



THE FORCES SHAPING:

Australia's Primary
& Secondary Education System

ABOUT THE STUDY

The Forces Shaping program is designed to explore the broader contextual factors influencing how Australians make decisions - with a focus on education.

In February 2025, we conducted a nationally representative survey with n=2,497 Australian parents and guardians, including a subset of teaching professionals.

PART 1: THE FORCES SHAPING EDUCATION

Australia's education system is under pressure, shaped by evolving realities of families, educators, and broader society.

We define and explore nine key forces driving this change in 2025, spanning foundational, structural, societal and household shifts.

PART 2: THE NEEDS OF PARENTS

We explore the issues that matter most to parents as education decision-makers, uncovering both universal concerns and the added expectations of fee-paying families.

This section profiles six distinct parent cohorts, to reveal how these needs vary by financial circumstances and school type, and highlighting where different forms of support, advocacy, and engagement could help rebuild confidence.

Part 1

THE FORCES SHAPING EDUCATION

THE FUNDAMENTAL FORCES:

- #1 EDUCATION IS A NATIONAL IMPERATIVE**
- #2 BULLYING & SAFETY CONCERNS**

FORCE 1: EDUCATION IS A NATIONAL IMPERATIVE, BUT CURRENTLY A BROKEN SYSTEM

Education remains central to Australia's vision of itself, but increasing concerns about its effectiveness in delivering on this promise are mounting across the country.

4 IN 5

Australian parents believe education is the most important investment society can make...

yet...

1 IN 2

Parents agree that the current education system is broken and failing Australian kids.

FORCE 1: A NATIONAL IMPERATIVE

"It's important to get the fundamentals right, to set a child up to become a successful adult"
(PARENT, PRIMARY, FAITH-BASED)

SO WHAT?

KEY ISSUE:

**PREPARING STUDENTS
FOR FUTURE JOBS AND
INDUSTRIES**

56%

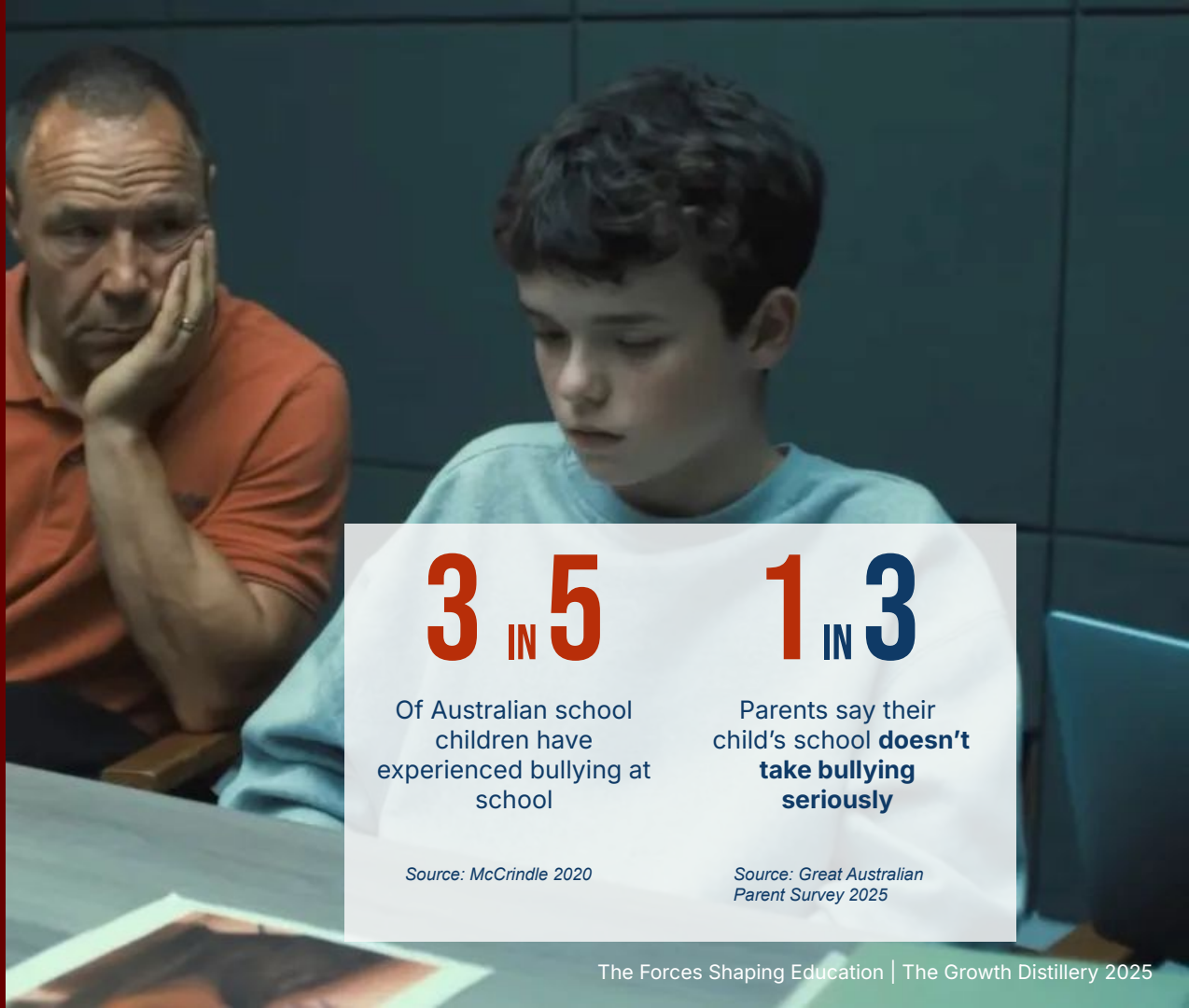
Parents want more
government
attention

44%

Parents want
more **media**
attention

FORCE 2: BULLYING & SAFETY

Parents are concerned about the safety of their children, both physically and mentally.



