periodic basis and produces public reports for use by the school, public officials, and parents. Although test scores can be incorporated into the school evaluations, the inspectorate approach permits a richer look at within-school processes and practices than is possible when the focus is on test scores alone.¹

The idea of school inspectorates has begun to elicit interest in the United States as an alternative or an addition to the current test-based approach to school accountability.² Currently the institutions most analogous to a school inspectorate in the United States are the various regional accreditation agencies that accredit some elementary schools and a larger number of secondary schools (Rothstein, Jacobsen, and Wilder 2008, chap. 7). Because such agencies are voluntary membership organizations and rely on voluntary peer reviews, however, they differ in significant ways from the government-run inspectorates in other countries.

This note focuses on the school inspection systems of two quite different countries, New Zealand and the Netherlands, with the goal of raising issues and suggesting lessons for the United States. As will soon become apparent, in neither country are policy makers fully satisfied with their current systems, and both countries continue to make changes. Thus this discussion generates

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1. For a summary overview of how evaluations, examinations, and assessments are used in the education systems of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, see OECD (2008, section on indicator D5, pp. 468–80). Thirteen of the twenty countries for which information is available have school inspection systems, and nine of the twenty-five countries for which information is available have national examinations for students at the junior secondary level. Only four countries with national examinations also have school inspectorates (Iceland, Ireland, Scotland, and Turkey). As discussed further below, neither the Netherlands nor New Zealand has compulsory high-stakes tests for students. Many schools in the Netherlands, however, administer tests to twelve-year-olds that are high stakes in the sense that they affect which type of secondary schools the student is able to attend.
 2. Ladd (2007) and Rothstein, Jacobsen, and Wilder (2008) both make the case for such a move; the Broader, Bolder Approach to Education policy campaign (www.boldapproach.org) recently released a statement on accountability, calling for the federal government to require states to start experimenting with education inspectorates; and a National Academy of Education white paper on standards, assessments, and accountability recommends that expert-constituted inspectorates be considered as part of an overall accountability system (NAE 2009).

no clear best model that could or should be directly transferred to the United States or to other countries. Instead the experiences of these two countries provide insights into the benefits of such systems and information relevant to the design of possible models for the United States.

New Zealand is interesting because of the recent changes it has made in its twenty-year-old innovative education review system. That system was introduced as part of a major reform effort that decentralized management to individual schools and expanded parental choice of schools. The Netherlands is of interest in part because of its long-standing constitutional commitment to parental choice and the full public funding of schools run by Protestants, Roman Catholics, and other private groups and its equally strong commitment to equality of education, especially at the primary level. Also of interest is that the students in both countries typically outperform U.S. students on international tests such as Trends in Math and Science Studies (TIMSS) and the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA).

NEW ZEALAND EDUCATION REVIEW OFFICE

In 1989, New Zealand abolished its national Department of Education (which had previously operated the schools), set up a new policy-oriented Ministry of Education, and turned operating authority for the schools over to school-specific boards of trustees dominated by parents.³ In 1991 the reform effort was expanded to give parents more choice over the schools their children would attend. An innovative part of the reform package was the establishment of an Education Review Office (ERO) that was independent of the Ministry of Education. The ERO replaced the earlier system of school inspectors who had worked for the department. In contrast to that system, in which school inspectors not only evaluated schools but also assisted and advised them, the responsibility of the new reviewers was limited to monitoring and evaluation. Small groups of inspectors would make periodic visits to each school, evaluate the schools, and write reports that were publicly available. In addition, the ERO would use the results from its school reviews to write reports on more general topics related to the performance of the education system. Its independence from the ministry meant that the ERO was in a position to evaluate not only individual schools but also the policies of the ministry.

Central to any school accountability processes are decisions about what the monitors should look for. The initial intent of the New Zealand reformers was for the ERO to monitor how well each school was meeting the “clear

3. This section is based on Fiske and Ladd (2000), Wylie (2007), ERO (2007), Hipkins, Joyce, and Wylie (2007), plus personal correspondence in 2009 with Cathy Wylie, the director of the New Zealand Center for Education Research.

and specific aims and objectives, expressed as outcomes,” specified in each school’s charter (see the Fiske and Ladd 2000 discussion on the Picot Report). For a number of reasons, however, the school charters failed to emerge as the definitive documents that had been envisioned. One reason was that policy makers soon realized that with national funding for schools comes an interest in national, not just school-specific, goals. Another reason was that school charters were not very specific about measurable goals.

