Top-Performing Students

On PISA 2015, the Netherlands’ average scores made it one of the top-performing education systems among the 72 participating countries and economies. Dutch 15-year-olds perform especially well in mathematics. The Netherlands has one of the highest rates of students performing at the top levels of PISA proficiency.

Demographic Data

Total students in the Netherlands’ primary and secondary schools, similar to the U.S. state of New York: 2.71 million

Student : teacher ratio in lower secondary schools, similar to the U.S. ratio of 15:5: 16.2

Yearly spending per student, less than the U.S.’s $15,720 per student per year: $12,247

System Strengths and Goals

Early Childhood Education

Dutch three-year-olds are enrolled in early childhood education, compared to OECD average of 70%.

Instructional Systems

Read about the Netherlands’ ongoing nationwide dialogue of curriculum alignment in Marc Tucker’s interview with Sander Dekker, the Netherlands’ State Secretary for Education, Culture and Science.

Teacher Quality

Dutch colleges of education have set higher entrance standards in response to evidence showing key skills deficiencies in teacher candidates. Despite initial teacher shortages caused by this change, the government hopes this policy will increase the status of the teaching profession and attract higher quality candidates in the long run.

Vocational Education

More than 50% of students choose to pursue vocational education in secondary school. Students have multiple opportunities to move to the academic track or on to higher education.

School Leadership

Dutch school leaders have completed a principal training program compared to the OECD average of 85%, and 91% have completed instructional leadership training compared to the OECD average of 78%.

Governance and Accountability

Around Neo-Herds of primary students attend school run by private secular or religious organizations. These schools are equally funded by the government and held to the same high standards as public schools, including high quality teacher requirements, national academic standards, national exams to measure mastery, and an inspection system to support school improvement.

Follow CIEB for further analysis and profiling of this high-performing education system during the coming year. For more on how the Dutch approach school choice, see this month’s International Reads, Understanding Education in the Netherlands.