

Provision for socioeconomically disadvantaged students

Goal 3 of the national goals is:

To promote equality of educational opportunities, and to provide for groups with special learning requirements.

In order to report progress on the achievement of this goal, the National Report focusses each year on one of the groups of students within the Australian community who are considered to be disadvantaged in their pursuit of school education. In 1998, the focus was on students who were deemed to be disadvantaged by virtue of their low socioeconomic circumstances. This section of the report describes the provision made for these students and reports on the progress that was made.

Provision for socioeconomically disadvantaged students was previously reported in 1993, when these students were the subject of a sample study which provided additional information on the issue. The sample study also investigated factors surrounding identification and definition.

Definition

Although the concept of socioeconomic disadvantage has long been recognised as a key component of educational disadvantage, there are many unresolved issues concerning its definition, measurement and application in school programs. A 1995 report by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), commissioned as part of the sample study referred to above, favoured a definition based on the occupational, educational and economic attainments of individuals:

Socioeconomic status is a term used to describe a person's overall social position or social standing and is determined by individual achievements, the most important of which are educational attainment, employment and occupational status, and income and wealth.

This was preferred to the broader definition embracing a wide range of attributes – gender, ethnicity and language proficiency, Indigenous background, family structure, geographical location, residential mobility – which contribute

to inequality and disadvantage. ACER argued that such a definition provided a less precise construct, making it more difficult to determine which components of socioeconomic status contribute to variations in student outcomes. (For school students, of course, socioeconomic status actually refers to parental or family socioeconomic status: it is an attribute of adults.)

The ACER study has provided a definition of socioeconomic status which can be used as a starting point for the collection of nationally comparable data on schools and students on a regular basis. However, there are many methods of identifying and measuring disadvantage. States and systems use a variety of ways to identify socioeconomic disadvantage, in order to allocate resources, provide special programs and collect data. ACER divided the criteria used into two main types:

- socioeconomic-related measures like the Ross–Farish Index of Disadvantage and similar indexes, and other family background indicators such as unemployment, single-parent families, low occupational status, family size, low parental education, low family income, pension recipients and health card holders
- extraneous measures, such as potential early school leavers, Indigenous descent, geographical isolation and personal/family circumstances such as family dislocation, abuse, homelessness and truancy.

Authorities also use different ways of collecting data on socioeconomic status. The ACER study found that, for reporting on the effects of socioeconomic status on educational outcomes, indexes based on reports from individual students were preferable to area-based indexes because they showed higher correlations with achievement. However, where area-based indexes were more appropriate (for example with very young children, or where only home address data is available, as with year 12 certification information), ACER found that the ABS Index of Education and Occupation (EdOcc) was the best readily available measure of socioeconomic status of an area.

EdOcc uses Census data to describe the educational and occupational characteristics of an area, including proportions of people with and without qualifications, proportions aged 15 and over attending an educational institution and the proportions in each major occupation group. It does not include income variables.

For purposes of national reporting, MCEETYA's Taskforce on School Statistics has, for some years, advocated use of another ABS area-based index, the Index of Relative Socio-

Economic Disadvantage (IRSED). IRSED's variables, while they correlate with educational achievement, provide a more general description of the socioeconomic conditions of an area, and so are useful for identifying broader disadvantage. The variables include family income, educational attainment, occupation, unemployment, dwelling ownership and occupancy, single-parent families, marital status and fluency in English. In 1998, education Ministers endorsed the use of IRSED as the most suitable basis for collecting data nationally, and school systems agreed to use it when submitting SES-related data for national reports.

However, for the 1998 Report, States continued to use a variety of state-based mechanisms to identify socioeconomically disadvantaged students for the allocation of special funding.

For example, New South Wales designated schools as socioeconomically disadvantaged through an index used for identifying government schools for the NSW Disadvantaged Schools Program. These schools served communities with the highest concentrations of low socioeconomic status families. Schools were identified through a voluntary survey of families, last conducted in 1996. The index takes account of factors such as parent's/caregiver's occupation and educational level and the size of the family. In 1998, there were 479 schools in the Disadvantaged Schools Program with 154,000 students. This represented approximately 20 per cent of both schools and students.

