

# Education Issues 2007

## Marginal Seats Survey

May, 2007

Conducted for

Australian Education Union (Federal Office)  
Ground Floor, 120 Clarendon Street  
Southbank 3006



Conducted by

Essential Research  
15-31 Pelham Street  
Carlton 3053

## 1. Introduction

This report summarises the results of a public opinion survey on education issues in Australia commissioned by Essential Media Communications on behalf of the Australian Education Union.

The survey was conducted by telephone with 400 respondents aged 18+ distributed across eight Coalition-held marginal seats.

The objectives of the survey were to measure public perceptions and opinions of current issues in education including -

- Relative perceptions of national issues
- Opinion of Government performance on key issues
- Perceptions of the quality of education services
- Importance of key education issues
- Opinions of education issues

## 2. Survey Methodology

The questionnaire was constructed in consultation with the Australian Education Union. The fieldwork and data processing were conducted by Marketmetrics, a Melbourne-based independent research company.

400 interviews were conducted by telephone from 9 to 16 May 2007. All interviewing was conducted in the evenings to maximise availability of respondents.

A total of 50 interviews were conducted in each of the following Coalition-held marginal seats:

- McMillan (Vic)
- Bass (Tasmania)
- Solomon (NT)
- Stirling (WA)
- Makin (SA)
- Moreton (QLD)
- Dobell (NSW)
- Eden-Monaro (NSW)

Respondents were chosen at random from those at home aged 18 or over using the closest birthday selection rule. The sample was also constrained by the requirement to interview equal numbers of men and women.

The following tables report the results in total and for “swinging voters”. Swinging voters comprise those who describe themselves as people who vote for different parties at different elections depending on who they think is best at the time.

### 3. Survey Reliability

Properly constructed sample surveys can provide results that are described as statistically reliable. The level of statistical reliability is dependent upon the sample size and (except where it is extremely small) the size of the population has no practical effect.

A survey of 400 respondents will provide results that are - at the 95% confidence level - subject to a sampling variation of between 3% and 5% at the total responses level. Sub-samples, because of their smaller size, will exhibit larger sampling variances. The following table shows the sampling variances at the 95% confidence level for a range of sample sizes and response levels.

SAMPLE SIZE	VARIATION WHERE THE ANSWER IS NEAR THE PERCENTAGE OF				
	10% or 90%	20% or 80%	30% or 70%	40% or 60%	50%
100	6%	8%	9%	9%	10%
200	4%	5%	6%	7%	7%
400	3%	4%	4%	5%	5%

## 4. Summary of Results

1. Firstly, thinking about Australian politics, how would you rate the performance of the Howard Government on these issues - very good, good, average, poor or very poor?

	Very Good	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor	Don't Know	Total good	Total poor
Handling education issues generally	4%	25%	32%	27%	9%	3%	<b>30%</b>	<b>36%</b>
Giving priority to funding schools in most need	3%	16%	25%	29%	12%	15%	<b>19%</b>	<b>41%</b>
Supporting the public school system generally	4%	22%	32%	27%	12%	4%	<b>26%</b>	<b>39%</b>

2. Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with following statements . . . .

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know	Total agree	Total disagree
The Federal Government has under-funded public schools for the last 11 years	27%	40%	23%	4%	7%	<b>67%</b>	<b>27%</b>
The Federal Government has provided more money for private schools at the expense of the public schools	27%	37%	21%	7%	9%	<b>64%</b>	<b>27%</b>
The Federal Government's lack of funding for public education shows they don't care much about the educational opportunities of children in public schools	19%	34%	35%	9%	4%	<b>53%</b>	<b>43%</b>
What we need is a Federal Government that will put public schools first	31%	48%	16%	2%	4%	<b>79%</b>	<b>18%</b>
John Howard has been the private school Prime Minister	20%	40%	26%	8%	6%	<b>60%</b>	<b>34%</b>

3. Do you think the Howard Government favours private schools with funding, favours public schools with funding or funds public schools and private schools on an equal basis?

	Total	Swinging voters
Favours private schools	62%	62%
Favours public schools	4%	4%
Funds both equally	29%	26%
Don't know	6%	8%

4. If the Federal Government increased funding for education, should it go mainly to:

	Total	Swinging voters
Public schools	78%	79%
Private schools	3%	2%
Can't choose	20%	19%

5. If the Federal Government increased funding to public schools, which of the following are the two most important areas to spend this on? Read list.- circle 2 only

	Total	Swinging voters
More teachers to reduce class sizes	71%	77%
Special classes for students with behaviour and learning problems	39%	37%
Improving discipline in schools	28%	24%
New classrooms and buildings	22%	25%
New Prep. To Year 12 Schools with community facilities located at the school	9%	8%
More welfare officers in schools	9%	7%
Better sporting facilities	4%	4%

6. Research conducted for Australia's education ministers found that to ensure every public school was able to provide a high quality education for their students an additional investment of \$2.9 billion per year is required. The Australian Education Union believes that money should come from the Federal Government's budget surplus. Do you agree or disagree with the education union?

	Total	Swinging voters
Agree with education union	72%	76%
Disagree with education union	23%	20%
Don't know	5%	4%

7. The Federal Government says the top priority in public schools should be improving the curriculum and improving teacher standards. The Australian Education Union says the top priority should be investing more in schools so we can reduce class sizes and ensure every child gets the opportunity to have a high quality education. Who do you agree with more the Federal Government or the education union?

	Total	Swinging voters
Agree with Federal Government	29%	25%
Agree with education union	69%	72%
Don't know	3%	3%

8. The Federal Government says it has increased the share of funding to private schools to ensure parents have a choice in where to send their children and it is mainly up to the states to fund public schools. The Australian Education Union says the Federal Government should be making public schools its top priority and helping the states by investing more federal funds in public education. Who do you agree with more the Federal Government or the education union?

	Total	Swinging voters
Agree with Federal Government	23%	21%
Agree with education union	74%	77%
Don't know	3%	2%

9. The Federal Government says we need to introduce performance pay into schools to reward the best teachers. They say teachers should be judged on test scores and the views of parent and students. The Australian Education Union says that the work of teachers cannot be judged on such a narrow set of criteria. The union believes the best way to attract and retain the best teachers is to increase pay rates overall and to put in place a scheme which rewards experienced teachers who reach professional standards in teaching and classroom performance. Who do you agree with more the Federal Government or the education union?

	Total	Swinging voters
Agree with Federal Government	20%	17%
Agree with education union	74%	76%
Don't know	6%	7%

10. In the Federal Budget which has just been announced there is an allocation of \$457 million to pay for tuition vouchers worth \$700 for parents whose children have not achieved minimum standards in reading writing and maths in years 3, 5, 7 and 9. The Federal Government says this will allow parents to get private tuition and help families that need it most. The Australian Education Union says giving money to unaccountable private tutors at the expense of schools is the wrong approach and the money should have been given to schools directly so they can employ more specialist teachers and give more individual attention to students who need it. Who do you agree with more the Federal Government or the education union?

	Total	Swinging voters
Agree with Federal Government	17%	16%
Agree with education union	80%	81%
Don't know	3%	3%