During the 1990s, the ERO initially focused primarily on compliance and after 1993 on “effectiveness” reviews. Because the country had no standardized tests, the effectiveness reviews were in effect process reviews designed to determine what the school expected the children to learn and how they would know that learning had occurred. Despite the ERO efforts to focus attention on outcomes, the reviews often became mechanistic, were heavily focused on management procedures, and did not necessarily foster better educational outcomes. At the same time, the reviews were undoubtedly useful to many schools. A 1999 survey of primary schools, for example, found that 56 percent of the principals found them helpful and another 21 percent very helpful. In addition, more than two-thirds made minor changes in response to the review and 13 percent made major changes, mainly in the areas of assessment, curriculum, and performance management.

New Zealand has made significant changes to the system during the past several years. Significantly, however, it has maintained the ERO as an agency separate from the Ministry of Education, although one that now works more closely with the ministry to develop policies to improve schools.

One major change was the introduction in 2003 of a new planning and reporting framework for schools. This framework requires schools to engage in three- to five-year strategic planning processes and to develop annual plans with measurable targets. This approach puts far more emphasis on strategic planning that builds on good national assessment tools than was previously the case. The Ministry of Education has invested in assessment tools that provide national benchmarks against which schools can measure themselves but does not require the schools to use any specific test. Moreover, the schools are encouraged to use a variety of different assessment tools for formative learning processes so that good assessment becomes an integral part of the learning process. Finally, the planning and reporting system encourages schools to make evidence-based decisions about the use of resources and investments in professional development.

The second and related change was to make the ERO process far more systematic and transparent. The ERO now spells out in some detail the types of indicators that it will monitor during the school visits. These indicators include both outcome and process indicators, with a distinction between measures for

Table 1. Illustrative Evaluative Questions: New Zealand Review Process

Student Achievement

- What is the extent and quality of the information the school has about individual student achievement in relation to essential learning areas, essential skills, attitudes, and values?
- How well is this information used, both formally and informally, to develop programs to meet the needs of individuals and groups of students?

High-Quality Teaching and Learning

- How well is the available time used for learning purposes?
- How well do teachers use assessment to improve learning and achievement?

Professional Leadership

- How effective are the systems for identifying and meeting staff professional development needs?

Involved Families and Communities

- How well does the school establish partnerships around learning with its community?

Source: ERO 2010.

Note: This list of categories is not exhaustive, and the questions are illustrative of a broader set of questions within each category.

students and for schools. For example, student achievement is an outcome indicator for students, while quality of teaching and quality of student assessment are viewed as process indicators for student achievement but outcome indicators for the work of the school. School governance and management, which are potentially important for outcomes at both the student and the school level, are clearly defined as process measures and not ends in themselves. The reviewers are instructed to use the indicators holistically, not as a checklist.

Currently this country of 4.1 million people (which makes it slightly smaller than Kentucky) has 120 review officers located in nine district offices. Each review team starts by meeting with school officials to set priorities for the review, carries out the on-site review, and then writes a report that includes recommendations for improvement in particular areas. The report is based on the reviewers' judgments on a variety of questions of the type shown in table 1. All ERO reports now include recommendations for improvement, but such recommendations need not mean a school is doing poorly in the particular area. The underlying idea is that even in effective schools, there is room for improvement. All reports are publicly available.

One observer of the new system has called it a high trust—low stakes model of accountability, which contrasts with what she refers to as the low trust—high stakes model in the United States (Wylie 2007). The current approach sends a number of key messages about what matters. First is an emphasis on student achievement and the role of the teacher in raising student achievement. Next is the importance of evidence-based decision making with schools, where the

evidence relates to the impact of interventions, not to the implementation *per se*. Finally, the system emphasizes the importance of coherence across school policies.

A 2007 study of the system based primarily on surveys of principals and teachers found that most schools were able to set measurable targets in literacy and numeracy but had difficulty setting targets in other areas—presumably because fewer good quantitative measures were available (Wylie 2007). In addition, the system appears to have changed the culture and led to a greater focus on investments in professional development and in action plans specifically designed to improve student performance in many schools. In general, teachers were positive, with primary teachers reporting more positive responses than secondary school teachers. As of 2006, however, it was clear that some schools had trouble setting goals and that many teachers and other school personnel needed more professional development to help them make data-supported decisions. Moreover, as far as I am aware, no studies have evaluated the extent to which the new system has improved student achievement.

