



A Broader, **BOLDER** Approach to Education  
[www.boldapproach.org](http://www.boldapproach.org) | [boldapproach@epi.org](mailto:boldapproach@epi.org)

## A Broader, Bolder Approach to Education (BBA):

### Estimating the Cost of a Qualitative School Inspection System<sup>i</sup>

September 2009

#### Introduction and Background

The Broader, Bolder Approach to Education campaign (BBA, [www.boldapproach.org](http://www.boldapproach.org)) proposes that the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) limit the federal role in accountability to (1) collecting and publicizing state-level data from an expanded and improved National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), supplemented by other relevant national surveys, on a broad range of academic and other subjects and skills that enable students to achieve success in a pluralistic society and complex global economy; and (2) requiring states to develop accountability systems that rely on the results of states' improved academic tests and other key educational, health and behavioral indicators, along with approved inspection systems to validate school and district performance, identify and help with necessary improvements, and judge outcomes. Inspections of schools should focus on:

\* the successful delivery of a balanced program that includes reading, math, and other academic subjects, the arts, citizenship, physical fitness, mental and physical health, work skills and other relevant behavioral skills;

\* the quality of instruction, teacher preparation, professional development, and leadership to deliver such a full curriculum;

\* the safety and supportiveness of the learning environment, and the fairness of disciplinary policy;

\* efforts to coordinate with other community institutions that provide early childhood care and education, parent education and support, physical and mental health care, and high quality out-of-school time programs;

\* responsiveness to parent, community, and student concerns, and the engagement of each of these groups in school education policy and affairs;

\* the extent to which district administrative, governance, coordination and support services enhance a school's capacity to promote student success.

Full implementation by each state of such an inspectorate system will take many years and considerable experimentation. It will also cost much more than the present accountability system that consists primarily of standardized tests.

### **Summary of Conclusions**

This memorandum presents an estimate of the costs of such an inspection system.

a) We estimate that upon full and complete implementation, the cost of inspection systems in the 51 states (including the District of Columbia) for all schools in these states would be \$780 million per year, or \$16 per pupil, representing less than one-sixth of one percent (0.15%) of total school spending.

b) We estimate that the cost of a gradual implementation, in which an initial inspection was conducted only in 10% of all public schools, would be \$78 million, or \$1.61 per pupil, or one-hundredth of one percent (.01%) of total school spending.

## Assumptions:

BBA emphasizes that, although our recommendation for an inspection system rests on a growing body of knowledge, from here and abroad and from both the education and other sectors, that knowledge is still insufficient to predetermine the best design for an education inspectorate system. BBA recommends that ESEA require states to begin experimentation with inspectorate designs, but ESEA should not mandate a particular design, and should encourage controlled experimentation.

The specific costs of an inspection system will depend on the particular design of that system. The cost estimates in this report must necessarily be based on many assumptions about the system design. We make these assumptions for the purposes of estimating costs only, and without implying that these should be the default assumptions for any state designing an inspectorate. [We have provided a spreadsheet and documentation to accompany this report](#); users of this report, by altering the assumptions, can generate different bottom-line cost estimates.

The assumptions underlying our estimates are these:

a) *Frequency of Inspections*: After an initial inspection,

- schools in the most serious difficulty (approximately 5% of all schools) will be inspected annually;
- schools in great need of improvement and support (approximately 10% of all schools) will be inspected every two years;
- schools in need of some support (approximately 25% of all schools) will be inspected every three years;

- schools that appear to be satisfactory in a previous inspection (approximately 60% of all schools) will be inspected every four years.

b) *Composition of Inspection teams*: Inspection teams consist of educators who are professionally trained and full time evaluators, specialists in areas such as curriculum, district and school organization and leadership, youth development, and community organization. The size of inspection teams should vary by the size and type of school. <sup>ii</sup> Inspection teams at average-sized:

- elementary schools should include 5 inspectors
- middle schools should include 5 inspectors
- high schools should include 7 inspectors

c) *Duration of Inspection visits*: One full day of report-writing follows each school inspection. Time spent on inspection and report writing should total:

- 4 days per elementary school inspection
- 5 days per middle school inspection
- 5 days per high school inspection

d) *Compensation of Inspectors*: Inspectors should be compensated at the average rate for high school principals in their state.

e) *Other Duties of Inspectors*:

In a 183-day school calendar, each inspector, operating out of state headquarters (or, in larger states, from regional headquarters) can participate in approximately 35 inspection teams per year. Although most school sites will be reasonably accessible to regional or state headquarters, not all will be, and each inspector will incur the need for about 25 travel days per year, in addition to days devoted primarily to inspections. Even where school sites do

not require travel days (e.g., are approximately two hours' travel time from headquarters), lodging expenses may be required. Travel, lodging, meal and incidental expenses average \$250 per day per inspector.

