

CAMPAIGN BULLETIN 1 - SCHOOL CHOICE COUNTS

DATE JANUARY 2025

WELCOME TO THE SCHOOL CHOICE COUNTS CAMPAIGN

This is the first in a series of regular **campaign bulletins** designed to keep you informed about our **School Choice Counts** Federal Election campaign and provide practical resources for you, your teachers, parents, and school communities to get involved.

Our goal is simple: to protect Independent school students' government funding, defend family choice in education, and ensure fair treatment for every family who chooses an Independent school.

These bulletins will include updates on the campaign, important facts and figures about Independent schools, and details on how you can help spread the message. We encourage you to use these bulletins in communications with your school community, so parents can understand what is at stake and how they can contribute.

A national campaign to support Schools, Students, and Families

There are growing calls from politicians and commentators who advocate that funding for non-government schools should be reduced or even removed. Decisions made in the coming months will shape the future of education funding, family choice, and the opportunities available to the 716,000 students whose families choose an Independent school.

Many Independent school parents, and the wider community, may not be aware that every Australian student, no matter which school they attend, receives some funding from government. They may not realise this funding is essential to keep education affordable and accessible, or that the government contribution is reduced based on the actual income – the Capacity to Contribute – of a school's parent body.

Changes to government funding policies risk higher fees, reduced support for vulnerable students and fewer choices for families.

Families are taxpayers and voters. They contribute to our education system through fees, often making significant sacrifices to send their children to their chosen school.

To ensure our voices are heard, Independent Schools Australia (ISA), working with the state and territory Associations of Independent Schools, has launched the **School Choice Counts** campaign.

This initiative will support students, parents, and school communities in coming together to protect fair funding and secure the right of every family to choose the best education for their children.

What we're asking for

Independent Schools Australia (ISA), in partnership with state and territory Associations of Independent Schools, will soon officially launch **School Choice Counts**—a national campaign to:

CAMPAIGN BULLETIN 1 - SCHOOL CHOICE COUNTS

Protect Family Choice: Families deserve the right to choose the best educational environment for their children without being penalised by rising fees as a result of funding cuts.

End the Blame Game: Let's focus on supporting every student, regardless of the school they attend, and put an end to divisive attacks that only harm communities.

In the coming weeks, a suite of key policy asks will be released as part of this campaign, including these priorities, to ensure no Independent school family is left worse off. We will keep you informed every step of the way.

How Schools Can Get Involved

In coming weeks we'll be sharing a range of resources for school communities. Your school can participate by:

1. **Sharing this Bulletin:** Help your parents and school community keep informed about the election, policies that impact school choice and activities that schools and their peak bodies are undertaking.
2. **Share the Facts:** We'll be providing resources so that families and school communities can develop their understanding of how our education and funding systems work, and how policy changes can affect them.
3. **Engage Politicians:** Encourage parents and school leaders to contact local MPs and candidates to highlight the importance of funding for students.
4. **Raise Awareness:** We'll be providing tools and resources that can be used on social media, in newsletters, or at parent events.

Resources for You

In the coming weeks, we'll be rolling out the **School Choice Counts** Toolkit for schools and parents. This toolkit will include everything you need to support the campaign and raise awareness in your community, including:

- **Campaign resources:** Fact sheets, posters, and templates to help you share accurate information about Independent schools.
- **A dedicated microsite:** A one-stop hub with campaign updates, downloadable materials, and tools to help parents and schools take action.
- **Social media tools:** Ready-to-use graphics, hashtags, and posts to amplify your message across platforms.

We're also planning a national media launch at Parliament House in Canberra, ensuring our campaign has a powerful and visible start. Details will follow in upcoming bulletins.

Political Activity

Engaging with politicians is a vital part of the campaign. Here's what we've been doing:

- **Roundtables:** We've hosted sessions in key electorates, including Boothby and Mackellar, where principals, parents, and school representatives shared their perspectives directly with MPs. In February and March, additional roundtables are
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CAMPAIGN BULLETIN 1 - SCHOOL CHOICE COUNTS

planned in seats such as Goldstein, Curtin, Solomon, Bass, Bradfield, Cowper, and more.

- **One-on-One Briefings:** Over the past three months, we've met with 21 senior politicians, including Education Minister Jason Clare and Opposition Leader Peter Dutton, to outline the campaign's priorities and stress its importance.

These efforts ensure that decision-makers understand the critical role Independent schools play in their communities and the consequences of policy changes that affect funding and affordability.



National Media Momentum is Building

The School Choice Counts campaign is already making headlines:

- Our campaign received **front-page coverage in *The Australian***, one of the nation's most influential newspapers.
- Stories about record-breaking enrolment growth in Independent schools have appeared in **every major daily newspaper**, demonstrating the trust and confidence families place in our schools.