THE DUTCH EDUCATION INSPECTORATE

The Netherlands has a population of 16.5 million people, which would make it the fifth largest U.S. state.⁴ As is true in New Zealand, the Dutch Education Inspectorate is responsible for monitoring schools to ensure that they meet national goals, while at the same time encouraging them to engage in as much internal evaluation as possible. One significant difference from the New Zealand ERO is that the Dutch Inspectorate is a department within the Ministry of Education rather than an independent agency. As the head of a department, the chief inspector participates in policy meetings with the minister of education. At the same time, the Inspectorate retains some independence. Of particular note is the annual report on the state of the Dutch schools that it makes directly to Parliament.

Within the Dutch system, the minister of education is responsible for the quality of education, and the Inspectorate is responsible for supervising the schools. In that capacity, inspectors visit schools on a periodic basis (currently a four-year cycle) and write school-specific reports that include an overall grade for the school. The reports are distributed to schools, school boards,⁵ and the

4. This section is based primarily on Dutch Eurydice Unit (2007), a personal interview with members of the *Inspectie van het Onderwijs*, February 2009, and the use of Inspectorate data by the author in a study of weighted student funding (Ladd and Fiske 2009).

5. These Dutch school boards should not be confused with school boards in the United States. Every Dutch school is officially run by a board. In many cases a board oversees a single school, in others it may oversee more than twenty schools, and in a few cases more than one hundred schools. Moreover, some of the boards run what we would call public schools, and others run publicly funded but privately managed schools, such as those operated by Protestant, Roman Catholic, or secular groups.

minister, and all reports are publicly available on the Inspectorate's Web site. The Inspectorate itself provides neither advice nor assistance to the schools and has no authority to shut down low-performing schools. Those responsibilities fall primarily to the national minister of education, which is the source of most of the funding for the schools. In addition, local municipalities can undertake initiatives to improve education in their areas, with funding primarily from the central government in the form of block grants available for a variety of municipal purposes, including education.

The inspectors examine a large range of topics, many of which relate to the processes within the school. Included in that category are the extent to which the school demonstrates concern for quality (as evidenced by its program of student evaluation and its improvement plans); its concern for giving children the skills to learn; assuring that the education offered is well suited to the needs of the students; school climate; adequacy of counseling and mentoring; and attention to students with special needs. The inspectors typically use a scale of 1–4 to rate each component of each of the topics (see table 2) and are instructed to apply the same criteria to all schools, regardless of the mix of students in the school. Their goal is to try to ensure that any school chosen by a parent will meet the national standards for a quality educational environment, a goal supported by a funding policy that provides additional resources for schools serving disadvantaged students.⁶

The Inspectorate also evaluates student achievement. For this analysis, which is done on an annual basis, the inspectors explicitly take the backgrounds of the students into account. For example, the procedure for primary schools (for students aged 4–12) is based on Cito scores (formerly Central Institute for Test Development), which about 85 percent of primary schools administer to their students in their final year. These test scores have high stakes for students in that they determine, along with advice from the school, the type of secondary school the student will attend. In evaluating school outcomes, the Inspectorate compares the actual test results with those predicted for each school based on the characteristics of the schools' students. A shortfall of actual results relative to predicted results triggers further investigation to determine whether the low test scores indicate some systemic problem or were simply an anomalous outcome for that year. Based on its

6. For almost twenty-five years, the Dutch have financed their primary schools using a system of weighted student funding. Until 2006, a native Dutch student whose parents had low education carried an additional weight (over the base weight of 1.00) of 0.25, and an immigrant student whose parents had low education carried an additional weight of 0.90. Thus the latter student would bring with him to his chosen school almost twice as much funding as a typical non-disadvantaged native Dutch student. Immigrant status was eliminated as a criterion in 2006, and students from families with very low education (many of whom are immigrants) now have an additional weight of 1.20 (Ladd and Fiske 2009).

Table 2. Topics Rated by the Dutch Inspectorate

Student-Related School Quality

- The school tailors its education program and process to the differing learning styles and educational needs of its students.
- The school collects data on the developmental needs of lagging students in a systematic way, has a plan to meet them, and monitors the effectiveness of that plan.

School-Related School Quality

- The school gives attention to quality control in a systematic way.
- The curriculum meets the core requirements and progresses appropriately from grade to grade.
- The school has robust procedures for assuring the well-being and safety of pupils and teachers and promotes respect among pupils.
- The school systematically monitors student progress and has a comprehensive system of tools and processes for doing so.

