Education Research Paper

Public Schools Bear the Greatest Burden of Disadvantage

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Key Points

1. Public schools bear the greatest burden of disadvantage but are not resourced to overcome its effect on learning outcomes. They have to do a lot more with far fewer resources than Catholic and Independent schools.
    - Income per student in public schools is 91.5% of the income of Catholic schools but the percentage of students from low socio-educationally advantaged (SEA) families in public schools is nearly 200% of that in Catholic schools.
    - Income per student in public schools is only 70.5% of that of Independent schools while their percentage of low SEA students is 285.6% of that in Independent schools.
2. Students from low SEA families comprise a much larger proportion of public school enrolments than in private schools.
    - In 2023, 31.1% of students in public schools were in the lowest SEA quartile compared with 15.9% in Catholic schools and 10.9% in Independent schools.
    - Low SEA students comprise a much higher proportion of public school enrolments than in Catholic and Independent schools in every state/territory.
3. By contrast, much larger proportions of students in Catholic and Independent schools are in the top SEA quartiles than in public schools.
    - Only 20.3% of students in public schools are from the highest SEA quartile compared with 41.8% in Independent schools and 26% in Catholic schools.
    - The proportion of students in the top two SEA quartiles in public schools is 42.8% compared with 70.1% for Independent schools and 56.7% for Catholic schools.
4. Public schools enrol the vast majority of students from the lowest SEA quartile.
    - 80.5% of low SEA students attend public schools compared to 11.8% in Catholic schools and only 7.7% in Independent schools.
    - Public schools enrol the vast proportion of low SEA students in every state/territory.
5. Most disadvantaged schools are public schools.
    - In 2023, 90.9% of schools with more than 50% of their students in the lowest SEA quartile were public schools. Only 4% were Catholic schools and 5.2% were Independent schools.
    - Public schools account for the vast majority of disadvantaged schools in every state/territory.
6. A much larger proportion of public schools have a high concentration of students from the lowest SEA quartile than Catholic and Independent schools.
    - 29% of public schools have over 50% of their students from the lowest SEA quartile compared to only 5% of Catholic schools and 9% of Independent schools.
    - A much larger proportion of public schools are disadvantaged schools than Catholic and Independent schools in every state/territory.
7. Claims by Catholic education authorities that Catholic schools serve a similar demographic profile as public schools are false. Claims by Independent schools organisations that 60% of families with students in Independent schools are from low to middle income households are also false.
8. There is extensive research evidence that both the family background of students and the social composition of schools have a major influence on student achievement. This is what is referred to as the “double jeopardy” effect of disadvantage.

- Australia's PISA results show that the "double jeopardy" effect accounts for the difference in school results between public schools and Catholic and Independent schools.

9. Catholic and Independent schools do not perform the social equity obligations expected by taxpayer funding.
    - Government funding of Catholic schools is 86% of that for public schools but the percentage of low SEA students in Catholic schools is only 51% of that of public schools.
    - Government funding for Independent schools is 72% of that for public schools but their percentage of low SEA students is only 35% of that of public schools.
10. Large proportions of low SES students and other disadvantaged students are not achieving international and national standards and there are large achievement gaps between rich and poor. Public schools face an enormous challenge in improving school outcomes for these students because they face large shortages in human and material resources.
11. Improving outcomes for low SES students requires clear equity objectives matched by appropriate, well-targeted funding. To date, all governments have failed on both counts.
    - The new Better and Fairer Schools Agreement between the Commonwealth and state/territory governments fails to clearly define equity or set clear equity goals. It could even increase inequity.
    - Public schools are vastly under-funded to meet their challenge and the vast majority will remain so indefinitely under current funding agreements.
        - While these funding agreements between the Commonwealth and Western Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory increase funding for public schools they will remain significantly under-funded until at least 2029.
        - Interim agreements between the Commonwealth and the governments of NSW and Queensland fail to provide any funding increase for public schools in 2025.
12. The new funding agreements between the Commonwealth and the governments of Victoria and South Australia announced by the Prime Minister set a new standard. They adopt key aspects of the 3-point plan proposed by Save Our Schools and will ensure that public schools in those states fully funded, albeit not until 2034.
    - It is imperative that the agreements with the other states and the Northern Territory now be renegotiated to align with the Victorian and South Australian agreements to ensure that all public schools are fully funded in future.

1. Introduction

This paper draws on school profile data from the My School website to examine the family socio-educational background of students in public, Catholic and Independent schools. It also examines the extent of concentration of students from low socio-educationally families in the three school sectors. Both the family background of students and the concentration of advantage/disadvantage in schools have a profound influence on student achievement. In the case of students from low socio-educationally families there is a "double jeopardy" effect on achievement in that they tend to be disadvantaged because of their own family circumstances and this is exacerbated when they form a high proportion of enrolments in the schools they attend.

This "double jeopardy" effect is well-documented in numerous studies overseas and in Australia. It is also evidenced in the results of the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) where school sector results strongly reflect the family background of students and the social composition of schools. Therefore, it is important to understand the current social composition of Australian schools and how it has changed over time.

School profile data is sourced from the data access program published by the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). My School measures the socio-economic composition of schools across four socio-educational advantage (SEA) quartiles based on student background data collected by the school from student enrolment forms and submitted to ACARA. Socio-educational advantage is based on the student's parental education and occupation. It does not include family income.