During days when inspections are not possible (school holidays and vacations) inspectors will be assigned as follows:

- Training: 20 days (during summer)

- Developing support plans and curriculum, for schools, and professional development for school staffs: 20 days (during summer). (Schools found by inspection to be in the most need of ongoing support will require additional intervention costs by districts and state departments of education. We do not assume that a state inspectorate can be responsible for this ongoing support.)

- Vacation and Holidays: 35 days

f) *Other costs:*

- Chief inspectors supervise inspectors, making school assignments, reviewing, editing, and approving inspection reports, conducting training programs for inspectors. We assume a ratio of one chief inspector for every 15 inspectors, with a chief inspector's compensation rate of 120% of the inspector rate. Each chief inspector is assisted by one administrative support person, at a compensation rate of 50% of the inspector rate.

- We estimate the cost of training programs, including purchased services, supplies, equipment, meals, lodging, and incidentals of \$300 per inspector per day.

- We estimate administrative overhead costs of 10% of all other costs.

With these assumptions, a fully developed national school inspection system in the 50 states and District of Columbia, for all schools in these states and the District, would cost \$780 million per year, or \$16 per pupil, representing less than one-sixth of one percent (0.15%) of total school spending.<sup>iii</sup>

## **Starting Slowly**

States should start slowly to implement a school inspection system, taking advantage of the flexibility granted by a re-authorized ESEA and making adjustments based on accumulating experience. Once an inspection system is functioning, states should inspect more frequently those schools shown in an initial evaluation to be in greater need of support, and less frequently those schools shown to be more effective.

States will have to make decisions, however, about where to begin, because present accountability systems do not offer a valid means of knowing which schools are most in need of support prior to an initial inspection. State education officials, therefore, will have to make a judgment about which schools are most likely to be in need of evaluation for the purpose of identifying weaknesses and recommending improvements.

Identification of these schools based primarily on prior low test scores could undermine the rationale behind qualitative evaluation. It will preserve perverse incentives from high-stakes testing that a re-authorized ESEA should be designed to eliminate – incentives to narrow the curriculum to tested subjects, to focus excessively on test preparation rather than the underlying knowledge and skills, to pay inadequate attention to students not on the cusp of passing. In effect, such a policy will substitute the sanction of being subject to inspection for the previous sanctions of providing supplemental educational services and choice.

Recognizing that states need to be given the opportunity to devise their own systems of identification of schools in greatest need of improvement, we assume that the determination of which schools will receive inspections on what schedule will be left to each state with clear direction that the objective of the inspection system is to improve the quality of education outcomes for all students. Inspection systems should not be seen as punitive, and states should design their inspection systems to identify exemplary practices as well as those needing to improve.

If a gradual implementation of an inspection system were initially to provide inspection of 10% of all schools, this would permit the inclusion of the 5,000 schools nationwide that are most in need of improvement, as well as of a nearly equal number of schools in other categories.

Such a gradual implementation, including 10% of all schools, would cost \$78 million, or \$1.61 per pupil, or one-hundredth of one percent (.01%) of total school spending.

### **Varying the Assumptions**

Accompanying this report is a table in spreadsheet format that displays the calculations presented above. Our conclusions, estimates of the total costs for inspections, costs per pupil of inspections, and the percentage of total per pupil costs are found in Cells C-6, C-7, and C-8.

Users of this information can generate alternative estimates by modifying the assumptions. Cells in which assumptions can be modified are colored red. For example, Cell C-58 of the spreadsheet states our assumption that a middle school inspection should take 5 days, including one day for report writing. If the assumption is changed to 4 days (by substituting the number "4" for "5" in Cell C-58), Cell C-6 will show the total cost changed from \$780 million to \$750 million, Cell C-7 will show the per pupil cost changed from \$16.21 to \$15.48, and Cell C-8 will show the percentage of total per pupil costs changed from 0.15% to 0.14%.