3 IN **5**

Of Australian school children have experienced bullying at school

Source: McCrindle 2020

1 IN **3**

Parents say their child's school **doesn't take bullying seriously**

Source: Great Australian Parent Survey 2025

FORCE 2: BULLYING & SAFETY

"I had to choose the school closest to catchment, and it was a school that had a bad reputation for bullying. It was hard to accept however beyond our control as others did not accept my children's application"
(PARENT, SECONDARY, PUBLIC)

SO WHAT?

KEY ISSUE:
**STUDENT WELFARE
AND SAFETY**

68%

Parents want more
government
attention

RANK #1

55%

Parents want
more **media**
attention

RANK #1

KEY ISSUE:
**STUDENT MENTAL
HEALTH &
WELLBEING**

59%

Parents want more
government
attention

RANK #4

52%

Parents want
more **media**
attention

RANK #2

THE STRUCTURAL FORCES


#3 TEACHERS A WORKFORCE IN CRISIS

#4 GOVERNMENT FUNDING FAILURE

FORCE 3: TEACHERS, A WORKFORCE IN CRISIS

2 in 3 parents already agree that Teachers are undervalued and underpaid, impacting their child's own education.

As teachers leave the profession, schools are increasingly relying on under qualified staff, raising concerns about educational quality.



77%

of teachers say they love being an educator, **however...**

70%

have **been abused** by students, or families of students

44%

are **considering leaving** the industry

58%

have **experienced burnout** or other **mental health challenges** due to work

FORCE 3: TEACHERS, A WORKFORCE IN CRISIS

"Teachers that find joy in teaching, they can grow students strengths and identify weaknesses and help them improve with guidance and recommendations" (PARENT, SECONDARY, PUBLIC)

SO WHAT?

KEY ISSUE:
TEACHER
SHORTAGES &
TURNOVER

65%

Parents want more
government
attention

51%

Parents want
more **media**
attention

RANK #2

RANK #3

KEY ISSUE:
TEACHER QUALITY
& TRAINING

55%

Parents want more
government
attention

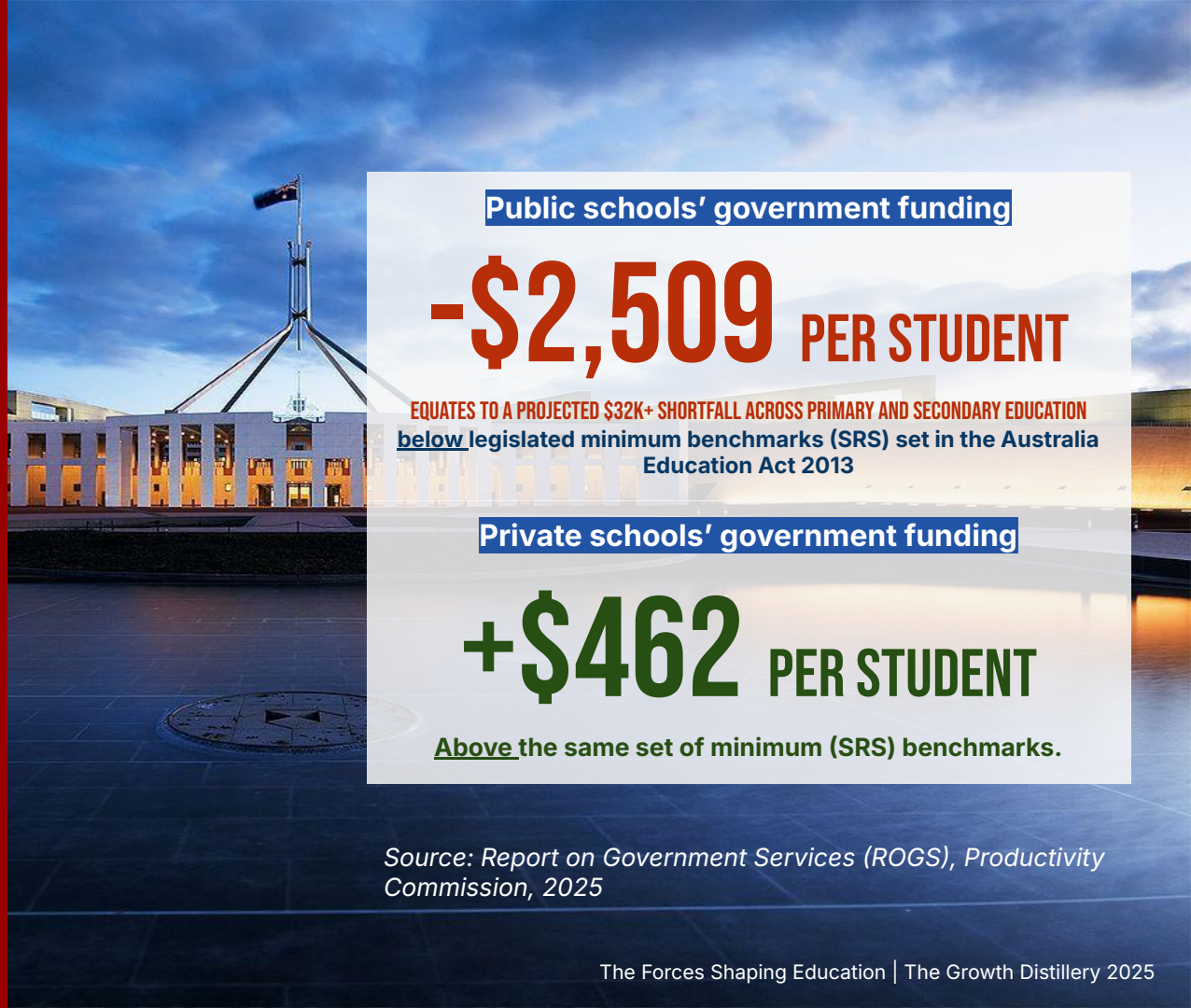
44%

Parents want
more **media**
attention

FORCE 4: GENERATIONAL GOVERNMENT FUNDING FAILURE

Despite the undisputable importance, **education funding has fallen short of legislated Gonski benchmarks since 2013.**

The 2025 Better and Fairer Schools Agreement aims to close the gap—but full implementation won't arrive until 2034, 21 years later.