Victorian government schools with concentrations of socioeconomically disadvantaged students were identified using the Special Learning Needs (SLN) index. This index comprises six indicators. Information was collected from schools electronically, using standard reports generated from the mandated student record system, CASES. The components were weighted differentially before being combined into an index value. The individual components and their respective weightings were:

Proportion of students receiving means tested Education Maintenance Allowance or Common Youth Allowance	1.0
Proportion of students who transfer into the school other than at the beginning of the year	1.0
Proportion of Indigenous students	1.0
Proportion of students who speak a language other than English at home	0.5
Family status (weighted proportion of students who are homeless or from single-parent families)	0.5
Occupational status (weighted proportion of students from families where the major breadwinner is in several occupational categories)	0.5

Schools with index values over the threshold were entitled to funding calculated by the following formula:

$$\text{Entitlement} = (\text{SLN index score} - \text{Threshold index score}) \times \text{enrolment} \times \text{base rate}.$$

In 1998, the Threshold was 0.82 and the base rate was \$345. A minimum level of funding for schools with enrolments less than 500 was \$2,000, and for schools with enrolments of 500 or more the minimum was \$5,000. Volatility in individual schools' index scores from year to year was taken into account by the provision of transition funding which limits the amount of funds a school can gain or lose in any year.

The Catholic Education Commission of Victoria used a definition for reporting and the provision of financial assistance according to the concept applied to students supported by the Commonwealth Literacy programme; that is, students who are educationally disadvantaged in terms of their literacy and numeracy outcomes. This may be due to a range of factors such as speaking a language other than English, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background and low socioeconomic background.

In 1998, the Ross-Farish methodology (comprising factors such as occupation, education of parents, income, family structure, accommodation and tenancy derived from information collected by the Census of Population and Housing) was used to identify schools with the highest concentration of disadvantage. Consideration to these schools is given in the allocation of literacy grants and the allocation of General Recurrent and Capital grants.

The situation was different in South Australia, where the department used students in receipt of School Card as an indicator of socioeconomic disadvantage. School Card is a state-funded scheme to provide benefits to eligible full-time students (from 4 years of age) receiving primary and secondary schooling. The cut-off point for eligibility for School Card is based on the number of children in a family and gross parental income.

In the South Australian government sector, the three components of the Commonwealth Literacy Programme were administered separately. In relation to the Disadvantaged Schools Component, funding was provided in direct grants to schools with significant percentages of socioeconomically disadvantaged students. The department used a weighted index based on School Card holders and Aboriginal enrolments to declare and allocate funding under the Component. For 1998, the weighted index was calculated using data from 1994, 1995 and 1996, with weightings of 0.8, 1.0 and 1.2 respectively.

In Western Australia government schools were ranked and grouped according to their index of disadvantage as determined by the Ross 'H' index. The most disadvantaged group was allocated 60 per cent of available funds, the second most disadvantaged 30 per cent and the third most disadvantaged 10 per cent.

The WA Catholic sector also uses the Ross–Farish 'H' index as a measure of socioeconomic disadvantage, and literacy funding under the targeted program is distributed among schools on this basis. The introduction of per capita funding under IESIP has provided additional resources for Indigenous education.

The majority of WA independent schools have means by which they can identify students as being socioeconomically disadvantaged. These include self-identification by parents, enrolment information, possession of government Health Cards, ability to pay fees, and the occupational, educational and/or employment status of parents.

Identification in Tasmania was based on an Education Needs Index, which provided a relative measure of the socioeconomic status of each school. The index was calculated using some data from Australian Bureau of Statistics surveys and the proportion of the school's population receiving financial assistance. Schools were then differentially resourced according to the level of disadvantage as indicated by the index. In recent years there has been a steady increase in the number of students qualifying for financial assistance in Tasmanian government schools. Between 1992 and 1998, the proportion of such students rose from 29.2 per cent to 38.6 per cent.