As another example, if a gradual phase in of an inspectorate system included 5% of all schools, change Cell E-149 from 10% to 5%. Now, Cells C-10, C-11, and C-12 will show that the cost of this gradual implementation will drop to \$39 million, \$0.81 per pupil, and .007% of total school spending, respectively.

One way that states may experiment with the development of inspectorates is to build on the models that have been developed by regional accreditation agencies, either by collaborating with those agencies to evaluate schools, or by modeling inspectorate policies in part on those of the agencies. (The regional accreditation agencies mostly evaluate secondary, not elementary schools.) Rather than using full-time salaried inspectors, the accreditation agencies typically use teachers and administrators (peers) from other regional schools, released for a single inspection from their regular assignments. In these cases, the schools contributing the peer inspectors, not the accreditation agencies, bear the compensation costs of inspectors. In practice, this means that the contributing schools incur the expenses of substitute teachers for the days on which peer inspectors are released. To improve consistency and quality within a quasi peer review model, full-time inspectors should be added to those inspection teams. To estimate the costs of an inspectorate

system that employed only 3 full-time inspectors per team, with the balance of the team composed of peer reviewers from other schools, substitute "3" for the numbers in Cells C-37, C-56, and C-75. Now, Cell C-6 will show the total cost reduced from \$780 million to \$426 million, Cell C-7 will show the per pupil cost reduced from \$16 to \$9, and Cell C-8 will show the percentage of total per pupil costs reduced from 0.15% to 0.08%.

---

<sup>i</sup> This memorandum was prepared by Jacob Ludes and Richard Rothstein for the Broader, Bolder Approach campaign. Invaluable research assistance and data analysis was provided by Nadia Alam.

<sup>ii</sup> There are many grade configurations of schools used by states throughout the country. Configurations can vary because of facility constraints, educational philosophy, or demographic patterns. For this report, using data from the Common Core of Data from the National Center for Education Statistics, for school year 2006-07, we considered;

- any school that begins with Grades PK to 4, and ends with Grades 1 to 10, to be an elementary school;
- any school that begins with Grade 5 or higher, and ends with Grade 9 or lower, to be a middle school;
- any school that begins with Grade 5 or higher and ends with Grade 10 or higher, to be a high school;
- any school that includes Grades 11 or 12 to be a high school.

Schools that end no higher than kindergarten are not included in our analysis.

<sup>iii</sup> These and subsequent estimates, calculated from the National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data for 2006-07, exclude small schools with fewer than 100 enrolled students, and exclude ungraded schools (for example special education schools).

## Estimating the Cost of an Elementary and Secondary School Inspection System

(This spreadsheet accompanies the memorandum, "A Broader, Bolder Approach to Education [BBA]: Estimating the Cost of a Qualitative School Inspection System")

### Summary of Results:

Total Annual Cost of 51 State Inspection Systems	\$780,480,830
Annual Cost (\$) Per Pupil of Inspection Systems	\$16.12
Annual Cost (% of Total Per Pupil Spending) of Inspection Systems	0.15%
Cost of Initial Inspection of 10% of All Schools	\$78,048,083
Annual Cost (\$) Per Pupil (All Pupils) of Initial Inspection of 10% of all Schools	\$1.61
Annual Cost (% of Total Per Pupil Spending) of Initial Inspection of 10% of All Schools	0.015%

### a. Frequency of Inspections

Number of Annual Inspections at Schools in the Most Serious Difficulty	1
Number of Annual Inspections at Schools in Great Need of Improvement and Support	0.5
Number of Annual Inspections at Schools in Need of Some Support	0.33
Number of Annual Inspections at Satisfactory Schools	0.25
% of Schools Inspected Annually	5%
% of Schools Inspected Once Every Two Years	10%
% of Schools Inspected Once Every Three Years	25%
% of Schools Inspected Once Every Four Years	60%

### b. Inspections at Elementary Schools

Number of Elementary Schools (See note 1)	47,757
Number of Elementary Schools Inspected Annually	2,388

Number of Elementary Schools Inspected Once Every Two Years	4,776
Number of Elementary Schools Inspected Once Every Three Years	11,939
Number of Elementary Schools Inspected Once Every Four Years	28,654
Number of Annual Elementary School Inspections	15,919
Number of Inspectors per Elementary School Inspection	5
Number of Days per Elementary School Inspection (Incl Report Writing)	4
Inspector Days Per Elementary School	20
Number of Elementary School Inspection Person-Days Per Year	318,380