Public schools' government funding

-\$2,509 PER STUDENT

EQUATES TO A PROJECTED \$32K+ SHORTFALL ACROSS PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION
below legislated minimum benchmarks (SRS) set in the Australia
Education Act 2013

Private schools' government funding

+\$462 PER STUDENT

Above the same set of minimum (SRS) benchmarks.

Source: Report on Government Services (ROGS), Productivity
Commission, 2025

FORCE 4: GENERATIONAL GOVERNMENT FUNDING FAILURE

"I believe that education should be free, equal and available to all. It should not be based on your location, income, social class or religion" (PARENT, PRIMARY, PUBLIC)

SO WHAT?

KEY ISSUE:
SCHOOL FUNDING &
RESOURCE
ALLOCATION

59%

Parents want more
government
attention

47%

Parents want
more **media**
attention

RANK #5

KEY ISSUE:
ACCESS FOR REGIONAL
& DISADVANTAGED
COMMUNITIES

50%

Parents want more
government
attention

42%

Parents want
more **media**
attention

THE SOCIETAL FORCES

#5 GROWING NEED FOR ADDITIONAL LEARNING SUPPORT

#6 CULTURAL AND POLITICAL TENSION ON THE CURRICULUM

FORCE 5: GROWING NEED FOR ADDITIONAL LEARNING SUPPORT

Schools are leaving **many students with diverse learning needs** without the support required to thrive.

Schools are **failing to meet the demand for specialist learning resources** and **teacher training**.

A photograph showing a person with long brown hair wearing a blue knit sweater sitting in a wheelchair. Another person's hands are visible, resting on their lap, providing support. The background is a plain yellow wall.

79%

of parents agree more support is needed for kids with different learning needs.

FORCE 5: GROWING NEED FOR ADDITIONAL LEARNING SUPPORT

"As she is disabled, she was rejected from independent schools, and there is less funding available in private schools that would allow her to have the support she needs" (PARENT, PRIMARY, PUBLIC)

SO WHAT?

KEY ISSUE:
**SUPPORT FOR
STUDENTS WITH
DIVERSE NEEDS**

52%

Parents want more
government
attention

43%

Parents want
more **media**
attention

FORCE 6: CULTURAL AND POLITICAL TENSION ON THE CURRICULUM

Ideological debates about **curriculum content** are **polarising** the education sector.

Conflicts arise **between advocates of modernised curricula** and those **demanding traditional academic foundations**.



57%

of parents agree **cultural, identity and gender diversity** and **inclusivity** in school has **gone too far**.

FORCE 6: CULTURAL AND POLITICAL TENSION ON THE CURRICULUM

Australia's education performance shows a clear long-term decline, with 15-year-olds now performing at levels seen by 14-year-olds two decades ago.

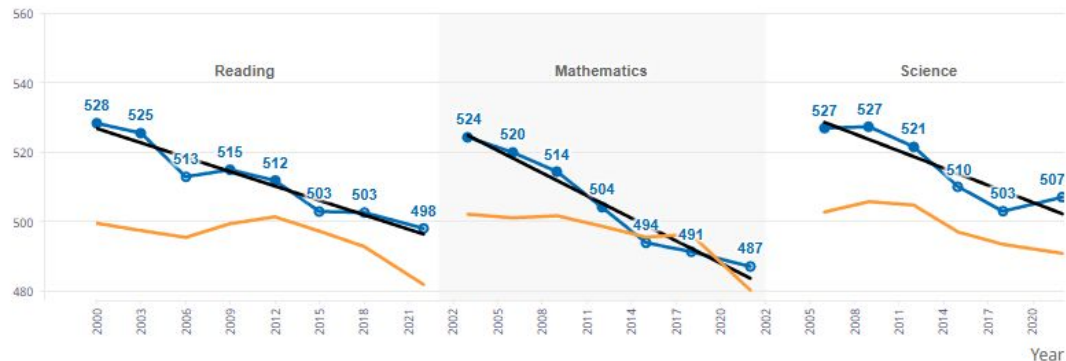
The gap between top and bottom students has widened, particularly in maths and science.

OECD Programme for International Student Assessment 2022 Results

Australia

Score points

Mean performance Best-fitting trend OECD Average (23 countries)



Source: PISA 2022 Results (Volume I and II) - Country Notes: Australia, OECD, 5 December 2023.
https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/pisa-2022-results-volume-i-and-ii-country-notes_ed6fbcc5-en/australia_e9346d47-en.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com

FORCE 6: CULTURAL AND POLITICAL TENSION ON THE CURRICULUM

"Schools need to concentrate on academic results and not on wokeness and radical ideologies ... Government schools have been ineffective with the woke mind virus and no longer value education over social agenda" (PARENT, SECONDARY, FAITH-BASED)

SO WHAT?

KEY ISSUE:
**ACADEMIC
OUTCOMES AND
PERFORMANCE**

48%

Parents want more
government
attention

37%

Parents want
more **media**
attention

THE HOUSEHOLD FORCES

#7 INEQUALITY OF CONFIDENCE

#8 PARENTS FORCED TO PAY FOR A BETTER FUTURE

#9 PARENTS STRETCHED TO BREAKING POINT

FORCE 7: INEQUALITY OF CONFIDENCE

Public school parents are **substantially less confident** in the future readiness of their children than private or faith based parents.

“

*How confident are you that **today's children** are getting the kind of education they need to be able to effectively work in the jobs/careers of the future?*

”

74%

Private School
Parents

63%

Faith School
Parents

54%

Public School
Parents

20_{pt}
confidence
gap

FORCE 7: INEQUALITY OF CONFIDENCE

"Our local public schools did not and could not give our child the support and education we wished for them" (PARENT, PRIMARY, PRIVATE)

SO WHAT?

KEY ISSUE:
**DISPARITIES
BETWEEN PUBLIC
AND PRIVATE**

48%

Parents want more
government
attention

39%

Parents want
more **media**
attention

FORCE 8: PARENTS FORCED TO PAY FOR A BETTER FUTURE...