Teacher-Related School Quality

- Teachers make efficient use of instruction time.
- Teachers are task oriented and clear, with students actively engaged in their learning.

Notes: Roughly translated from the Dutch by the author with assistance from Dutch officials. Each of the eight topics listed here typically has from three to five separate components, each of which would be rated.

overall evaluation, the Inspectorate gives a rating to the school in the form of a double plus, plus, acceptable, negative, or double negative. When the Inspectorate determines that a school is underperforming, it requires the school to make a plan for improving outcomes. Those receiving the lowest designation are publicly identified, with the hope that this “naming and shaming” will encourage the school and local community to pull together to improve outcomes.

The procedures of the Inspectorate are continually evolving. The 2002 change in government led to changes throughout the public sector, including in the Education Inspectorate. Prior to 2004, the inspectors acted more like coaches who provided advice and support to the schools. Since then, school inspectors no longer give advice to schools. Instead their task is simply to assess the school’s performance. Further, the Inspectorate is currently developing a new strategy of “risk-based” inspections. The idea is that the Inspectorate will reduce the frequency and intensity of inspections in schools that prove capable of monitoring themselves.

One anomaly in the Dutch system is that technically the schools are not legal entities. The legal entities are instead the boards that run the schools (see note 5). Moreover, although the amount of school funding provided by the government is calculated school by school, the money is provided to the school boards, and the boards need not pass all of it on to the individual

schools. That raises the question of who holds the boards accountable.⁷ Prior to 2006, the ministry itself performed financial audits of the schools boards, a function that has now been moved to the Inspectorate. Moreover, the boards were remarkably disconnected from the performance reviews of the schools; indeed, historically the school inspectors neither talked to the boards nor officially informed them of the outcomes of their school visits. Starting in 2006 (at which time a number of changes were made to the system of school funding), the inspectors have been providing information directly to the boards as well as to the individual schools. The question of accountability for the boards is part of a broader issue of school governance that will soon be the subject of a new law currently under development.

Dutch research on whether the inspection process improves school performance appears to be quite limited and is complicated by the fact that some of the inspections are triggered by poor performance, which means that it is hard to determine causal effects. However, one careful study that examines two types of school inspections performed between 1999 and 2002 suggests that inspections at the primary level may have increased Cito test scores by 2–3 percent of a standard deviation in the two years following an inspection, with the results strongest for arithmetic. Moreover, the evidence suggests that the more intensive two- to three-day inspections generated larger improvements than the less intensive one-day inspections (Luginbuhl, Webbink, and de Wolf 2007). Given the time frame for the analysis, the results apply to the period during which the Dutch inspectors provided advice and support rather than to the more recent period in which they simply assessed schools.

POLICY ISSUES RELATED TO INSPECTORATE SYSTEMS

Emerging from the experiences of New Zealand and the Netherlands are insights related to the following three issues.

For What Should Individual Schools Be Held Accountable?

Like the test-based accountability system in the United States, both of the inspectorate systems described here focus attention on individual schools. Such a focus on the schools is reasonable given that primary and secondary education is compulsory in all developed countries and that education is delivered by the schools. Moreover, most people would agree that public funding of schools implies a public responsibility to assure that the funds are well spent.

But schools are part of a larger education system and often have little or no control over key aspects of their environment, such as the composition

7. The careful reader might note some similarities here to charter schools in the United States. In those cases in which charter school funding goes to the charter management organization rather than directly to the school, who holds the management organizations accountable?

of their student bodies and the resources available to them. The composition of a school's students is particularly important given the extensive evidence from around the world that student achievement is highly correlated with socioeconomic background. It is higher level policy makers who provide the resources and design the incentives or rules that determine how students and teachers are distributed among schools. As a result of these policy decisions, schools differ in their capacities to meet the needs of their students and also in the average performance of those students.

This observation implies that if the intent is to be fair to schools and to put them in a position to react in a constructive way, an accountability system should hold schools accountable primarily for things under their control, which would include the processes and practices within the school. For this reason, a case can be made for a monitoring system, such as an inspectorate system, that focuses attention on those internal practices.

