Submission to the Australian Government Department of Education Review into Low SES Loading

The Australian Council of TESOL Association (ACTA) is the not-for-profit national organisation representing, supporting and lobbying for the interests of teachers of English to speakers of other languages and learners of English as an additional language or dialect. ACTA has a long and positive relationship with educational authorities, and marks the development and use of the ACARA: EALD Learning Progression as a highlight in cooperative achievements. The Review into Low SES Loading is therefore an opportunity to once again contribute to achieving a positive outcome for students.

ACTA supports the Review of Low SES loading and acknowledges the complexity of the task in determining the best way in which to provide funding for students who require additional resources to achieve appropriately targeted support. Receiving appropriately targeted support is the key to student achievement and identifying the specific need is at the core of ACTA's response. Being poor, having parents with low levels of educational achievement, low incomes or being born into a linguistically and culturally diverse background, are not characteristics that school can control. Schools can however address students' educational needs, be that literacy, numeracy, language proficiency or materials and resources that provide access to activities and experiences that broaden or enrich learning experiences.

ACTA understands that the allocation of funding for EAL/D students is linked to the mechanisms which allocate funding on the basis of socio-economic status (SES).

ACTA would like to make the following points as to why a loading for English Language Proficiency should not be linked to a mechanism used for Low SES:

1. English Language Proficiency needs a stand-alone identifier. This should be the initial loading after which other factors, such as low SES, can be added. There is considerable international research which recognises that the development of a second or additional language proficiency (in our case English) requires specific and targeted pedagogical support. This is a process which can take a number of years, depending on the educational experiences of the student and their exposure to the target language English.
2. English language learners constitute a heterogenous group, with considerable variation in their learning needs, associated with such factors as socio-

economic status, parent education levels, geolocation of residence and exposure to English prior to school entry, and if educated in other countries, quality of schooling, comparability with Australian education, and education level attained.

3. Given the complexity of this group, we suggest that whilst SES is certainly associated with educational achievement, we should not limit funding allocation on the basis of this measure only. Students who are newly arrived with little English, or who enter schools with languages other than English may not necessarily be categorised as low SES, but may have distinct and specific language learning needs which should be addressed to ensure they are able to reach their full educational potential.

4. Factors such as low SES, limited prior education, limited levels of parent education constitute additional, and multiple intersecting factors which also require specific and distinct pedagogical responses.

5. In the first instance, we are arguing for a stand-alone language indicator for funding allocation. However, other complexities, such as low SES for example, should attract separate and additional funding.

6. States and territories have tools currently in place, which enable the identification and tracking of EAL/D learners in the classroom. Whilst this work has largely been the domain of the EAL/D specialist teacher, recent work by ACTA, in partnership with ACARA has seen the production of the EAL/D Learning Progression. The ACARA: EAL/D Learning Progression is based on the language acquisition process of additional language learners. It represents a synthesis of a range of existing language scales used in specific states and territories.

7. We would strongly recommend that the EAL/D Learning Progression, or, existing and current EAL/D Bandscale documents be considered as an alternative tool for allocation of funding for this group of students.

ACTA is concerned at the potential loss or compromise of data on EAL/D learners as jurisdictions move to less accountable models for these learners.

There is the capacity and the opportunity to utilise EAL/D data now being captured, along with mandated enrolment data (Indigenous status, language/s spoken at home by parent and child, birth countries, visa categories, date of arrival in Australia and language proficiency levels), to provide information on a growing cohort of students entering Australian schools.

ACTA sees this as a project with great potential to develop a more accurate and informative process for funding allocation.