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### **PRIME MINISTER DENYING PARENTS' CHOICE BY UNDERFUNDING PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Australian Education Union has slammed a speech by the Prime Minister to the Centre for Independent Studies as further criticism of public schools without any commitment to provide additional resources.

"The Prime Minister talks about quality but he's not prepared to pay for it," said AEU Federal President Pat Byrne.

"Instead all we get are half-baked proposals that won't benefit students.

"John Howard also says he wants to offer parents choices, but the first choice they should have is to send their children to a quality public school

"If the Prime Minister was serious about offering parents real choice, last week's budget would not have decreased the share of funding for public schools yet again.

"Instead, as of last week's budget, private schools are set to receive a \$1.7 billion increase over the next 5 years to rise to \$7.5 billion, while public schools will receive only \$300 million to rise to \$3.4 billion.

"That's a 30% increase over the next 5 years to private schools compared to 10% for government schools.

"With adequate resources, public schools could afford smaller class sizes, teachers would have more time to give kids with special needs individual attention, and we could have effective anti-bullying strategies in more schools across Australia.

"All Mr. Howard has announced in this speech in regard to bullying in schools is an extra layer of reporting and administration that will take teachers away from time with their students.

"Schools need more resources, not statistics.

"Howard has also contradicted his Minister's own research by advocating increased hiring and firing power for principals, even though the Australian Council for Educational Research has said it would lead to a lack of consistency between schools.

"We know that public schools are under-funded by \$2.9 billion annually.

"This is certain, unlike the Prime Minister who seems to be unsure how much he is funding schools – last week he said funding had increased by 118% overall, this morning it was 74% in real terms, now it's 70% in his speech.

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