0 Making special provision

All States and the Commonwealth make available additional resources to be used to support the schooling of socioeconomically disadvantaged students. In 1998, the Commonwealth did this through the Grants to Schools strand of the Literacy and Numeracy Programme. This program included the funds formerly provided as the Disadvantaged Schools Programme and, although the target group included all students disadvantaged in terms of their literacy learning, it also included those from a low socioeconomic background. The range of resourcing arrangements used in the States and Territories is illustrated by the examples that follow.

New South Wales

In New South Wales in 1997–98, expenditure on socio-economically disadvantaged students totalled \$54.2 million. Programs to assist socioeconomically disadvantaged students included the Disadvantaged Schools Program, which operates

within the government sector, and the Student Assistance Scheme, which applies to all sectors.

Some support for Disadvantaged Schools Program schools in the form of direct financial assistance and consultancy services was funded through the Commonwealth's Literacy Programme for Schools. Funds were provided directly to schools as tied grants in their global budgets on the basis of a statewide formula. The NSW government also provided extensive funding to support increased staffing levels through a differential formula in those schools targeted as socioeconomically disadvantaged.

The Student Assistance Scheme, which recognises the need to assist students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged, provided funds directly to schools.

The Disadvantaged Schools Program was refocused from 1997 towards improving literacy outcomes of students in schools serving communities with the highest concentrations of socioeconomically disadvantaged students. Designated Disadvantaged Schools Program schools received direct financial assistance that increased from \$15.7 million in 1997 to \$17 million in 1998. The NSW government also provided a staffing differential to Disadvantaged Schools Program schools to support strategies to improve literacy outcomes.

All NSW Catholic schools accept students whose parents cannot afford school fees and a multitude of arrangements are made individually between the school and disadvantaged parents for the payment of fees. There were also some system-level initiatives in 1998; for example, the Catholic Education Office in Sydney directed nearly \$1,000,000 of Commonwealth Literacy Programme funding to 21 schools – 5 secondary and 16 primary – serving the most socioeconomically disadvantaged communities in the Archdiocesan system of Catholic schools.

Queensland

The Literacy Enhancement for Special Program Schools Scheme is a component of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies for Education Queensland. It provided additional funds for socioeconomically disadvantaged students within government schools. Funds provided through the Commonwealth Literacy Programme were directed to schools with the highest concentrations of students from low socioeconomic background.

During 1998, 388 schools received funding under this program. Schools were required to develop initiatives that formed part of longer term literacy and numeracy plans. The following

types of projects were undertaken at primary, secondary and special schools:

- implementation of basic skills and intervention programs designed to improve literacy and numeracy
- development and implementation of literacy and/or numeracy across the curriculum
- development and implementation of screening strategies
- development and implementation of reporting strategies
- development and implementation of innovative classroom and whole-school organisational arrangements
- implementation of professional development programs for teachers and other staff.

South Australia

In South Australia, Commonwealth and state funding for socioeconomically disadvantaged students was provided from a variety of sources for a variety of purposes, including:

- **School Card benefits**
Primary students eligible for School Card received a \$110 benefit and secondary students \$170. The State government provided \$12 million in funding under School Card in 1998.
- **Grants to schools**
In 1998, 282 department schools received a total of \$5.55 million in funding under the Disadvantaged Schools Component of the Commonwealth Literacy Programme. Also in 1998, 211 department schools received a total of \$605,000 in funding under the Early Literacy Component of the Commonwealth Literacy Programme. Schools were required to use these resources to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes for socioeconomically disadvantaged students.
- **System-level initiatives under the Commonwealth Literacy Programme**
Funds were allocated to a Vacation Literacy program for students at risk of not successfully developing literacy and numeracy skills; the development of a CD-ROM, *Texts on Television*, to help teachers use students' television viewing skills as a bridge into learning the literacies used in school; and training and development support for schools in using the program First Steps and in developing Early Literacy plans. There were also three collaborative research projects: an investigation into why students fail to complete schooling (with the Flinders Institute for the Study of Teaching and the Senior Secondary Assessment Board); the development of

materials for teachers to address issues of information technology, literacy and educational disadvantage (with the University of South Australia); and a longitudinal study into the acquisition of school literacies by socioeconomically disadvantaged students in the middle primary years (with the Language and Literacy Team of the University of South Australia).