As **parents increasingly seek the best educational options** for their children, **more are turning to independent and faith-based schools**, often stretching their budgets to do so.

There is a vote of no confidence amongst many parents who are making sacrifices to pay for their children's education.



FORCE 8: PARENTS FORCED TO PAY FOR A BETTER FUTURE...

"I wish I could afford to send my kids to a better school as it is where they spend most of their childhoods and is where they develop the building blocks. Unfortunately as a single mum of 3 who's already over budget, I can't afford it" (PARENT, PRIMARY, PUBLIC)



3 IN 5

believe the **best schools are only accessible to families with financial means.**

FORCE 8: PARENTS FORCED TO PAY FOR A BETTER FUTURE...

SO WHAT?

KEY ISSUE:
FINANCIAL COST OF
EDUCATION

59%

Parents want more
government
attention

RANK #3

49%

Parents want
more **media**
attention

RANK #4

FORCE 9: PARENTS STRETCHED TO BREAKING POINT

Affordability concerns are leading families to being on the precipice of **what they are willing and able to sacrifice** in order to **give their children the best chance in the future** and get a **return-on-investment** from their education.

2 IN 3

have made sacrifices in other areas of their life for their child's education



7 IN 10

are worried about being able to afford education due to rising costs





FORCE 9: PARENTS STRETCHED TO BREAKING POINT

*"**Everything is too expensive.** Overpriced uniforms. Expensive school shoes. Paying for a useless yondr pouch. Paying excessive fees for school stationary and excessive resources fees. School toilets locked and students can't freely go when needed" (PARENT, SECONDARY, PUBLIC)*

*"I can't justify spending tens of thousands of dollars on a private education when the **cost of living keeps increasing but my wages don't.** Had my wages kept up with inflation it may be a different story" (PARENT, PRIMARY, PUBLIC)*

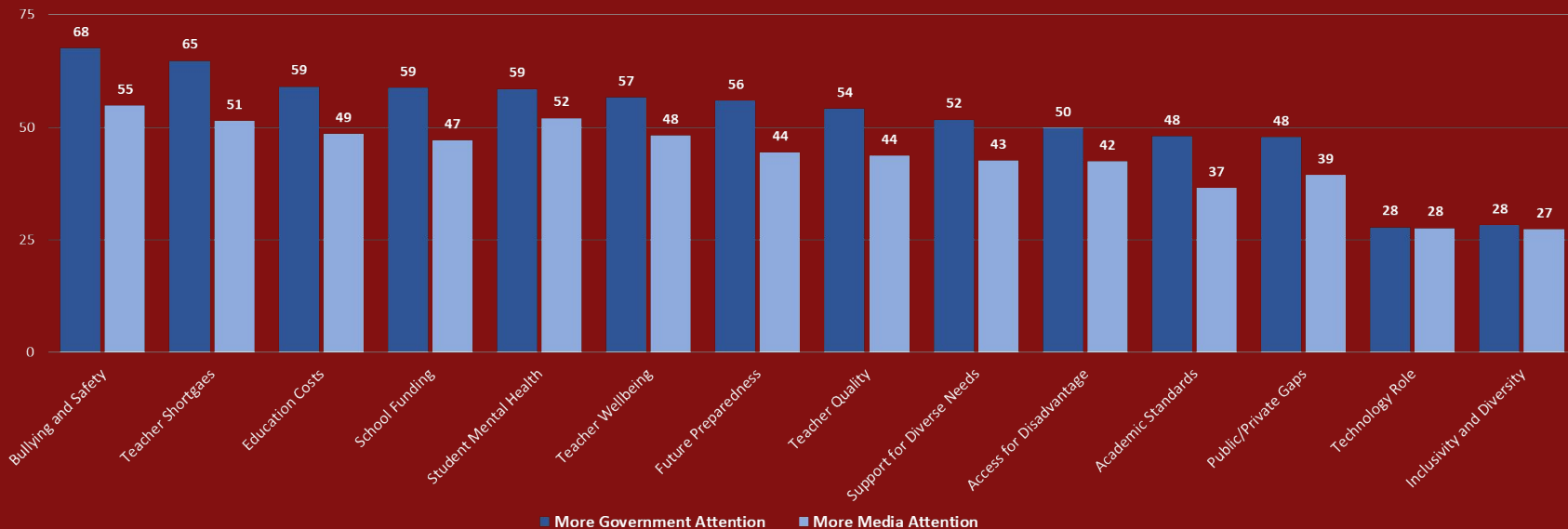
*"A faith based great school was always a priority for us because of the failing public school system. Due to the rising cost of living it's been **difficult to keep up with fees but we have had to work extra hard for this**" (PARENT, SECONDARY, FAITH-BASED)*

*"It's **hard to put a price on the school you want your kids to go to** but the harder thing is when the keep increasing the fees every year" (PARENT, PRIMARY, PRIVATE)*

THESE KEY EDUCATION ISSUES ARE ALL SEEN REQUIRING MORE

ATTENTION

Parents identified these critical areas that need greater attention from both **government** and **media**, to help them navigate the sector for their family



SUMMARY: WE IDENTIFIED **NINE FORCES** SHAPING EDUCATION DECISIONS IN 2025

Fundamentals	THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IS A NATIONAL IMPERATIVE, BUT BROKEN	<ul style="list-style-type: none">80% of Australian parents think education is the most important investment a society can make, yet 1 in 2 parents think the education system is broken.
	BULLYING & SAFETY IS THE TOP CONCERN FOR PARENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Student welfare and safety is the #1 influence for Australian parents when making school decisions, 3 in 5 kids are reported to have experienced bullying at school.
Structural	TEACHERS, A WORKFORCE IN CRISIS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Teacher shortages and attrition remain a key concern - while 77% love teaching, 70% of educators say they have received abuse and 58% experienced burnout
	GENERATIONAL GOVERNMENT FUNDING FAILURE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">School funding remains a concern, with public falling behind the recommended and legislated benchmarks, and 45% saying school asks for too much extra money
Societal	GROWING NEEDS FOR ADDITIONAL LEARNING SUPPORT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">79% of parents agree more support is needed for kids with different learning needs
	CULTURAL AND POLITICAL TENSION ON THE CURRICULUM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">While academic performance has declined, 57% of parents agree cultural, identity and gender diversity has gone too far
Household	PUBLIC V PAID: INEQUALITY OF CONFIDENCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">There's a 20-point confidence gap between private and public school parents when it comes to their children's future readiness for the workforce (74% v 54%).
	PARENTS FORCED TO PAY FOR A BETTER FUTURE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The cost of education is a major pressure, 60% of parents believe the best schools are only accessible to families with the financial means.
	PARENTS STRETCHED TO BREAKING POINT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">67% of parents are concerned about affordability the rising costs of education.