One potential problem with this approach, as exemplified in part by New Zealand's early experience with its ERO, is that too much focus on process can lead to mechanistic reviews and the promotion of practices that may bear little relationship to ultimate policy goals such as student achievement. For this reason New Zealand has reoriented its monitoring strategy to emphasize better internal use of assessment as a formative tool to improve the achievement of individual students and as the basis for resource allocation decisions within the school, including investments in professional development. Similarly, the Dutch Inspectorate is working to encourage schools to do as much internal monitoring as possible while at the same time sending clear signals about the importance of student achievement.

Both countries are developing new ways to incorporate student achievement into their review processes, albeit using quite different strategies. New Zealand tests a nationally representative sample of students on a periodic basis for the purposes of monitoring the progress of the overall system, and it has specifically avoided requiring schools to administer standardized tests to all students. Long concerned about the potential for the misuse of national test results in the evaluation of individual schools, it has instead invested in the development of a variety of assessment instruments with national benchmarks and encouraged schools to use them in ways that the schools determine to be most productive of learning. Thus the ERO reviews the schools with less attention to the test scores themselves than to whether the schools are using achievement data in appropriate ways for internal decision making.

Likewise, the Netherlands has resisted mandatory national testing. Although an increasing number of schools, including all primary schools in Amsterdam, now use the Cito test in the final year of primary school, the Inspectorate must gather additional information from each school on the nature

of its use in order to correctly interpret the results. In addition, as I noted earlier, the Inspectorate looks at deviations between a school's actual and predicted test scores and then uses that information primarily as a trigger for further investigation rather than as a mechanistic indicator of school quality.

In sum, while the education inspection systems in both countries make use of test scores in their reviews, the major focus continues to be on internal processes and practices within the schools. This focus seems sensible provided the ultimate goal of raising student achievement does not get lost in the process. By monitoring the practices and processes of individual schools—with particular attention paid to the fostering of decision-making practices within schools that are likely to promote student achievement—an inspection system assures that school decisions are attuned to the goals of national policy makers. Ultimately in both countries it is the national policy makers who are responsible for the quality of the education system, not the schools themselves.

Coaches or Arm's-Length Evaluators?

A thorny issue related to any inspectorate system is whether the inspectors should behave like judges or like coaches. As judges, they would maintain an arm's-length relationship to the schools they monitor so as to be in a position to provide an objective evaluation. As coaches, inspectors would not only monitor schools but would also provide guidance and assistance. The main problem with the coach model is that once inspectors have provided guidance, it is difficult for them subsequently to criticize the school when following the guidance or assistance has not led to the desired results.

New Zealand and the Netherlands both have experience with inspectors as coaches, but both have rejected that model in favor of inspectors as judges. With the introduction of its ERO in the early 1990s, New Zealand explicitly opted for arm's-length accountability and rejected the close, sometimes avuncular, relationships between school inspectors and schools that existed under the previous, more centralized form of school governance. Similarly, more recently the Netherlands has moved away from the coach model toward an arm's-length model. Consequently, the main function of the school-specific reports in both countries is to draw attention to the problems or shortcomings of individual schools.

With a test-based accountability system, schools are often held accountable for outcomes not fully under their control. In contrast, the attention to internal processes in an inspectorate system means that schools themselves should be in a reasonably good position to make the changes needed to rectify the identified shortcomings. School principals, for example, can use the reports to put pressure on school personnel to change practices and policies. In some cases, when a school's shortcomings reflect larger and more systemic problems

(such as the difficulty some schools face in attracting and retaining high quality staff) or when specific problems continue year after year, higher level policy makers may need to intervene and provide support for individual schools.

Both because it avoids potential conflicts of interest and because schools often have the capacity to respond in constructive ways without additional assistance, the arm's-length approach is preferred to the coaching approach. Such an approach to individual schools, however, need not rule out a working relationship between the Inspectorate and the governmental units charged with developing policy frameworks and initiatives on a broader scale. Indeed, such a relationship could be useful for keeping the Inspectorate focused on broad policy goals and avoiding the danger of emphasizing narrow processes or practices that do not promote those goals.

How Independent of Policy-Making Bodies?

By gathering arm's-length information on all schools, the Inspectorate is in a good position to contribute to education policy making in other ways as well. In the Dutch context, for example, the Inspectorate provides a feedback loop for government policy making. In particular, the Inspectorate provides information directly to education policy makers, partly in the form of thematic reports that draw on its school visits and partly by sitting at the table with policy makers trying to improve education policies. In addition, the Inspectorate makes an annual, independent report to Parliament on the state of education in which it has the freedom to criticize, at least to some extent, government policies.