- **Basic Skills Test funding**
In 1998, schools with students performing in the lower two bands of literacy and numeracy achievement of the Basic Skills Test received \$1.95 million in funding.
- **Primary school counsellor salaries**
Primary schools with a significant number of School Card holders receive a salary for a school counsellor and, in 1998, 70 salaries were allocated, representing \$4.041 million in funding.
- **School Card salaries**
Additional salaries are allocated to schools with a significant number and proportion of School Card holders. These salaries are used to provide direct support for socioeconomically disadvantaged students. In 1998, 57.5 full-time equivalent salaries were allocated, representing a total funding allocation of \$3 million.

Western Australia

In Western Australia, the most disadvantaged group of schools was allocated 60 per cent of available Commonwealth Literacy Programme funds, the second most disadvantaged 30 per cent and the third most disadvantaged 10 per cent. This resulted in \$6.08 million being allocated to 450 government schools, compared with 187 schools in 1997. Schools were encouraged to integrate Commonwealth Literacy Programme activities with existing State initiatives to facilitate the most effective use of funds for targeted students.

Particular attention was given to provision for students at educational risk, rather than to programs for the general school population, and assistance to students in the critical years K–3.

Northern Territory

The Northern Territory used the IRSED as a basis for distributing Commonwealth Literacy Programme funding to regions for allocation to schools. Regional advisory committees also used it as a guide when considering applications.

To address the needs of severely disadvantaged students who are often further disadvantaged through the submission

process, the Northern Territory Department of Education (NTDE) identified and implemented a number of central initiatives targeting students and teachers in remote areas. These projects of Territory-wide significance focussed mainly on improving the literacy skills of students from language backgrounds other than English. The NTDE also used the IRSED as one of the factors that determined allocations to schools through the Country Areas Programme.

Australian Capital Territory

The Australian Capital Territory government continued to provide additional support for socioeconomically disadvantaged students through the Schools Equity Fund (SEF). For the purposes of this fund, disadvantage was determined using the IRSED. Support was provided for programs in 14 Priority Schools. In a Priority School, 25 per cent or more of its student population live in districts defined as socioeconomically disadvantaged. Territory funds were combined with Commonwealth funds to provide for a range of additional education support programs.

SEF funding was used to improve learning outcomes of relatively disadvantaged students, particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy. In addition to literacy-based programs, initiatives included support for camps, excursions and breakfast programs. The projects aimed to improve self-esteem and learning outcomes.

Measuring progress

It is possible to make an assessment of progress towards the achievement of the national equity goal for students from low socioeconomic circumstances by looking at information on access, participation and achievement for these students and comparing it with that for all students. Progress will be evident when the gap between the two is closing.

Access and participation

Comparative attendance data are available from South Australia and Tasmania.

In Term 2, 1997, data were collected from South Australian government schools that use the schools' administrative system to monitor student attendance. For each non-attendance, the following information was available: date of absence, type of absence (whole-day, part-day, late arrival) and reason for absence. These data were matched with information on student background characteristics where available.

Non-attendance included absences as well as days away from school for acceptable reasons. Not all reasons for non-attendance counted as absences. The data were analysed for whole-day absences for full-time students only.

There was a significant difference in absence rates by School Card status which, as explained above, is used as an indicator of socioeconomic status. Students with a School Card were absent 8.5 per cent of the time, compared to students without a School Card, who had an absence rate of 6.8 per cent; 22.3 per cent of School Card holders had no whole-day absences, compared to 26.2 per cent of students without a School Card.

School Card holders had higher absence rates than students without a School Card at all regular year levels. For special classes, students with a School Card had lower absence rates than students without a School Card.