CALL TO ARMS: ADVOCACY OPPORTUNITIES

PARENTS UNDER PRESSURE

7 in 10 are worried about being able to afford education due to rising costs. Concerns on curriculum, wokeism and academic performance.

Information about the core academic curriculum and performance

Practical guidance to help parents make choices/decisions for their child

Tips for managing social issues or conflicts (e.g. peer-pressure, friendships)

Budgeting tips for managing education expenses

Create awareness on 'real-world' costs of education to help parents navigate their household budget.

SCHOOL SAFETY & BULLYING CRISIS

3 in 5 students bullied; 1 in 3 parents feel schools don't act.

Continue national anti-bullying campaigns

Spotlight schools successfully reducing bullying rates

Create interactive parent guides on what to ask schools

Collaborate with students to share their experiences and solutions.

TEACHER RETENTION & RESPECT

44% of teachers considering leaving; 70% report abuse.

Continue "Best Teachers" editorial campaign profiling inspiring educators

Partner with education experts to advocate for better conditions, training and resources for all teachers

Investigate root causes of attrition and policy gaps

Host forums or roundtables amplifying teacher voices.

SCHOOL FUNDING FAILURE

Full Gonski not delivered until 2034; \$2,509 per public student shortfall last year.

Investigate the real-world impact of underfunding on public classrooms and outcomes for the entire education system (eg. flow on effect to private and faith)

Track and compare funding per student across sectors and regions

Publish student/parent/teacher voices in an ongoing "Gonski Watch" series

Pressure-test the political promises and timelines through investigative journalism.

Part 2

THE NEEDS OF PARENTS & THEIR EDUCATION CHOICES

**GIVEN THESE FORCES INCREASINGLY SHAPING OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM AND
LANDSCAPE, WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR PARENTS NAVIGATING THEIR FAMILY'S
EDUCATION DECISIONS?**

PARENTS CONSIDER A RANGE OF FACTORS WHEN MAKING DECISIONS, WHICH CAN BE GROUPED INTO THREE KEY CATEGORIES:

1. Universal factors that apply to the holistic experience

Quality Teaching

Practicality

Anti-bullying & wellbeing policies

All parents

2. Environment-based factors that shape a child's values, character, and culture

School Facilities

School Culture and Values

School Hours and Care Options

Uniforms and Dress Codes

Tuition Fees and Expenses

Small Class Sizes

Communication with Parents

All paying parents with emphasis from faith-based

3. Excellence-based factors that impact a child's learning journey

Curriculum Quality

Technology in Classrooms

Student Diversity

Selective Admission

Academic Ranking

Feedback from Previous Parents

Scholarships

Family Tradition/Legacy

Extracurricular Activities

Tailored Support for Learning Needs

All paying parents with focus among private school parents

1. UNIVERSAL NEEDS:

THE FACTORS THAT MATTER TO ALL PARENTS WHEN DECIDING ON THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

RANK

#1

QUALITY OF TEACHERS AND TEACHING

ALL PARENTS

76%

#2

LOGISTICS AND PRACTICALITY

75%

#3

ANTI-BULLYING & WELLBEING POLICIES

73%

THESE ARE TRULY NON-NEGOTIABLES.

MORE THAN JUST IMPORTANT TO PARENTS, THESE UNIVERSAL NEEDS ARE CRITICAL FACTORS WHICH SHAPE THE DAILY REALITY OF A CHILD'S SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

QUALITY OF TEACHERS AND TEACHING

"Critical to have good teachers that really care and want " to help your child grow and bloom" (PARENT, SECONDARY, PUBLIC)

"A school is a good investment if it provides high-quality teaching, a strong curriculum, and a supportive learning environment that nurtures a child's academic, social, and emotional growth" (PARENT, PRIMARY, FAITH-BASED)

"Solid subject knowledge and teaching skills and can provide high-quality teaching for children and help children lay a solid foundation in various subjects" (PARENT, PRIMARY, PUBLIC)

LOGISTICS AND PRACTICALITY

"It is affordable and close to home. As I have work and other commitments, it's much easier to juggle things around" (PARENT, PRIMARY, PUBLIC)

"Close to our home, which means less time spent on commuting and more time for study and relaxation. Also allows him to easily participate in after-school activities without having to travel long distances" (PARENT, SECONDARY, PUBLIC)

"A school bus option which makes the commute to and from school a lot easier and my daughter doesn't have to worry about using the public transport system" (PARENT, SECONDARY, FAITH-BASED)

