

Executive Summary, Working Paper II: “Integrating ‘Helping Schools Improve’ with ‘Accountability’”, Gary Ratner & Monty Neill, DRAFT -For Comment Only- 12/15/09

Now that the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) is coming up for reauthorization, its emphasis needs to shift from sanctioning schools for inadequate test scores to helping them make the systemic changes that will enhance students’ learning, while continuing to hold the schools accountable. That is, ESEA must integrate “helping schools improve” with “accountability.”

Central to doing that is for ESEA to establish a system of qualitative and quantitative evaluation to assess how individual schools are doing and what help, or sometimes interventions, they need to improve. The critical question is how can a system of qualitative and quantitative evaluation be designed that would effectively integrate “helping schools improve” with “accountability.”

Fortunately, England and other nations have already developed, and extensively relied on, an institution well designed to meet this need: “ inspectorates.” School inspectorates provide a corps of skilled and experienced educators who evaluate and report on the academic achievement, demographics, resource and other conditions in each school, analyze school strengths and problems, recommend solutions and outside assistance, and, for schools in serious trouble, recommend major interventions. Inspectorates also hold the schools accountable through reporting to the public.

Fundamentally, this working paper will consider how the inspectorate model might best be adapted to ESEA and the structure of American federalism. The paper is intended to show that it would be feasible to establish an inspectorate system that would well serve the purposes of “helping schools improve” and “accountability” under ESEA and illustrate how such a system could operate. However, the paper is not intended to suggest that its approach is the only way such a system could be structured nor that it would be appropriate to incorporate all the matters that the paper discusses into federal law.

Since the ESEA/NCLB accountability/sanctions scheme has been focused just on Title I-funded public schools, we assume, for purposes of this paper, that any federally required inspectorate would apply to all such schools, but only to such schools. Similarly, because having an effective evaluation system that would both “help schools improve” and hold them “accountable” to the public is so integrally related to accomplishing the policies of Title I, we assume that the federal government would pay the costs.

In performing its roles, an inspectorate would have a range of responsibilities. When inspectors visited schools, they would already have gathered and analyzed: student outcome data (scores on state assessments, grade promotion, graduation, attendance and other such data); demographic and community context data; data on teachers and resources; the school’s own improvement plan and any reports based on it, including any key strategies the Government would have required be used in the improvement process. (ESEA would require all Title I-funded schools, to provide professional development addressing staff-identified needs, time for peer collaboration among staff, and

enhancement of parental involvement with the school. In addition, ESEA would require those Title I-funded schools with the highest poverty and lowest achievement to provide: intensive mentoring for teachers; career ladders; staff training for engaging families and communities to support student learning; instructional leadership training for staff; literacy and parenting skills programs; and adult mentors for students without families available, all as recommended by the Forum on Educational Accountability.) For any school already subject to intervention, the inspectors would know what interventions had been initiated and, to the extent possible, what, if any, progress had been made.

In visiting schools, inspectors would look at: facilities, plant, library, technology, and other resources; school climate and culture; curriculum; teaching; and student work samples/portfolios (randomly selected). They would talk with administrators, teachers, students, parents, pupil service personnel, and other community members whose work significantly impacts the school and its students.

After their visits, the inspectors would publish a report addressing these categories: resources (what are available, how, and how well, they are being used, and what else, if anything, is needed;) climate and culture; teaching; professional development and staff evaluation; relations with, and support to, parents; student learning outcomes; the status and results of implementing its improvement plan and key improvement strategies; any other major strengths and problems detected; and recommendations for any needed school improvements, technical assistance, resource support, and interventions.

Inspectors would typically be retired teachers and principals, supplemented by one or more community representatives, selected and trained by a new State inspectorate office. Inspections should focus first on the persistently lowest-performing Title I-funded schools in each State. How frequently schools should be inspected needs more consideration, but there is precedent for 3-6 year cycles, with schools in difficulty inspected more frequently. Assuming a 5-6 year inspection cycle, with poorly rated schools inspected more often, the estimated cost of such an inspectorate nationwide would be about \$780 million/year.

As important and valuable as it would be to establish a high quality inspectorate system, that must not be done in isolation. There must concurrently be a major expansion of human resource and material capacity to carry out the inspectors' recommendations. Specifically, programs must be developed to greatly strengthen the knowledge and skills of: all educators; LEAs and SEAs to provide highly competent technical assistance and additional resources where needed; and states and localities to provide major interventions where provision of technical assistance and resources is insufficient.

In essence, an inspectorate system would powerfully integrate "helping schools improve" with "accountability" under ESEA. The federal role should be to establish, monitor and fund, as an integral part of ESEA, a qualitative and quantitative evaluation system along these lines – what might be called an "American inspectorate – as well as the related capacity building programs. As the ESEA is about to be reauthorized, *the time to create an inspectorate system is now.*