At most year levels girls had slightly higher absence rates than boys, and this pattern was the same for those with a School Card and those without a School Card. However, in Reception and year 5, School Card girls had higher absence rates than School Card boys, even though non-School Card boys had higher absence rates than non-School Card girls. In years 11 and 12, girls with a School Card had absence rates 2 per cent higher than girls without a School Card; for boys, the difference between School Card holders and non-School Card holders was 0.5 per cent.

Table 3.32 Absence rates by School Card and gender, government schools, SA, 1998

	<i>Female</i>		<i>Male</i>		<i>All students</i>	
	<i>Students</i>	<i>Absence rate %</i>	<i>Students</i>	<i>Absence rate %</i>	<i>Students</i>	<i>Absence rate %</i>
No School Card	33,969	6.9	36,088	6.7	70,057	6.8
School Card	19,088	8.6	20,434	8.4	39,522	8.5
Sample totals	53,080	7.5	56,549	7.3	109,629	7.4

Note: Fifty students were denoted with School Card status of 'C'; these students are not included in groups, but are included in totals.

Source: Dept of Education, Training and Employment, SA

Qualification for receipt of a School Card is also used to identify socioeconomically disadvantaged students by the Catholic school system in South Australia. Data collected by a sample of schools in that system reveal a very similar picture to that of government schools. The figures for secondary girls are particularly significant, and are shown in Table 3.33.

Data was collected on students absent from Tasmanian schools in one week of October, 1998. As in previous surveys conducted each year from 1994, information was collected on all students absent in the chosen week from the preparatory year to year 10. All government primary, high, district high and special schools were included. Teachers completed forms to indicate the students absent from their classes and the days they were absent, as well as some information about each student.

Table 3.34 presents data for students according to whether they receive Student Assistance (STAS), a measure which is comparable to the School Card classification used in the South Australian studies described above.

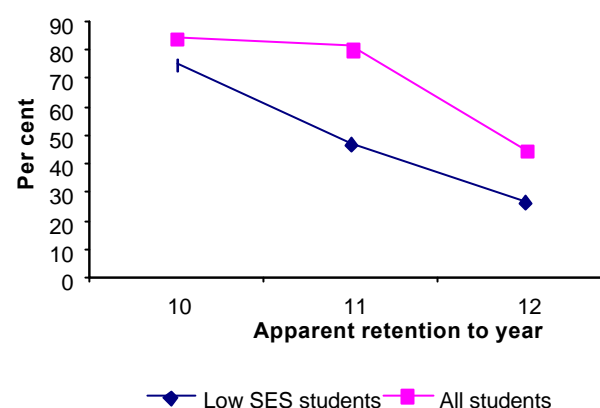
It is apparent that socioeconomically disadvantaged students, as identified by receipt of STAS, have higher absentee rates than others. This pattern was also found in previous surveys, and is very similar to the findings from South Australia.

Information regarding the retention and grade progression is available from New South Wales and the Northern

Territory. The wide variation between students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and others is readily apparent, especially in years 11 and 12.

From New South Wales, information is available concerning grade progression rates for students from schools included in the Disadvantaged Schools Program (see Table 3.36). The apparent retention from year 7, 1993 to year 12, 1998 for the current list of Disadvantaged Schools Program schools is 60.7 per cent, compared with a state average of 63.5 per cent.

Figure 3.7 Apparent retention by socioeconomic status, government schools, NT, 1998



Source: Department of Education, NT

Table 3.35 Apparent retention by socioeconomic status, government schools, NT, 1998 (per cent)

	<i>Apparent retention to year</i>		
	<i>Yr 10</i>	<i>Yr 11</i>	<i>Yr 12</i>
All students	0.84	0.82	0.44
Low SES students	0.76	0.48	0.27

Source: Department of Education, NT

Table 3.36 Apparent progression rates, Disadvantaged Schools Program, NSW, 1998 (per cent)

