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NEW RESEARCH SHOWS GROWING DIVIDE IN SCHOOLS

The Australian Education Union today released new research showing a growing divide in our schools.

The Social Make-Up of Schools by researcher Barbara Preston updates an earlier work using family income and data from the 2006 census.

AEU Federal President, Ms Pat Byrne said the research showed that high income families were increasingly sending their children to private schools and low income families were increasingly sending their children to public schools. Family income is now the overriding determinant of school choice, more so than religious affiliation.

The research found:

- In government schools 40 per cent of students are in low income families. In Catholic schools only 25 per cent are in low income families and in other private schools only 22 per cent are in low income families.
- The ratio of low income families to high income families has increased in public primary schools from 1.21 in 1996 to 1.35 in 2006 and in private schools has declined from 0.57 to 0.52.

Ms Byrne said that growing divide reinforced the need for greater funding for public schools.

"Public schools are the mainstay of our education system and they do not pick and choose the students that attend them," she said.

"The costs of providing a high quality education are going to be higher when you have parents less able to fund their child's education in and outside of schools.

"Students from low-income families often require more intensive schooling and support.

"But at the same time as this divide based on income is growing you have a Howard Government which has repeatedly cut the share of federal funding that is going to public schools.

"It has refused to allocate funding on the basis of need and we now have a situation where government schools receive 35 per cent of federal funding yet teach almost 70 per cent of students.

"Working families are being let down by the Howard Government which is pouring money into the schools that need it the least.

"Labor must show that it would not let this situation continue in government by committing substantial extra funding to our public schools."

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