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## AEU Parliamentary Brief

### ALP National Conference Special

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#### **HOWARD'S SMOKESCREEN ATTACK**

*The Howard Government's recent attack on public education's values is a pre-emptive strike against those who criticise its unfair education policies. Cunning as ever, Howard knows that he must renew the quadrennial funding to private schools this year and that it is deeply unpopular. His attacks are an attempt to obscure the issues.*

*The public knows that Federal school funding is not only skewed towards the private sector but provides the biggest increases to elite schools. Public education supporters are looking to the ALP and other opposition parties to stand firm against the renewal of this system.*

*Unmet demand in universities and TAFE is directly related to the fact that private school education now claims the largest uncapped allocation in the Federal Budget. Howard's solution is to cover his tracks by claiming that public schools have no values, or if they do that he doesn't like them. Their solution in this case, as in so many others, is to attempt to demonise his opponents.*

However, it is not so easy to demonise 200,000 public school and TAFE teachers. The attack is deeply offensive to all school educators, who after all teach a common curriculum framework with the same outcomes across the sectors. It is also resented by the over one million parents of public school children enrolled in 7,000 schools who have chosen public education.

#### **National Public Education Campaign**

Public education advocates will mount an unprecedented campaign in the run-up to the Federal Election. Education unions, parents, students and community groups will campaign to translate public opinion, which opposes Coalition policy, into votes. The outcome will depend on the policies and actions of the ALP Opposition and the Federal Government prior to the poll.

The AEU's campaign is backed by extensive research, polling and message testing as well as funding. The theme linking all aspects of our campaigning in education is the rejection of the Coalition's "two-tier" education policies which disadvantage most Australians in schools, TAFE and universities.

The PM's attack on public schools was not well received by the electorate, but no doubt the attacks will continue. It is notable that many non-government school teachers also opposed the PM's attack. There are 350,000 school teachers in Australia, many of whom live in marginal electorates.

#### **Public Education – It Is Our Future**

The campaign, under this community slogan, will be displayed in schools and colleges. Political parties will be called on to develop funding policies which commit them to making public education a national priority. A charter for public education will be promoted which will set high standards for class sizes, funding, teacher training and professional development and quality outcomes.

AEU research and campaign information can be accessed on the AEU site at:

<http://www.aefederal.org.au/pubedu.html>

In the lead-up to the Federal poll, the renewal of the States Grants Act by the Coalition, and the response of opposition parties, will be critical for the direction the campaign takes. The Greens have declared their complete opposition to the Bill and their intention to initiate an enquiry into the effects of the SES funding arrangements which the Coalition has announced will continue. These funding arrangements have led to an unprecedented level of funding going to non-government schools, with the highest increases going to the elite former schools.

### **Federal Labor's Position on School Funding**

It is critical to the success of this campaign that all opposition parties are united in their opposition to the States Grants Act which provides quadrennial funding to non-government and public schools. This Bill, which the Howard Government says will continue the current unfair SES model of funding, will be introduced prior to the Federal Election. The ALP passed the States Grants Act in 2000, which caused resentment and a loss of the traditional support that the ALP has received from educators.

### **Caucus Public Education Group**

The AEU campaign is being assisted by a group of Labor MPs whose commitment to public education is highly appreciated. They have organised events in the parliament and have developed their own research portfolio on current issues. These include Post-Compulsory Education and Training, Targeted Programs for Schools, Teacher Professional

Development and the SES System of Funding Private Schools.

### **Media Campaign**

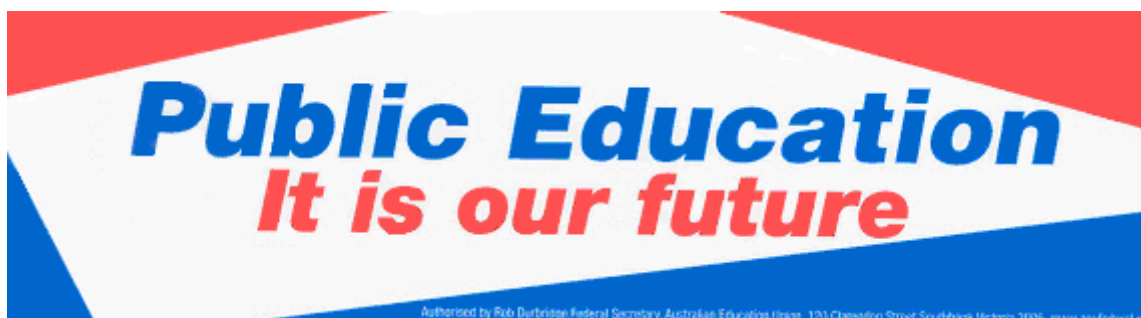
Because the States Grants Act to be introduced in May-June is critical, the AEU will run a television campaign in two tranches, one commencing early in the year in February. This will feature the inequity of Coalition funding of elite private schools compared to public schools. Radio and other advertisements will repeat this theme.

### **Electorate Campaign**

The AEU, with parent and student organisations, has conducted effective electoral campaigns against Coalition governments in a number of states in recent years. These will be replicated in the Federal Election, with the building of electorate organisations committed to highlight the needs of public schools and colleges, particularly in targeted electorates. Committees will include media officers, school principals, parents and teachers.

### **National Public Education Event**

As a means of assisting electorate organisation, a national event is planned closer to the election to bring activists together with prominent personalities who support the aims of the campaign. It will be an opportunity for electorate committees to meet others from around the country and to help them to redouble their efforts in support of public education. This event will be held in Canberra and give Federal politicians the opportunity to declare where they stand. Lobbying and celebration of the achievements of public education will occur at this time.



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