ANTI-BULLYING & WELLBEING POLICIES

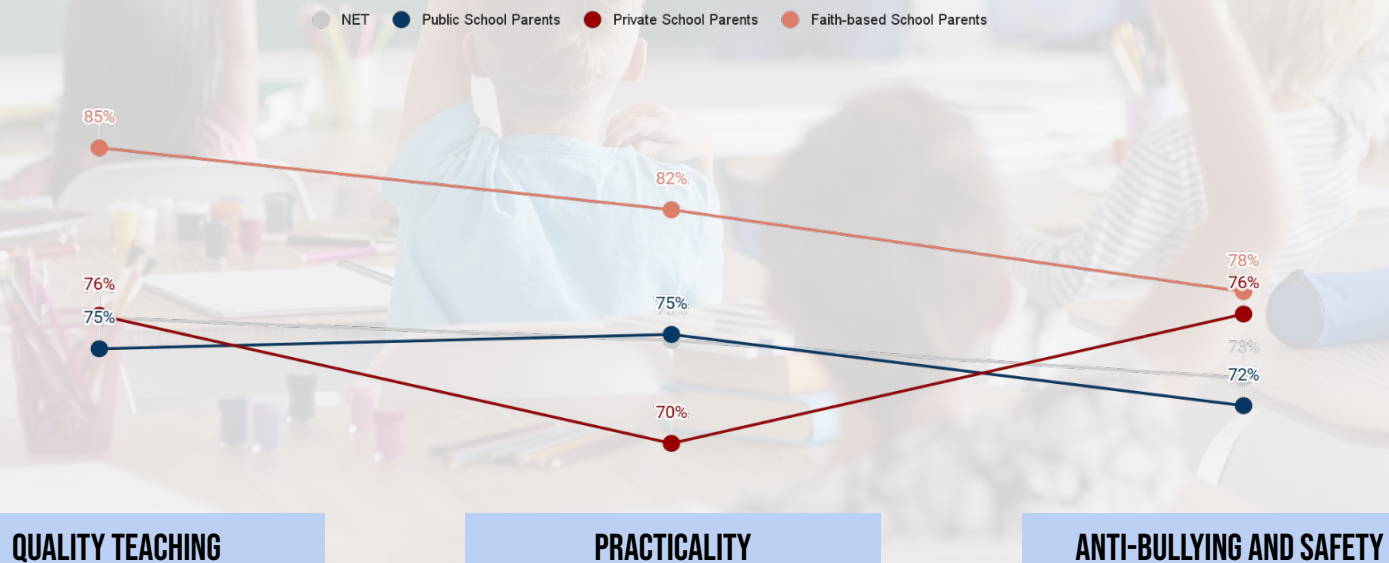
"Choosing a school that focuses on student safety and mental health can reassure parents that their children are learning and growing in a supportive environment" (PARENT, PRIMARY, PUBLIC)

"Every child deserves an education somewhere where they are safe and comfortable. This education is more than books and learning. It's life experiences and community" (PARENT, PRIMARY, PUBLIC)

"The schools in our area were not somewhere anyone should send their kids, they are full of bullies" (PARENT, SECONDARY, PRIVATE)

ALL PARENTS VALUE THESE UNIVERSAL NEEDS.

BUT ATTITUDES CAN VARY SLIGHTLY ACROSS COHORTS, WITH PARENTS MAKING ACTIVE INVESTMENT DECISIONS ABOUT THE TYPE OF EDUCATION AND SCHOOLING THEY WANT (AND NEED) FOR THEIR CHILD



2. ENVIRONMENT-BASED NEEDS:

IMPORTANT TO ALL PAYING PARENTS BUT AN EMPHASIS FROM THE FAITH-BASED PARENTS

Overall, we can see that 'faith' based parents prioritise a range of factors related to the school's culture, environment and facilities.

81%

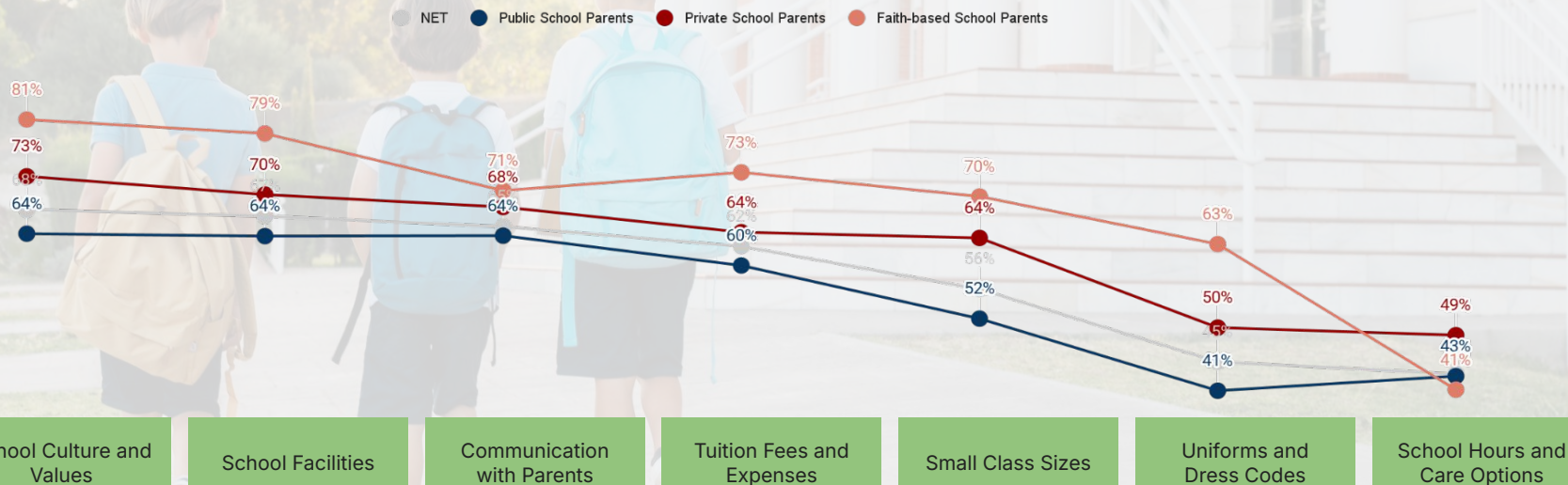
Of faith-based parents consider 'school culture and values' as either critical or important

vs 73% of private school parents

vs 64% of public school parents

FAITH-BASED PARENTS TAKE THE LEAD ON ENVIRONMENT-BASED FACTORS, PRIORITISING VALUES AND CULTURE ABOVE ALL ELSE

These parents are proactively dedicating time and paying to ensure their beliefs and values are positively instilled and reinforced through the school's culture, curriculum, and facilities



3. EXCELLENCE-BASED NEEDS:

PARENTS WILL PAY FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE, PRIVATE SCHOOL PARENTS SEE IT AS A PRODUCT OF A BALANCED EXPERIENCE.

