

How the quintile system for schools works

by Brian Isaacs

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There are huge differences in the resources and number of teachers available to schools in poorer and wealthier areas. Picture: Jacques Naude/African News Agency(ANA)

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The Quintile system to fund grades 1 to 9 pupils was introduced in 1996 by Sibusiso Bengu.

His claim to fame was the much discredited Outcomes-Based Education system (OBE) introduced in Grade 1 in 1998, with much fanfare.

We are feeling the effects of OBE in our educational system. Pupils became learners and teachers became educators. Fortunately, parents remained parents. One parent jokingly said at the time that parents should be called ATMs.

I was asked by Isaac Arendse, the acting principal of Steenberg High, to explain to the public how the quintile system worked.

Before 1994, under apartheid, the country had 10 Bantu education departments, one education department for black people in the non-homelands, an Indian education department, a coloured education department and a white education department.

A unified education department, formed in 1996, had to decide on a new education system. The National Department of Education (then known as NDE) sent out a questionnaire to ascertain the richness and poorness of school communities.

Questions included:

- * What is the income of the parent(s)?
- * Number of vehicles a family owned.
- * The value of the property.

On the basis of this information, schools were then placed into five categories (quintiles 1-5).

Schools with the most resources and parents who earned good salaries were placed in quintile 5 and then graded from 5 to 1, based on the material wealth of the families. Quintile 1 would be the poorest schools.

There were 25000 schools placed in these quintiles.

Schools could appeal to the provincial departments to be moved down the quintiles.

Obviously, schools would not apply to be moved up the quintile system, because it meant they would receive less funding.

In an article published by Section 29, Sheryelle Dass and Amanda Rinqest indicated that in 1997 the annual allocation for each pupil in the quintiles were:

- * Quintile 5: R204.
- * Quintile 4: R590.
- * Quintile 3 to 1: R1177.

This has almost remained constant for the past 12 years. The government rarely considers inflation and increases.

Now for a bit of maths (hopefully, not mathematical literacy where the same content is repeated from grades 10 to 12). A quintile 5 school receives R204 a pupil a year. It has 1000 pupils and therefore receives R204000 from the department.

A poor school with 1000 pupils in quintile 5 receives R1177 a pupil. It receives R1177 000. Parents do not pay school fees in these schools. Parents of grade 10 to 12 pupils should pay school fees but they are too poor.

Remember, school is compulsory in South Africa from grades 1 to 9, or up to the age of 15.

It sounds good that the schools of the poor are getting more funding from the department. However, rich schools charge parents R30 000 a pupil a year. Such a school collects R30 million from its parents. Compare R30m with the R1m poor schools receive from the government.

One can see from funding alone that most schools in the country cannot compete financially with the schools of the rich.

Remember that before 1994 white schools were well-resourced financially, and better staffed and physical resourced than "black" schools.

To level the playing field, the government would have to employ many more teachers in the schools of the poor and pour huge amounts of money into physical resources.

I salute the teachers in poor schools. They work extremely hard.

Most teachers in the schools will tell you that they have full teaching loads with hardly a period in which to recover, unlike at rich schools where there are additional teachers paid by the parents.

Rich schools can allow teachers to have a teaching load that is acceptable.

Schools in poor areas, taking into account the huge backlogs experienced there, are doing magnificent work - but it comes at a cost to the health of the teachers.

Teachers cannot sustain working under these conditions. Their health and family life suffer.

I salute the teachers in most of our schools who, under trying circumstances, give hope to most of the children they teach.

It is our duty to fix our schools. Pressure must be brought to bear on the government to correct the vast imbalances in our education system. The time to do it is today. Not tomorrow. Let us live for our children.

* Brian Isaacs obtained a BSc (UWC) in 1975, a Secondary Teacher's Diploma in 1976, BEd (UWC) in 1981, and MEd (UWC) in 1992. He is a former matriculant, teacher and principal at South Peninsula High School.