School leavers with NCEA Level 2 or above

In 2018, seventy-nine percent of school leavers achieved NCEA Level 2 or above.

Indicator Description

Percentage of school leavers with at least an NCEA Level 2 or equivalent qualification.

Why This Is Important

A formal school qualification is a measure of the extent to which young adults have completed a basic prerequisite for higher education and training and many entry-level jobs.

The main qualification available to secondary school students is the NCEA, which encompasses a wide range of learning. NCEA enables students to undertake multilevel study to attain credits, perhaps at different levels in any one year, towards an NCEA qualification. Students can attain credits through internal and external assessment, and they can accumulate these credits both within and across years. Future educational and job prospects will be limited for those who leave school without Level 2 NCEA.

The recent research done by Scott (2018) found that NCEA level 2 leavers are slightly more likely to go direct to work than their Level 3 peers who are slightly more likely to enrol in a tertiary institution. The group with NCEA 2 has more accumulated earnings in the 7 years since leaving school than the UE group. While there is not much difference between earnings for NCEA level 2 and level 3 groups, those with NCEA level 1 school achievement have earned 15% less than NCEA level 2 peers, and those with no achievement are earning 51% less. (Scott, 2018)
How We Are Going

In 2018, 79.4% of all school leavers attained at least NCEA Level 2 or equivalent, a 1.7 percentage point decrease since 2017. Since 2009, there has been an 11.9 percentage point increase with respect to those who attain at least NCEA Level 2 or equivalent, with 79.4% in 2018 compared to 67.5% in 2009.

Female school leavers were more likely to attain at least NCEA Level 2 or equivalent than their male counterparts in 2018.

When looking at ethnicity, in 2018, Asian students had the highest proportion of school leavers attaining at least NCEA Level 2 or equivalent, followed by European/Pākehā. Pacific and Māori were found to have lower rates of attainment.

*Figure 1: Percentage of total school leavers with at least an NCEA Level 2 qualification or equivalent (2009 to 2018)*
Ethnic Group

Total response ethnicity collection involves counting people who identify with more than one ethnic group in each of these ethnic groups. For the New Zealand total, individuals are counted only once. In 2018, the proportion of Asian school leavers attaining at least NCEA Level 2 or equivalent was 90.6%, which was 8.2 percentage points higher than European/Pākehā (82.4%). Pacific was 74.6% and Māori was 65.8%.

From 2009 - 2018, the largest percentage point increase in those attaining at least NCEA Level 2 or equivalent has been in Māori school leavers, with an increase of 20.1 percentage points between 2009 (45.7%) and 2018 (65.8%), and Pacific school leavers, with an increase of 18.2 percentage points between 2009 (56.4%) and 2018 (74.6%). This can be compared to the European/Pākehā school leavers, who had a 9.6 percentage point increase between 2009 (72.8%) and 2018 (82.4%), and Asian school leavers, who had a 7.8 percentage point increase between 2009 (82.9%) and 2018 (90.6%). These changes indicate that the disparities between ethnic groups have reduced over time but a large achievement gap remains for Māori and Pacific students.

2018 has seen an overall decrease in the proportion of leavers of all ethnicities achieving a minimum of NCEA Level 2 or equivalent. For Māori this decrease was 2.6 percentage points, European/Pākehā had 1.8 percentage point decrease, Pacific had 1.6 percentage point decrease, and the decrease Asian was 1.3 percentage point decrease.

Figure 2: Percentage of school leavers with at least an NCEA Level 2 qualification or equivalent, by ethnic group (2009 to 2018)
Māori Medium Education

Of the 15,398 Māori students who left school in 2018, 4.1% were learning in Māori Medium Education (MME) when they left school. This proportion has increased 0.8 percentage points in last year.