Private school parents pay for **great opportunities**

They seek these opportunities through **reputation**

70%

Curriculum Quality

vs **73%** for Faith
vs **60%** for Public

70%

Extracurricular
Activities

vs **64%** for Faith
vs **53%** for Public

70%

Feedback from
Previous Parents

vs **61%** for Faith
vs **57%** for Public

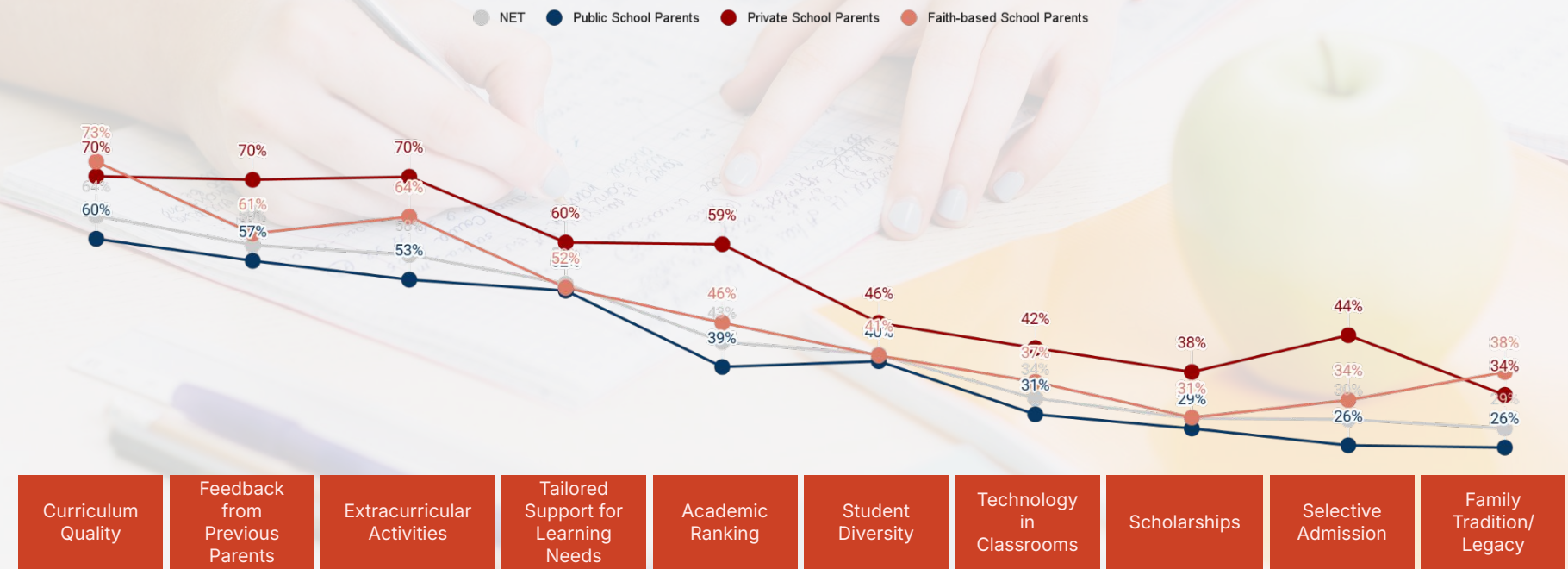
59%

Academic Ranking

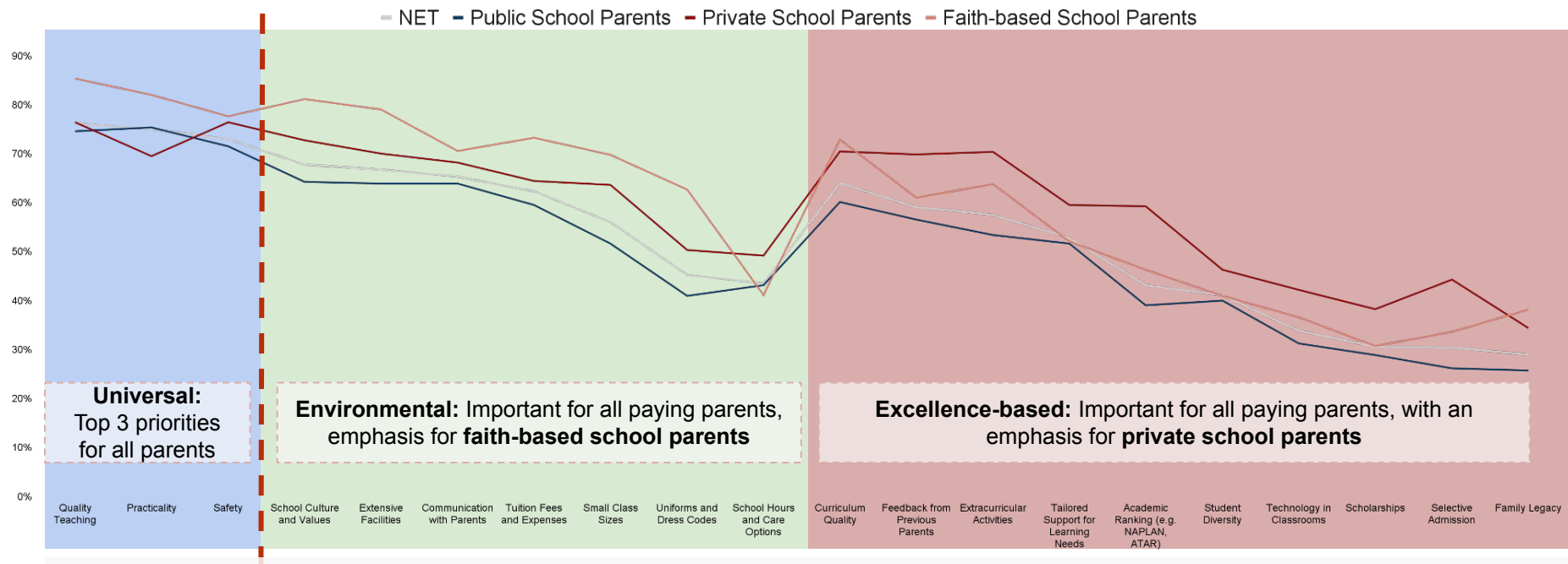
vs **46%** for Faith
vs **39%** for Public

