

The Equity Index and other attempts at a more equitable education system in Aotearoa

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It is critical to note that while the terms “equality” and “equity” may seem similar, are very different. Equality is often defined as everyone having access to the same opportunities and resources, that is to say, to satisfy the needs of each individual. This principle is a long-term objective of a just society where children, irrespective of their ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or gender, should have equal access to the same resources and opportunities (de los Santos et al., 2020).

On the other hand, equity refers to a system where unequal goods are redistributed in order to create systems and schools that share a higher likelihood of becoming more equal (Brayboy et al., 2007). Because people differ in their abilities, this concept calls for an unequal distribution of resources (Vijfeijken et al., 2021). In terms of the education system, this implies that every student must have access to educational resources depending on their demonstrated capacities or their ability to make use of them (Mijs, 2016). As every learner has a different learning and developmental trajectory, each one might need individualised or extra support to optimise a high-quality education system. Equity does not mean giving the same experiences for every child, rather it calls for educators to identify and recognise sometimes unseen barriers and obstacles to learning, and to actively address them (Hyland, 2010).

Educational inequity appears to be an ongoing problem in Aotearoa New Zealand. Large equity gaps continue to exist for specific groups including Māori, Pasifika, and individuals from low SES families. Researchers argue that structural inequities faced by students cause a disconnect and even dismissal of their cultural experiences, values, and understanding (Hunter et al., 2016). More is needed from educators – namely to implement culturally responsive pedagogical approaches that engage students and offer them opportunities to achieve academically. But to do this, educators and schools need to be properly funded and supported.

Policymakers have been attempting new strategies to address the ongoing education equity gap. Starting from January 2023, the Ministry of Education is abolishing the school decile systems as a basis for distributing funding. Instead, the funding will be entirely based on the Equity Index. The Equity Index estimates the

extent to which young learners encounter socio-economic obstacles to achieving in education (Ministry of Education, 2022-b). They argued that The Equity Index can be a more useful resource for understanding how socio-economic disadvantage affects education and schooling, and that it can offer a more comprehensive perspective on how education resources might better support equity in schools, kohanga reo, and early childhood education services, particularly for students from underprivileged background (Ministry of Education, 2022-a). In addition to this, the Governments is also allocating an additional budget of 75 million annually to strengthen the equity system at the same time (Ministry of Education, n.d.-d).

Another initiative being implemented in Aotearoa to address inequity is a program called Ka Ora, Ka Ako – Healthy School Lunches Programme which seeks to reduce food insecurity by supplying access to a healthy lunch in school every day. This programme is targeted at the top 25% of learners in schools and kura confronted with the greatest socio-economic obstacles, as research has shown that reduced food insecurity for children and young people can enhance well-being, support development and learning, and improve school involvement and achievement (Ministry of Education, 2022-e). The Ongoing Resources Scheme (ORS) is also a funding programme specifically focused for learners who require the highest level of needs for specialist support at school (e.g., difficulties in areas of learning, hearing, vision, physical, or communication). The ORS help students to participate in and learn alongside other students at school, assisting them to feel accepted and be able to be active members of the learning community (Ministry of Education, 2022-f). In conclusion, reducing educational inequities in any school system is not an easy or simple task. However, to create systemic change in Aotearoa it starts with equity in the education system.

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EXTRA REFERENCE FOR EQUITY INDEX

<https://www.education.govt.nz/our-work/changes-in-education/equity-index/>

EQUITY INDEX SUMMARY AUCKLAND

https://assets.education.govt.nz/public/Documents/our-work/changes-in-education/MOE14173_Regional-Summary_Auckland_19.pdf