In 2018, 80.2% of Māori school leavers from MME achieved at least NCEA Level 2 or equivalent, up 3.2 percentage points from 2017. However the proportion of Māori school leavers from English Medium Education (EME) who achieved at least NCEA Level 2 or equivalent was down 3.0 percentage points from 2017 to 65.2%. In 2018, the proportion of Māori school leavers achieving at least NCEA Level 2 or equivalent in MME exceeded that of total school leavers².

Figure 3: Percentage of school leavers with at least an NCEA Level 2 qualification or equivalent, by gender (2009-2018)

Learners³ in Māori Medium education (MME) have high rates of attainment⁴ in Māori language standards⁵. 2018, 69.9% of Māori school leavers from MME had attained in Te Reo Māori at level 2 or above, compared to 6.3% of Māori school leavers from English Medium education (EME).

Māori school leavers from MME are also more likely to attain at level 2 in English (41.6% compared to 34.2%), mathematics and statistics (28.6% compared to 25.2%), and the arts (24.3% compared to 19.0%), but less likely to achieve level 2 in sciences (15.5% compared to 19.5%) and social sciences (21.7% compared to 25.8%). Both groups have similar proportions attaining in health and physical education (33.4% and 34.4% respectively).

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¹ Māori Medium Education is where students are taught all or some curriculum subjects in the Māori language for at least 51 percent of the time (Māori Language Immersion Levels 1-2).
² Total school leavers include school leavers of all ethnic groups in both MME and EME.
³ Learners included in learning areas analysis do not include school leavers with international qualifications, or leavers who attended schools where a mix of NCEA and International assessment were offered.
⁴ Attainment is defined as attaining 14 or more credits where the result in standards is achieved, merit, or excellence.
⁵ Standards derived from the New Zealand Curriculum, Te Marautanga o Aotearoa, industry training, and tertiary institutions.
Gender

From 2009 to 2018 there has been a consistent pattern of female school leavers attaining NCEA Level 2 or equivalent at higher rates than male school leavers. In 2018, 82.3% of females achieved compared to 76.7% of males. The size of the gender gap has decreased from 8.3 percentage points in 2009 to 5.6 percentage points in 2018.

From 2017 to 2018, male achievement decreased by 1.9 percentage points and female achievement decreased by 1.4 percentage points. This increased the gender disparity by 0.5 percentage points over the same period.

Figure 4: Percentage of school leavers with at least an NCEA Level 2 qualification or equivalent, by gender (2009-2018)
Decile

A clear positive correlation can be seen between the socio-economic mix of the school the student attended and the percentage of school leavers attaining at least an NCEA Level 2 or equivalent qualification. Schools in the lowest deciles (deciles 1 and 2) draw their students from communities with the highest degree of socio-economic disadvantage.

In 2018, 91.5% of students from schools in the highest deciles (deciles 9 and 10) left school with at least an NCEA Level 2 qualification. This was 25.0 percentage points higher than the percentage for school leavers in deciles 1 and 2 (66.5%).

There is, however, a great deal of variation amongst schools within each decile, with some schools in the lowest deciles with a greater proportion of students achieving a level 2 qualification or above than some schools in the highest deciles.

*Figure 5: Percentage of school leavers with at least an NCEA Level 2 or equivalent, by school decile (2018)*
Where to Find Out More

To obtain information about other forms of student disengagement consider indicators:

- School leavers with NCEA Level 1 or above.
- School leavers with NCEA Level 3 or above.
- School leaver destinations.
- 18-year-olds with a minimum of NCEA Level 2 or equivalent.
- Retention of students in senior secondary schools.

The Ministry of Education has established an Iterative Best Evidence Synthesis Programme to systematically identify, evaluate, analyse, synthesise and make accessible, relevant evidence linked to a range of learner outcomes. Evidence about what works for this indicator can be found in:

- Quality Teaching for Diverse Students in Schooling: Best Evidence Synthesis.
- Effective Pedagogy in Mathematics/Pāngarau: Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration.
- To access BES publications, visit the BES page on the Education Counts website.

References

