

# Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA)

By David Knuckey

**One of the more popular parts of the Education Revolution (if we judge by sheer usage) is the My School Website. Live as of January this year, there are already calls and plans for its development and there seems to be no limit to the information it may eventually carry.**

A fundamental point of the site (and all forms of assessment and measurement) is to enable comparison between 'like' schools. Obviously, given the highly-individualised nature of schools the very notion of 'like' is relative.

One means which can help parents put their school in perspective, is the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA).

ICSEA has been specifically created for My School. Not a measure of school resources or really even socio-economic factors, ICSEA is a measure, which identifies the key attributes of the student population that a school serves.

ICSEA uses Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data and school data. The data ICSEA uses includes:

- Socio-economic characteristics of the areas where the students live
- Whether the school is in a regional or remote area
- The proportion of Indigenous children enrolled in the school.

## Socio-economic characteristics

ICSEA isn't a typical socio-economic measure. The ABS includes 35 variables in its socio-economic determinations – but not all of these have anything to do with education. ICSEA uses just 16 of these variables, which are known to influence education and are variables over which the school has very little control. These variables include average income, level of education, and types of employment for the households the students come from, together with Internet access and whether English is the language spoken at home.

These factors 'external' to school control are known to predict 62% of primary and 56% of secondary school performance. By adding the influence of the other

factors of remoteness and percentage of Aboriginal students, these prediction figures increase to 68% for primary and 59% for secondary.

The converse to this then, is that about 30% of primary school variance and 40% of secondary variance is brought about by in-school factors, such as the quality of teaching, leadership, school resources etc.

## ICSEA Value

The ICSEA value is expressed as a number – the average value being 1000. Most schools have an ICSEA value between 900 and 1100. Obviously, the higher the ICSEA score, the more advantageous the background of the students – at least in terms of those factors that positively influence education. A higher score does not reflect on the quality of your child's school, however, merely allows you to compare the performance of your school with other schools with similar student backgrounds.

## ICSEA Group

The ICSEA value groups your school with up to 60 other schools which have similar student backgrounds – and theoretically, probable similar student results in areas such as NAPLAN. In the relevant group, your school is the median value, with the 30 closest schools above yours and the 30 closest below yours on the ICSEA scale.

These 'statistically similar' schools are of course not necessarily close geographically and their 'similarities' have nothing to do with school size, school community or school populations – it means that their students come from similar levels of student advantage / disadvantage.

## Using ICSEA

So, by looking at statistically similar schools, you are looking at schools which have students from backgrounds which have the same level educational advantage / disadvantage as your school. Therefore, when comparing NAPLAN results from these schools, you can fairly determine that differing NAPLAN results are due to in-school factors. ■

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