PRIVATE SCHOOL PARENTS LEAD IN PRIORITISING EXCELLENCE, PAYING TO MAKE SURE THAT THEIR CHILDREN ARE RECEIVING THE BEST EDUCATION POSSIBLE

These parents are actively investing, paying to for the holistic academic experience, ensuring that their child is well-equipped with facilities and programmes to aid in their learning journey



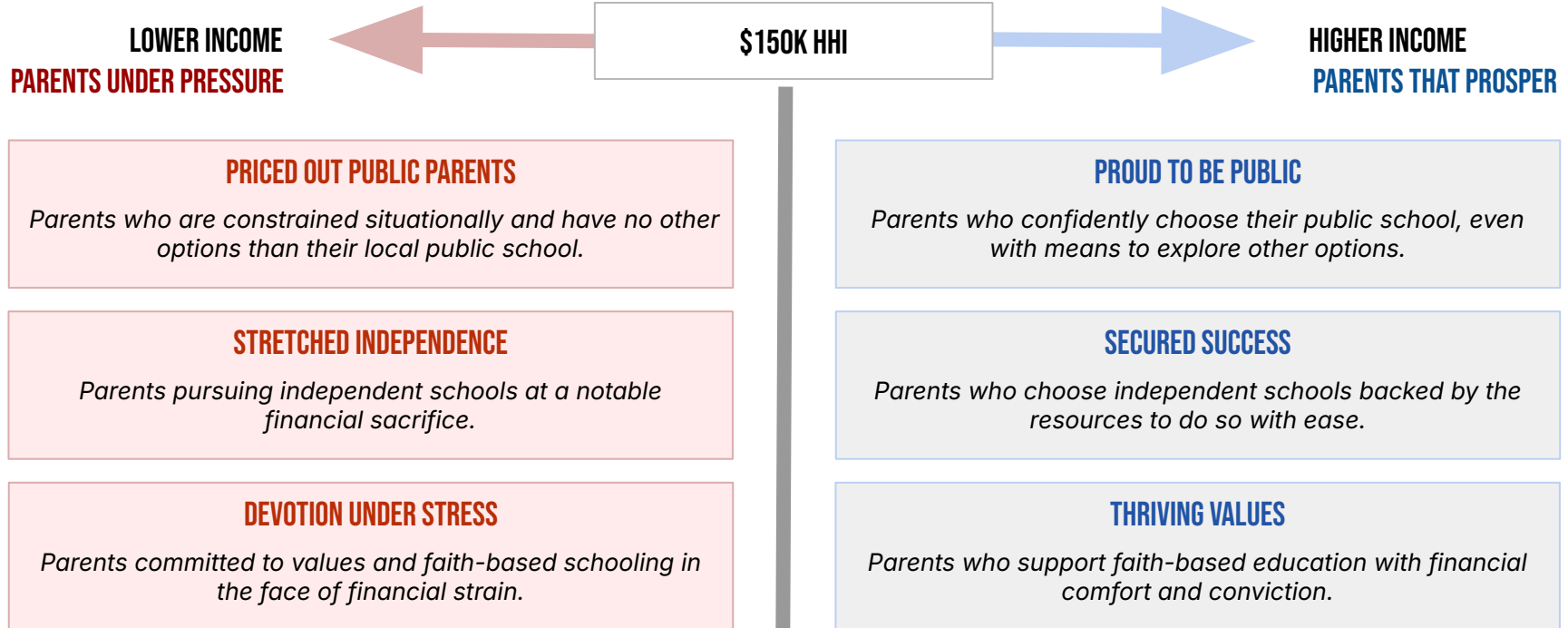
SUMMARY: PARENTS WHO PAY HAVE A BROADER, MORE COMPREHENSIVE SET OF FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THEIR DECISIONS THAN PUBLIC SCHOOL PARENTS, WITH ENVIRONMENT A KEY FOR FAITH-BASED PARENTS AND EXCELLENCE AN EMPHASIS FOR PRIVATE SCHOOL PARENTS.



PAY DIVERGENCE POINT: The Pay Divergence Point marks the moment where priorities in school choice begin to diverge, with factors beyond this point being of significantly greater importance to fee-paying parents than to public school parents.

AND - IT GETS EVEN MORE NUANCED THAN THAT.

NATIONALLY, \$150K HOUSEHOLD INCOME IS A TIPPING POINT THAT CAN NOTABLY IMPACT HOW PARENTS APPROACH DECISIONS, EVALUATE CHOICES, AND THEIR ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE SECTOR



FINAL WORD: TIME FOR SYSTEMIC ACTION

AUSTRALIA'S EDUCATION SYSTEM STANDS AT A CROSSROADS

The findings are clear:

- Two decades of underfunding,
- Widespread safety concerns,
- A workforce in crisis, and
- Rising inequality between those who can pay, and those who cannot.

Across every sector and segment, parents are not just worried - they are stretched, sacrificing, and searching for (re)assurance that the system can still deliver.

What unites them, is a belief that education is the single most important investment a society can make. But belief is fading, and faith in the system is increasingly fragile.

SO WHAT MUST CHANGE:

- *Policy must accelerate:* 2034 is too far away, and two generations can't afford to wait.
- *Media must advocate:* Parents and teachers alike are calling for journalism that pressures systems, not just reports on them.
- *Leaders must act:* We need to prioritise funding, teacher support, and student safety as urgent national imperatives.

If we fail to respond now, we risk not just losing confidence in the system — but undermining the future of an entire generation.

