Report on Progress of the Recommendations of the 2013 Waikato Region Conference Paper – A Hierarchy of Inequality – The Decile Divide

The 2013 Conference passed a recommendation requesting a report on progress related to the issues identified in the paper to be given to the 2014 Conference. The paper highlighted the need for:

* Each school to be adequately funded to reflect the needs of its students so the provision of education is equitable for all;
* Engagement with the Ministry of Education in any review of the decile rating system to more adequately reflect the student mix in each school;
* Work with the various agencies (MOE, ERO and NZQA) to provide more information about the purpose of the decile system as a mechanism for the targeted funding of schools, rather than for other purposes;
* Publicity and campaigning to raise awareness of the growing inequalities between schools and address this issue (particularly in election year).

Since the Conference last year the decile system has continued to be in the news from time-to- time, particularly in relation to the funding of schools and parental perceptions of them. The release of the 2013 Census information is now being used by the Ministry of Education to recalculate the deciles. In 2007, when the last review took place, two-thirds of all schools were reclassified. On 23rd July the MOE began the process of collecting addresses for all school children so the deciles can be recalculated.

There has been concern from some principals that their decile ranking will rise, causing their funding from government sources to drop, forcing communities to make up the shortfall. Population movement and changing community socio-economic profiles over the last six years have been considerable in some cities.

Child welfare advocates have been campaigning for better funding for low decile schools (1 – 4). The Child Poverty Action Group has published a series of reports with the overall title of “Our Children, Our Choice – Priorities for Poverty”. The most recent of these focused on the school sector, written by Professor John O’Neill from Massey University. Decile funding, which gives support to schools in areas of greatest need, is an important foundation principle.

There was a call in the report to:

* Use data gathered on learners to be used to direct resources to where they are needed. This would not necessarily be generated by testing;
* Provide 100% government subsidy to all Decile 1 – 4 schools for examination fees;
* Create decile 1 – 4 community hubs; and,
* Provide free breakfasts and lunches for students in low decile schools.

There was also a call to abolish school donations to remove an unnecessary burden on low income families.

In March this year, there was an article in the Herald On Sunday (March 19th), following a comment from the Minister in late 2013 that the decile rating system was a “blunt instrument that needed to be reviewed“. There was a further concerning statement implying that a new funding mechanism based on student progress and performance was being considered. This was swiftly clarified but there remains a suspicion that the school funding system is up for grabs and a different funding model is being thought about.

An article in the Listener “Dealing to the Deciles” on 29th March 2014, based on a transcript of an interview the Minister gave earlier, outlined concerns about the future direction of school funding and the method of allocation, again questioning the decile system and giving partial endorsement to use of student results as a funding mechanism. At present, the Ministry cannot identify which schools add the most value to students[[1]](#footnote-1).

The decile system review will be watched with interest. Schools will go up, down or stay the same. There will be winners and losers and funding for overall school operations will need to be carefully phased in over a transition period. Some schools will need to turn to their local communities more and some maybe less. The decile ranking for a school is still being used by the public as a proxy for school caliber and influences school zones and real estate prices. However, a high-decile school can have significant numbers of students from poor backgrounds without the funding to support, so any review should consider this.

A New Zealand Herald investigation, published 7th February this year, produced figures which showed a difference of $445 in fundraising and donations between decile 10 and decile 1 schools. The average annual donation for decile 1 schools was $59, while for decile 10 it was $278. The New Zealand Herald also published an investigation related to roll numbers for Auckland - *Social Climbing Leads To Decile Drift* and included the following table which summarises changes between 2003 and 2013;

Decile 1 - 1366 loss

Decile 2 - 512 loss

Decile 3 - 3174 loss

Decile 4 - 2287 loss

Decile 5 - 765 loss

Decile 6 - 573 loss

Decile 7 - 211 gain

Decile 8 - 2161 gain

Decile 9 - 3021 gain

Decile 10 - 3596 gain

Decile drift is difficult to break and perceptions difficult to change. The recent [TV One series fronted by Nigel Latta](http://tvnz.co.nz/nigel-latta/s1-ep2-video-6037627) highlighted the pernicious creep of inequality, but found that there was quality education going on in both high and low decile schools.

One thing that is agreed on is that the funding of schools is a complicated system. Any review of the system and the recalculation of the decile ranking for schools needs to be closely monitored, with funding based on real need and any change must not penalize those it purports to help. The Conference papers on *A Needs based Funding Model* and the Waikato Paper on *Zoning - Educational Apartheid* will keep the issue of inequality, inequity and polarization between schools in the public arena.

1. Despite political claims, there is no valid way of measuring the extent to which schools and teachers “add value.” The American Statistical Association noted this year. Value-Added Measurement (VAM) “typically measure correlation not causation”. ASA statement on *Using Value-Added Models for Education Assessment*. April 2014

   <http://www.amstat.org/policy/pdfs/ASA_VAM_Statement.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)