

Parents condemn public schools

LAUREN NOVAK
EDUCATION REPORTER

MORE than a third of parents believe their children are getting a worse education than they did at school and two-thirds would choose a private school if they had the money.

An *Advertiser* poll of more than 970 parents, teachers and students also found a majority want more government funding for public schools to address concerns that literacy, numeracy and maintenance are being neglected.

Education Minister Jane Lomax-Smith and teachers are defending their classroom techniques and results but the state's peak parent group says the poll results are an indictment of the public system.

"You can't blame parents for thinking if they can send their child to a private school and they might get a better education that they would want to do so," SA Association of State School Organisations executive director David Knuckey said. "The state of our public schools is distressing... the actual buildings and the erosion of the facilities."

Almost 35 per cent of parents of students in public and private schools believe the education system is worse now than when they were at school.

A resounding 60 per cent would send their child to a private school if money was not a consideration, while 33 per cent favoured a public school. More than 90 per cent of teachers and 70 per cent of parents

said public schools needed more government funding and 20 per cent wanted no more public money given to private schools.

Mr Knuckey said the results were "sadly" unsurprising because parents often told him they felt standards and expectations of students had dropped.

Dr Lomax-Smith said she was "personally proud of the work of our teachers and schools".

"Parents can be confident that we have a fabulous choice of schools in South Australia in the

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Government, Catholic and Independent sectors," she said.

SA Primary Principals Association president Steve Portlock said today's education system could not fairly be compared with the system in place when parents were in school. "The sort of world we're trying to get kids ready for is different," he said.

Catholic Education director Jane Swift said research had "enhanced, overall, the education we provide to our students". Association of Independent Schools of SA executive director Gary Le Duff warned good public schools were "critical" to maintaining a "diverse education system".

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PERFORMANCE: Ngarrindjeri elder Major Sumner with Seymour College's Marlee, front, Bridget and Shaye yesterday.
Picture: ALICE PROKOPEC

Students must take native culture to heart

LAUREN NOVAK

ABORIGINAL culture should be taught as part of the general curriculum at all schools, not just as a "one-off" subject, says Aboriginal elder Major Sumner.

The Ngarrindjeri elder, who last week returned from a trip to the UK to retrieve the remains of several Aboriginal people from a British museum, said Aboriginal education should be included in the new national curriculum.

"(Students) need to learn about Aboriginal people," he said.

"They take French and other languages; so if you're living in the land of the Kurna people, why not learn their language, too?"

The comments come as the Australian Education Union has joined with indigenous leaders to call for a 25-year national indigenous education plan to explore innovative ways of teaching students and boosting participation as well as literacy and numeracy skills.

Major Sumner, who returned on Friday after overseeing the handover of the remains - including three skulls which will be kept at the Camp Coorong Keeping Place until reburial - yesterday visited Seymour College to address students and perform.


The school began offering Indigenous Scholarships in 2007 and has this year recorded a spike in applications.

Marlee Wilson, 15, was the first girl to be awarded a scholarship and the first indigenous student at the school.

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