In New Zealand, the initial head of the ERO, Judith Aitken, used the power and visibility of ERO specifically to challenge national education policies and to focus public attention on large structural problems encompassing groups of schools. Her method was to publish a series of high-profile reports on different aspects of the state education system. In doing so, the ERO sought to balance its narrow purpose of evaluating individual schools with the goal of addressing larger structural problems. As Aitken put it in a 1998 interview, "It has been a struggle to get the Ministry [of Education] to understand that the school is not a great unit to focus on. Compare the successful firm. It has a lot of vertical and horizontal linkages to other firms" (cited in Fiske and Ladd 2000). There is little doubt that these ERO reports had an impact on the ministry. A report on the structural problems in a large group of South Auckland schools, for example, ultimately prompted the government to establish a NZ\$19 million program aimed at assisting troubled schools in that area.

This 1990s experience with the ERO in New Zealand highlights one of the key benefits of an independent Inspectorate, namely that it can bring objective, disaggregated evidence to bear on the effectiveness, or lack thereof,

of government policies and thereby help to hold policy makers responsible for those policies. Although the ERO remains an independent agency separate from the Ministry of Education, it now has a closer working relationship with the ministry than it did during the 1990s. Whether that has interfered with the ERO's ability and willingness to write public reports critical of the ministry is not clear.

My reading of this evidence, and in particular my knowledge of New Zealand's early experience with the ERO, leads me to conclude that an inspectorate should have substantial independence from the education system it is monitoring. Only in that way will it be in a position to hold higher level policy makers responsible for policies that cannot be implemented at the school level or that do not further the goals to which the policy makers aspire. But there are some clear trade-offs here. As suggested by the Dutch model, there are also benefits from having the Inspectorate engaged in policy deliberations. The challenge is to design a system in which the information gathered by the Inspectorate from its arm's-length periodic monitoring of all schools can be fed back into the policy-making process in a productive manner, while at the same time assuring that the Inspectorate retains sufficient independence to criticize government policies. If the Inspectorate is not given the independence to provide that oversight, who will provide it?

CONCLUSION

It would be a mistake to leave the impression that these two inspectorate systems are the only ones of potential interest for U.S. policy makers. Other models of possible interest include, for example, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) in England and the HM Inspectorate of Education in Scotland.⁸ In all these countries, the inspection systems are evolving as policy makers struggle to determine the best way to assure quality education for all students and to promote school improvement in an international climate in which high-quality education is viewed as essential for one's life chances. The main point is simply that the inspectorate approach seems to work reasonably well in various other countries, and for that reason it represents an option worth considering in the United States.

A formal evaluation of how well such systems work in practice would be a major undertaking and is far beyond the scope of this note. Additional research would also be useful, not only to examine the effectiveness of specific procedures followed by the various inspectorates but also to examine the context in which they operate. For example, in both the Netherlands and

8. Ofsted is described in Rothstein, Jacobsen, and Wilder (2008). See also www.ofsted.gov.uk/. For the Scottish Inspectorate, see www.hmie.gov.uk/AboutUs/InspectionResources/.

New Zealand, school funding is highly centralized and designed to be equitable across schools, parents are empowered to choose schools for their children, and individual schools have significant operational autonomy. Further, in the Netherlands, a child's test scores at the end of primary school have high stakes in that they help determine what type of secondary school the child will have access to. As a result, the inspectorate systems in both countries interact in complex ways with parental pressure on schools to make sure the schools serve not only the private interests of the parents but also the public interest as expressed in national policy. The U.S. context differs in many ways, including the far greater resource disparities across schools and the less frequent use of tests that have high stakes for students. As a result, there is no one best model that can or should be readily transferred to the United States.

Given the current state of knowledge about education inspectorates and the lack of U.S. experience with them, the best strategy for the United States, in my view, would be for the federal government to encourage, or possibly to require, states to start experimenting with inspectorates as a substitute for test-based accountability at the school level.⁹ Ideally the federal government would also provide funding for the training of inspectors to ensure that they meet professional standards, as well as funding for the evaluation of the models adopted by the various states with the goal of learning how best to design inspectorate systems suited to the U.S. education policy context.

The author was a visiting scholar at the University of Amsterdam in the spring of 2009 and was a Fulbright lecturer and researcher at Victoria University, Wellington, New Zealand, in 2002.

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9. See the Broader, Bolder Approach to Accountability, which recommends that the federal government require that all states establish a school inspectorate system (www.boldapproach.org).

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