<i>Years</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Years</i>	<i>%</i>
K-1	96.9	7-8	99.9
1-2	96.0	8-9	98.7
2-3	96.3	9-10	95.6
3-4	97.3	10-11	76.7
4-5	97.0	11-12	81.3
5-6	98.3		

Source: Department of Education and Training, NSW

Table 3.33 Absenteeism by socioeconomic status, Catholic schools, SA, 1998

	<i>Average no. of days absent</i>	
	<i>School Card holders</i>	<i>Others</i>
Primary girls	12.74	9.55
Primary boys	10.61	9.80
Secondary girls	19.14	11.73
Secondary boys	12.09	9.67

Source: Catholic Education Office, SA

Table 3.34 Absentee rates by socioeconomic disadvantage, government schools, Tasmania, 1998 (per cent)

<i>STAS status</i>	
STAS	8.74
Non-STAS	7.31
Total	7.88

Source: Department of Education, Tasmania

Territory. Table 3.35 and Figure 3.7 show comparative apparent retention rates for government school students in the

0Student achievement

A good deal of evidence is available concerning the academic achievement of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

In general, this evidence supports previous findings that these students achieve considerably less than their more advantaged peers.

New South Wales

A pattern of over-representation in the low achievement bands and under-representation in the high achievement bands is evident in School Certificate English results from New South Wales. Table 3.37 shows the results obtained by students in government schools in 1998 and compares the performance of students from schools in the Disadvantaged Schools Program with all students.

Table 3.37 School Certificate English, government schools, NSW, 1998 (per cent)

<i>Band</i>	<i>All students</i>	<i>DSP students</i>
1 (low)	4	10
2	12	21
3	26	30
4	31	27
5	22	11
6 (high)	5	1
	100	100

Source: Dept of Education and Training, NSW

Victoria

There is information from Victoria relating to the performance of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds in senior secondary years. Tables 3.38 and 3.39 indicate year 12 scores in both English and mathematics and are presented in relation to two dimensions:

- proportion of students who do not speak English at home
- proportion of students receiving an Education Maintenance Allowance of Austudy or Common Youth Allowance.

Each dimension has three values (high, medium and low), resulting in a nine-cell matrix that allows comparison of 'like' groups. The shaded cells indicate scores above the statewide average. It is apparent that low-income students from homes where English is not spoken are likely to be below-average performers. It is also apparent that, at all levels of English speaking, average scores decline as the proportion of low-income students increases.

The information concerning year 12 is from 1996, but 1998 data is available from the years 3 and 5 Learning Assessment Program (LAP). Here the evidence is quite stark, for in every case disadvantaged students are over-represented in the lower two Curriculum Standards Framework (CSF) levels, and under-represented in the upper two levels.

Table 3.38 Average English score matrix, year 12, Victoria, 1996
Proportion of low SES students *Proportion of students not speaking English at home*

	<i>Nil to very low (less than 4%)</i>	<i>Low (4–22%)</i>	<i>Medium to high (greater than 22%)</i>
Low (less than 28%)	29.1	30.1	31.7
Medium (28–43%)	28.5	27.7	27.6
High (greater than 43%)	27.5	25.0	25.8

Shaded cells indicate scores above the statewide average score (28.4, maximum possible 50)

Source: Office of Review, VCE Benchmarks 1998

Table 3.39 Average further mathematics score matrix, year 12, Victoria, 1996
Proportion of low SES students *Proportion of students not speaking English at home*

	<i>Nil to very low (less than 4%)</i>	<i>Low (4–22%)</i>	<i>Medium to high (greater than 22%)</i>
Low (less than 28%)	30.4	31.1	31.5
Medium (28–43%)	29.6	28.4	27.5
High (greater than 43%)	28.4	27.5	25.1

Shaded cells indicate scores above the statewide average (28.8, maximum possible 50)

Source: Office of Review, VCE Benchmarks 1998

Table 3.40 LAP test results by socioeconomic status, years 3 and 5, all schools, Victoria, 1998 (per cent)