### **c. Inspections at Middle Schools**

Number of Middle Schools (See Note 1)	15,373
Number of Middle Schools Inspected Annually	769
Number of Middle Schools Inspected Once Every Two Years	1,537
Number of Middle Schools Inspected Once Every Three Years	3,843
Number of Middle Schools Inspected Once Every Four Years	9,224
Number of Annual Middle School Inspections	5,124
Number of Inspectors per Middle School Inspection	5
Number of Days per Middle School Inspection (Incl Report Writing)	5
Inspector Days Per Middle School	25
Number of Middle School Inspection Person-Days Per Year	128,108

### **d. Inspections at High Schools**

Number of High Schools (See Note 1)	17,668
-------------------------------------	--------

Number of High Schools Inspected Annually	883
Number of High Schools Inspected Once Every Two Years	1,767
Number of High Schools Inspected Once Every Three Years	4,417
Number of High Schools Inspected Once Every Four Years	10,601
Number of Annual High School Inspections	5,889
Number of High School Inspectors per Inspection	7
Number of Days per High School Inspection (Incl Report Writing)	5
Inspector Days Per High School	35
Number of High School Inspection Person-Days Per Year	206,127

#### **e. Inspectors' Work Load**

Length of School Year (Days)	183
Travel Days (Per Inspector) to Sites	25
Days Available for Inspection, per Inspector	158
Number of Inspectors Needed	4,130

#### **f. Compensation of Inspectors**

Inspector Annual Salary (Average National High School Principal Salary) (see Note 2)	\$87,100
Benefits as % of Salary (See Note 3)	24%
Compensation of Inspectors	\$107,931
Cost of Inspectors	\$445,804,641

#### **g. Chief Inspectors and Administrative Support**

Number of Inspectors Per Chief Inspector	10
--	----

Number of Chief Inspectors Required	413
Compensation of Chief Inspectors Compared to Inspectors (%)	120%
Compensation of Chief Inspectors	\$129,517
Cost of Chief Inspectors	\$53,496,557
Number of Administrative Personnel Per Chief Inspector	1
Compensation of Administrative Support Personnel Compared to Inspectors (%)	50%
Compensation of Administrative Support Personnel	\$53,965
Cost of Administrative Support Personnel	\$22,290,232

#### **h. Expenses of Inspection System**

Travel, Lodging, Meals, Incidentals, Per Inspector Per Inspection Day (See Note 4)	\$250
Cost of Travel, Lodging, Meals, Incidentals	\$163,153,750
Number of Training Days Per Inspector Per Year	20
Purchased Services, Travel, Lodging, Meals, Incidentals, Per Inspector Per Training Day (See Note 4)	\$300
Cost of Annual Training for Inspectors	\$24,782,848
Estimate of Overhead to Direct Expenses (%)	10%
Cost of Overhead for State Inspection System	\$70,952,803

#### **i. Calculation of Cost of Inspection System**

Total Annual Cost of 51 State Inspection Systems	\$780,480,830
--	---------------

Number of Students Enrolled in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools (See Note 5)	48,430,404	
Average Per Pupil Spending, U.S. Public Elementary and Secondary Schools (See Note 6)	\$10,889	
Annual Cost (\$) Per Pupil of Inspection Systems		\$16.12
Annual Cost (% of Total Per Pupil Spending) of Inspection System		0.15%

#### **j. Calculation of Cost of First Year of Inspection System (10% of All Schools Only)**

Percentage of Schools Inspected		10%
Total Annual Cost of Inspecting 10% of All Schools		\$78,048,083
Annual Cost (\$) Per Pupil of Inspection Systems for 10% of All Schools		\$1.61
Annual Cost (% of Total Per Pupil Spending) of Inspection Systems for 10% of All Schools		0.01%

Note 1. Source: Common Core of Data, NCES (Not included: schools with fewer than 100 enrolled students)

Note 2. Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics 2008, Table 86, Cell AG33

Note 3. Source: Sylvia A. Allegretto, Sean P. Corcoran, and Lawrence Mishel, 2004 *How Does Teacher Pay Compare? Methodological Challenges and Answers*.

Washington, D.C.: The Economic Policy Institute; Table 8 (Estimate is for teachers, not high school principals.)

Note 4: Estimate based on experience of accreditation teams of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges

Note 5. Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics 2008, Table 97, Cell B28

Note 6. Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics 2008, Table 181, Cell K75