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## NCEA REPORT CALLS FOR EXAM FEES TO BE SCRAPPED

Some high school students are still missing out on sitting their NCEA exams because they can't afford the fees of up to \$150, says a new report commissioned by the Child Poverty Action Group.

Even though *The Irony Persists* finds that the system of giving out financial assistance and collecting fees has vastly improved since the inaugural NCEA in 2002, some students are still choosing subjects and pulling out of courses based on what their family can afford.

"We still had 34 students who did not pay their money, therefore they had to be withdrawn from NCEA," said one of the anonymous interview participants from the ten low-decile Auckland schools surveyed.

*The Irony Persists* is a follow-up to CPAG's 2003 report *The Irony of NCEA: How Compulsory Exam Fees Prevent the Achievement of Students from Poor Families*.

CPAG spokesperson and Massey University education consultant Kay Hawk says "the fact that the schools are mostly pleased with NZQA support and flexibility compared with last year, and that their own internal systems are now up and running, shows that some families' inability to pay is going to be a recurrent obstacle to educational achievement."

"It is not just a handful of students in one year missing out because of NCEA teething problems. Every year, there will be able students who cannot get the credits they deserve because their families miss out on financial assistance but are still too poor to allow them a so-called 'free education'."

The report includes several examples of students not letting their families know about the exam fees because they knew they couldn't afford them.

"They felt the fees would simply be a source of conflict between their parents," says Ms Hawk. "There is a huge amount of pressure on these children, caught between their families' lack of money and what their schools are saying they need."

The report recommends the abolition of NCEA exam fees, and mentions "there is a strong feeling amongst the interviewees that no student should have to pay exam fees".

However, if fees are to be continued, the report strongly recommends that the "NZQA improves flexibility in the enforcement of cut-off dates, and that fee invoices be made easier to understand for both students and families."

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