		<i>CSF levels</i>				
		<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>
Year 3 reading	All	10.9	20.8	50.8	17.5	
	Disadv.	16.8	24.9	46.2	12.1	
Year 3 writing	All	7.1	28.9	44.2	19.8	
	Disadv.	11.1	33.4	40.3	15.2	
Year 3 maths	All	6.7	45.1	40.3	8.4	
	Disadv.	10.4	50.1	34.1	5.5	
Year 3 number	All	6.7	38.3	47.2	7.9	
	Disadv.	10.3	41.8	41.3	6.6	
Year 3 science	All	7.2	46.0	39.0	7.7	
	Disadv.	10.9	49.9	33.2	6.0	
Year 5 reading	All		10.2	48.5	26.1	15.2
	Disadv.		16.4	54.2	20.3	9.2
Year 5 writing	All		7.9	51.8	20.5	19.8
	Disadv.		13.0	56.8	16.7	13.5
Year 5 maths	All		7.2	42.6	41.6	8.8
	Disadv.		12.2	48.9	33.8	5.1
Year 5 number	All		9.0	42.7	38.8	9.5
	Disadv.		13.5	46.7	33.3	6.6
Year 5 science	All		20.9	51.7	17.7	9.7
	Disadv.		30.6	50.0	12.9	6.5

Source: Board of Studies, Victoria

Table 3.41 Literacy performance by socioeconomic status, year 2, Queensland, 1998 (per cent)

	<i>Phase</i>				
	<i>A</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>E</i>
All students, reading	6.0	38.6	55.2	0.2	0.0
Disadvantaged students, reading	11.6	42.7	45.4	0.3	0.0
All students, writing	11.6	68.4	20.0	0.0	0.0
Disadvantaged students, writing	18.7	65.1	16.2	0.0	0.0

Source: Education Queensland

Queensland

Data from Queensland shows high proportions of disadvantaged students in the low phases of literacy achievement. In Table 3.41, Phase A represents the lowest level of achievement.

Authorities in Queensland are monitoring the pattern of results. Comparison with 1997 fails to reveal any significant change.

South Australia

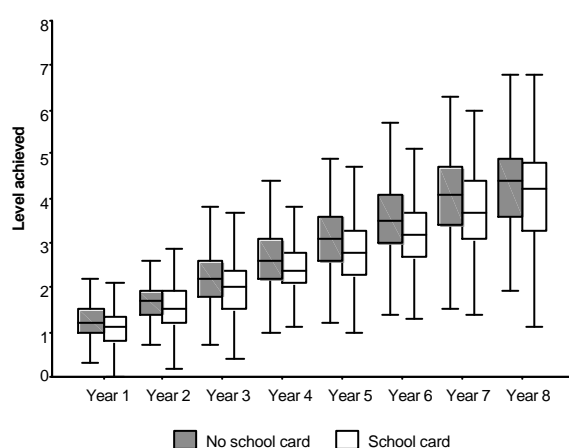
At the end of the 1998 school year, South Australian government schools provided achievement information on more than 14,000 students in years 1–8 in the mathematics learning area. Schools were able to use the data to determine achievement expectations for their students, and to look at differences in growth for male and female students, and students with a School Card. While there were no differences between boys' and girls' achievement levels in mathematics, there were significant differences in achievement between School Card holders and others.

Students without a School Card generally achieved profile levels higher than students with a School Card. The boxplot in Figure 3.8, shows that, in the Number strand, the median student without a School Card achieved the same level as the median student with a School Card one year later. At all year levels, the median student without a School Card achieved slightly higher than the median student with a School Card in the Number strand. The results for achieving selected Profile Levels at years 3, 5 and 7, comparing School Card and non-School Card students, are shown in Table 3.42.