This widespread media attention highlights the importance of our campaign and ensures that decision-makers are paying attention. By working together, we can keep this momentum going and make a difference for our students and families.

'VILIFIED' PRIVATE SCHOOLS' ELECTION VOW

Class war: 'We'll teach the Greens'

EXCLUSIVE
SARAH ISON

Independent schools are preparing to launch a nationwide campaign in Greens and marginal electorates calling out the "intolerance and bias" of the Greens and urging voters to support parties that would abolish their funding and limit educational choice.

Independent Schools Australia (ISA) launched a social media campaign in key marginal seats – first targeted by the Greens – last week, with Education Minister Jason Clare introducing legislation to lift the commonwealth share of state school funding. It follows the need to avoid internal negotiations with state governments.

Mr Carr said all students in school systems should be supported to "access a great education", but that this should not result in attacks against private schools and campaigns to close their funding.

INSIDE
There are challenges facing our education system that affect all students. Unfortunately, we are engaged in an ugly, escalating fight that ignores students.

GRAHAM CATT PII

With an election approaching, we will be working to ensure families' voices are heard in key electorates, including those held by the Greens.

Greens leader Adam Bandt declared earlier this year that his party would be fighting for more public school funding and learning against "the continued over-

GRAHAM CATT

Parents, kids suffer in divisive Greens' war on education

There are some significant challenges facing our school education system that affect all students, such as literacy and numeracy, teacher shortages and workloads, student wellbeing, or the integration of new technologies such as generative AI.

More than 70 per cent agreed every child had a right to "some level of government funding" for their education, while 66 per cent agreed that if independent school funding was cut, the public system could not cope with the increased enrolments.

The Alliance government sought to quell concerns over lack of funding for public schools this month, with Education Minister Jason Clare introducing legislation to lift the commonwealth share of state school funding. It follows the need to avoid internal negotiations with state governments.

Mr Carr said all students in school systems should be supported to "access a great education", but that this should not result in attacks against private schools and campaigns to close their funding.

portioning blame to the commonwealth government and the very existence of non-government schools. This fight is underpinned by a relentlessly divisive campaign led by the Australian Greens and the Australian Education Union.

Schools are first and foremost communities of children, families and educators – not just collections of buildings. Let's be clear, the relentless attacks that conveniently ignore this fact and paint all non-government schools as elitist institutions that only serve the wealthy are a vilification of those communities and an assault on family choice and aspirations.

They target the families who make sacrifices, often working extra hours, cutting down on holidays and putting off other financial commitments to give their children the education they believe is best for them.

School choice counts. With more than 700,000 students na-

Independent schools on roll

Sector is outgrowing all others

EXCLUSIVE
Charlotte Karp

Independent school enrolments have outpaced government and Catholic schools, with fresh data showing more than 60 per cent of new students come from low to middle income households.

A report by Independent Schools Australia (ISA) showed the sector has seen its strongest growth in more than a decade, with admissions increasing by 3.8 per cent between 2022 and 2023.

The rate far exceeded enrolment since it opened in 2018. It charges as much as \$1800 per year.

Arethusa College, a fee-free special assistance school with multiple campuses across

between 2018 and 2023 include Al-Faisal College, an Islamic school in Western Sydney that saw a 180 per cent spike in new students. It teaches students from Kindergarten to Year 5 and charges as much as \$2700 per year.

Harkaway Hills College in southern Victoria, which teaches Prep to Year 10, saw growth of 365 per cent and charges up to \$11,594 per year.

Zahra Grammar, an Islamic school in Western Sydney teaches students from Kindergarten to Year 5, saw an enrolment spike of 541 per cent since it opened in 2018. It charges as much as \$1800 per year.

Arethusa College, a fee-free special assistance school with multiple campuses across

highlights the diversity and community role of the private education system.

This data dismantles outdated stereotypes used to unfairly target independent schools," Mr Carr said.

Contrary to some commentary, most independent schools are accessible and affordable, with median annual fees of just \$5337. The growth we're seeing is primarily driven by families in outer and inner suburban areas who, despite economic pressures, are choosing to invest in their children's future."

He said the data shows families make significant sacrifices to send their children to independent schools, with 24 per cent of new enrolments over the past five years coming from

CAMPAIGN BULLETIN 1 - SCHOOL CHOICE COUNTS

Next Steps

The next bulletin will include updates on the **School Choice Counts Toolkit** and practical ways your school community can get involved. Together, we can stand up for Independent school students, protect family choice, and end divisive rhetoric that harms our communities.

Thank you for your support in this critical campaign. For more information or assistance, please contact schoolchoicecounts@isa.edu.au

#SchoolChoiceCounts #IndependentSchoolsAustralia
