

# Australian Labor government, teacher unions pitch bogus school funding promises in election campaign

**Morgan Peach, SEP candidate for the seat of Calwell**  
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The Australian Labor Party's federal election campaign has promoted Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's fraudulent school funding model, which promises to "fully fund" public schools within a decade. The Australian Education Union is supporting this campaign, spending millions of dollars on advertising material warning of the dangers of a Liberal-National election victory.

Like every aspect of the official election campaign, the "debate" on school funding is characterised on the one hand by misleading and false claims, and on the other by complete silence on critical issues confronting workers and youth.

Neither the Labor nor Liberal-National parties have said a word about the accelerating privatisation of the school system. Australian education is among the most privatised and socially segregated among advanced capitalist countries, with more than 40 percent of secondary students enrolled in private schools. This is the engineered result of decades of successive Labor and Liberal governments funnelling vast sums of public money into the private sector. Public schools, especially those in working-class communities, are increasingly run down, overcrowded and understaffed.

Bipartisan unity continues in the 2025 election. The Liberal-National opposition has vowed to match the government's school funding plan "dollar for dollar." Peter Dutton explained at last Tuesday's leaders' debate: "There's a position which is identical between the two parties in relation to funding for public schools and for private schools as well."

Earlier in the campaign, Labor's Education Minister Jason Clare confirmed this in a grovelling personal letter to the heads of Independent Schools Australia and the National Catholic Education Commission that stated: "I would like to reaffirm Labor's commitment to parent choice, and that school funding arrangements for non-government schools will remain unchanged under a returned Albanese Labor government."

Dutton is among the most ruthless advocates of pro-business austerity measures. That he has signed up to the government's school funding plan is not merely based on electoral calculations, but rather reflects how threadbare Albanese's vaunted funding model is.

The government's so-called Better and Fairer Schools Agreement involves a nominal increase in funding to public schools of \$16.5 billion over the next ten years. This is a drop in

the bucket compared to what is required.

In Victoria, to take one example, the total funding pledge amounts to approximately \$160,000 per school, per year. Not even enough, in other words, for a school to employ two additional staff members.

Moreover, it is highly unlikely that the pledged funding will eventuate. The Labor government has deliberately backloaded the vast majority of the additional spending into the 2030s. Of the vaunted \$16.5 billion spending pledge, just \$400 million, or 2.4 percent of the total, will eventuate in the next four years.

The Socialist Equality Party's election statement explained:

The real agenda of whichever party forms government is being sketched out in the financial press. There, it is openly discussed that whether led by Labor or the Coalition, the next government will have to carry out massive cuts to social spending, to make the working class pay for the economic crisis. And it will preside over an unprecedented expansion of the military in preparation for war.

That is the reality behind all the lies of a "better future." Australia's economy, already in a deep slump, will be battered by the developing trade war. Politically and militarily, Australia is already involved in all of the wars being waged around the world. And the same financial and corporate interests overseeing the gutting of federal spending in the US are demanding similar austerity measures here.

What this will mean for the school system is an even sharper assault on public education.

Regardless of who forms government and on what basis after the May 3 election, private schools will reap even more enormous levels of public funding. This includes the most elite institutions that charge annual tuition fees of more than \$50,000, and which every year expand their luxurious facilities, including Olympic-standard swimming pools, music halls, drama and art centres, and technology and engineering labs.

Meanwhile, already crisis-stricken public schools will remain systematically under-resourced. Excessive workloads and

inadequate support for teachers has created a national workforce shortage, hiking class sizes and causing widespread disruption to student learning. Ageing and inadequate infrastructure is rife within public schools, while student support services such as psychologists are grossly inadequate, with mental health episodes and serious behavioural issues emerging in classrooms daily.

At the same time, the regressive, standardised testing, data-driven pedagogical model that is being imposed by state and federal governments will only worsen. The Labor government has emphasised that additional school funding does not represent a “blank cheque,” and both Albanese and Jason Clare have boasted of new test requirements and so-called evidence-based teaching methods that will soon be mandatory across all public schools.

Militarist curriculum initiatives will also expand, in line with the ruling elite’s preparations to join a US-led war of aggression against China. Several educators and students have already been victimised for speaking out against the genocide in Gaza.

I am the Socialist Equality Party’s candidate for the seat of Calwell in Victoria, and I am also completing my teaching degree, preparing to go into the public school system. I call on every educator and every supporter of public education to reject the Labor Party and its bogus promises on school funding, and to likewise reject the phoney claims made by Labor’s accomplices: the Greens and the teacher union bureaucracies.

The Greens posture as champions of public schools, and critics of excessive funding of elite private schools. However, their entire campaign is aimed at securing sufficient seats in parliament to join the Labor government, either in direct coalition or via a minority government agreement. Any such deal would undoubtedly maintain the school funding status quo.

Likewise the Australian Education Union (AEU) and its state affiliates are campaigning for Labor, on the basis that Dutton poses too great a risk for public schools. This is aimed at channelling teachers’ and school workers’ anger behind the Labor Party, and at covering up both the Albanese government’s record and the AEU’s active complicity in the long-standing assault on the public education system. The lavishly paid bureaucrats within the teacher union apparatuses have imposed countless sell-out industrial agreements in every state and territory, driving down school workers’ real wages, increasing workloads and worsening conditions in the schools.

Only the Socialist Equality Party advances a genuine perspective in defence of a fully funded public education system for all. What needs to be fought for is a universal public education system providing every student with the opportunity to develop to their maximum potential—intellectually, physically, culturally and artistically. The resources for this are available, but can only be made accessible through the development of a working-class movement—unifying school workers, students and all workers—that raises the demand for the expropriation of the ultra-wealthy elite as part of the socialist reorganisation of society.

This is an international perspective. Access to public education is under assault across the world, with the situation especially sharp in the US as the fascistic Trump administration prepares wholesale privatisation.

The Socialist Equality Party supports the demands raised by rank-

and-file educators organised in the Committee For Public Education:

- An immediate 40 percent pay increase for educators, with salaries indexed against inflation, and automatic cost-of-living adjustments.
- Maximum class sizes of 15-20. End administrative burdens so teachers can focus on teaching. A minimum of 8 hours weekly during school hours for planning, assessment and collaboration.
- Abolish NAPLAN and other regressive standardised testing measures that legitimise funding cuts for “underperforming” schools.
- End the authoritarian imposition of mandatory teaching methods—teachers must have the democratic right to collectively decide on curriculum implementation.
- Hire thousands of teachers and support staff to end punishing workloads. At least one education support staff member must be employed full-time per class. Re-employ experienced educators driven out of the profession.
- Fully funded support services for all students, including those with diverse needs. Employ psychologists in every school.
- Ensure properly ventilated classrooms including HEPA filters to mitigate the risk of COVID infection. Schools must no longer be vectors for unchecked virus transmission. Staff and student health and safety must be prioritised.
- Oppose the militarisation of education. End all victimisations of educators and students who oppose genocide and war.
- Initiate a high-quality school construction program in working-class communities. No public funds for elite private schools; invest billions in public education for a free, first-class education for all.

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