Table 3.42 Profile Levels in mathematics strands by School Card status, selected years and levels, government schools, SA, 1998

<i>Year 3, Level 2</i>	<i>Achieved</i>		<i>Not achieved</i>		<i>Total</i>
<i>Strand</i>					
<i>Chance and data</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>
School Card	319	46.4	368	53.6	687
No School Card	660	64.8	358	35.2	1,018
Total	979	57.4	726	42.6	1,705
<i>Number</i>					
School Card	356	51.3	338	48.7	694
No School Card	704	68.2	329	31.8	1,033
Total	1,060	61.4	667	38.6	1,727
<i>Year 5, Level 3</i>					
<i>Strand</i>					
<i>Chance and data</i>					
School Card	188	31.5	409	68.5	597
No School Card	541	50.4	533	49.6	1,074
Total	729	43.6	942	56.4	1,671
<i>Number</i>					
School Card	245	40.1	366	59.9	611
No School Card	645	58.1	466	41.9	1,111
Total	890	51.7	832	48.3	1,722
<i>Year 7, Level 4</i>					
<i>Strand</i>					
<i>Chance and data</i>					
School Card	179	29.3	431	70.7	610
No School Card	447	44.4	559	55.6	1,006
Total	626	38.7	990	61.3	1,616
<i>Number</i>					
School Card	265	40.5	390	59.5	655
No School Card	580	54.9	476	45.1	1,056
Total	845	49.4	866	50.6	1,711

Source: Dept of Education, Training and Employment, SA

Figure 3.8 Mathematics (Number) Profile Levels by School Card status, years 1–8, government schools, SA, 1998

Source: Dept of Education, Training and Employment, SA

have achieved Level 2 by the end of year 3; 2.1 times as likely to have achieved Level 3 by the end of year 5; and 1.8 times as likely to have achieved Level 4 by the end of year 7.

Tasmania

Tasmania's 1998 year 3 literacy survey produced achievement results for schools arranged in order of socioeconomic status. In Tables 3.43 and 3.44 the percentage of students at each performance level is shown for schools ranked according to their Educational Needs Index (ENI). As explained previously, the ENI is a measure of socioeconomic status and schools with a high index have large numbers of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

The ratios show that, in the Number strand, non-School Card students were 2.0 times as likely as school card students to

Table 3.43 Reading levels by school socioeconomic status, year 3, government schools, Tasmania, 1998 (per cent)

<i>ENI category</i>	<i>Reading level</i>				
	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>
0.00–30.00	2.3	2.5	19.3	32.2	43.7
30.01–40.00	2.6	2.9	24.5	34.5	35.6
40.01–45.00	5.0	5.0	29.3	32.3	28.5
45.01–50.00	3.5	6.0	31.2	32.2	27.1
50.01–55.00	4.2	6.9	32.0	32.0	25.0
55.01–65.00	5.6	7.8	33.4	28.8	24.5
65.01–80.00	7.7	6.1	33.8	34.5	17.9
> 80.00	10.4	11.7	39.7	26.2	12.1
All schools	5.0	5.9	30.0	31.7	27.5

Source: Dept of Education, Tasmania

In each table, it is evident that the proportion of students achieving at the low levels (Levels 1 and 2) increases as the ENI increases. Similarly, the proportion of students achieving at the higher levels (Levels 4 and 5) decreases as the ENI increases.

Table 3.44 Writing levels by school socioeconomic status, year 3, government schools, Tasmania, 1998 (per cent)

<i>ENI category</i>	<i>Writing: text and content level</i>				
	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>
0.00–30.00	1.8	12.7	16.7	20.8	48.0
30.01–40.00	2.1	13.1	12.5	19.1	53.2
40.01–45.00	3.9	16.8	16.0	24.0	39.2
45.01–50.00	2.9	20.0	15.3	20.0	41.9
50.01–55.00	3.4	22.4	17.9	21.3	35.0
55.01–65.00	3.7	22.0	18.1	18.2	38.0
65.01–80.00	7.0	20.8	18.8	19.4	33.9
> 80.00	7.2	33.9	18.8	17.8	22.3
All schools	3.8	19.6	16.6	20.2	39.8

Source: Dept of Education, Tasmania

Summary

It is clear that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are performing at significantly lower levels than other students. However, it is not clear whether progress is being made towards closing the gap. This issue is discussed later in this report.