In 2023, SEA quartile data was not available for 261 schools, comprising 2.7% of all schools. Of these, 197 (75.5%) are public schools, 18 (6.9%) are Catholic schools and 47 (17.6%) are Independent schools. There are several reasons why this data is not available. For example, SEA data for schools with only five or fewer students is not published for privacy reasons. Moreover, some schools that have more than five students do not receive the information from parents. Also, education centres such as distance education schools are not required to provide this information.

It is possible that the absence of SEA data for some schools may may slightly skew the relative proportions of students in the lowest SEA between school sectors because the geographic distribution of these schools differs between the public and private sectors. The proportion of the lowest SEA students in public schools is likely to be slightly under-estimated and the proportion in private schools slightly over-estimated. Of the 197 public schools for which SEA data is not available, 103 (52.3%) are located in outer regional, remote and very remote areas which tend to be lower SEA areas. Only 5 Catholic schools and 8 Independent schools with no SEA composition data are in these geographic areas. Over half (55.6%) of the Catholic schools and 67.4% of the Independent schools not reporting SEA data are in metropolitan cities which tend to be higher SEA areas than outer-regional and remote area schools.

The data examined in this paper include special schools where student composition data is available.

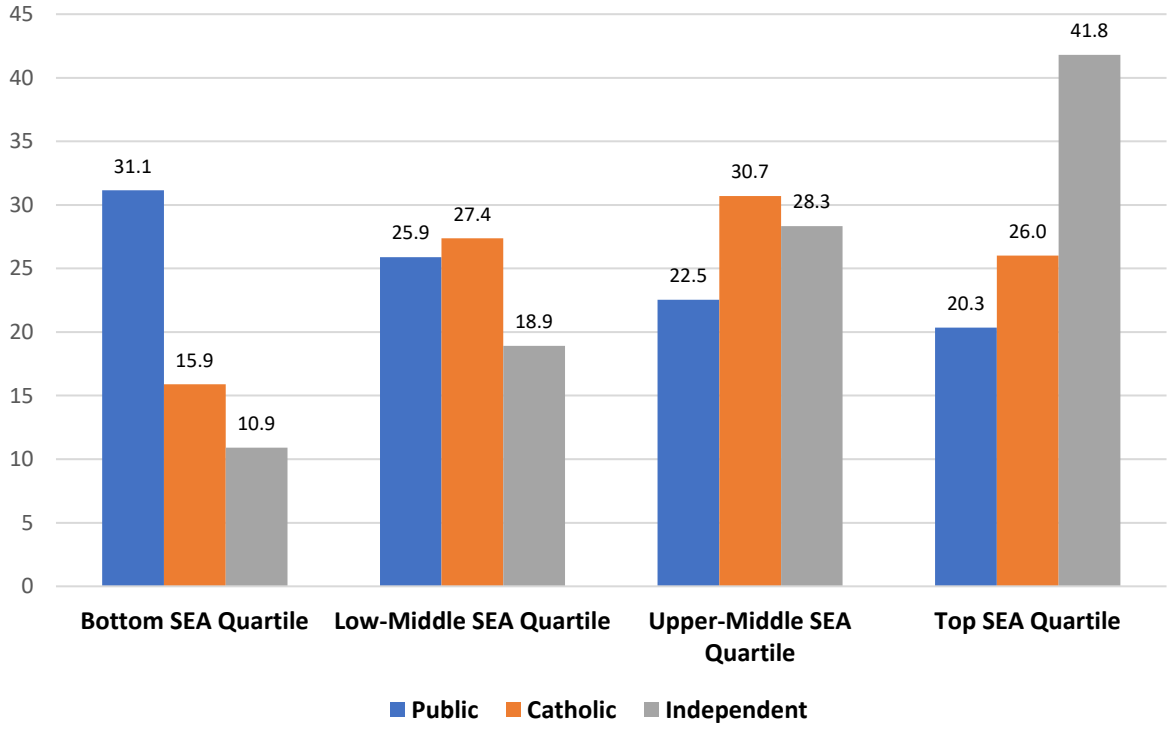
The concentration of low SEA students in schools is measured in a number of ways. The SEA student population is divided into quartiles so schools with more than 25% of students in the lowest quartile can be considered to have a higher concentration of low SEA students. Estimates are provided for 30-50%, 51-75%, over 75%, 30% or more and over 50%.

1. Low SEA students comprise a larger proportion of public school enrolments than in private schools

Nearly one-third (31.1%)of students in public schools across Australia are in the lowest SEA quartile in 2023. This is about double the percentage in Catholic schools (15.9%) and nearly three times that (10.9%) in Independent schools [Chart 1]. By contrast, much larger proportions of students in Catholic and Independent schools are in the top SEA quartiles than in public schools. The proportion of students in the highest quartile in Independent schools is over double that in public schools – 41.8% compared to 20.3% while the proportion in Catholic schools (26%) is significantly larger than in public schools.

Public schools have a much larger proportion of students in the two bottom SEA quartiles than Catholic and Independent schools – 57% compared to 43.3% in Catholic schools and 29.8% in Independent schools. On the other hand, Catholic and Independent schools have much higher proportions of students in the top two quartiles than public schools – 56.7% in Catholic schools and 70.1% in Independent schools compared to 42.8% in public schools.

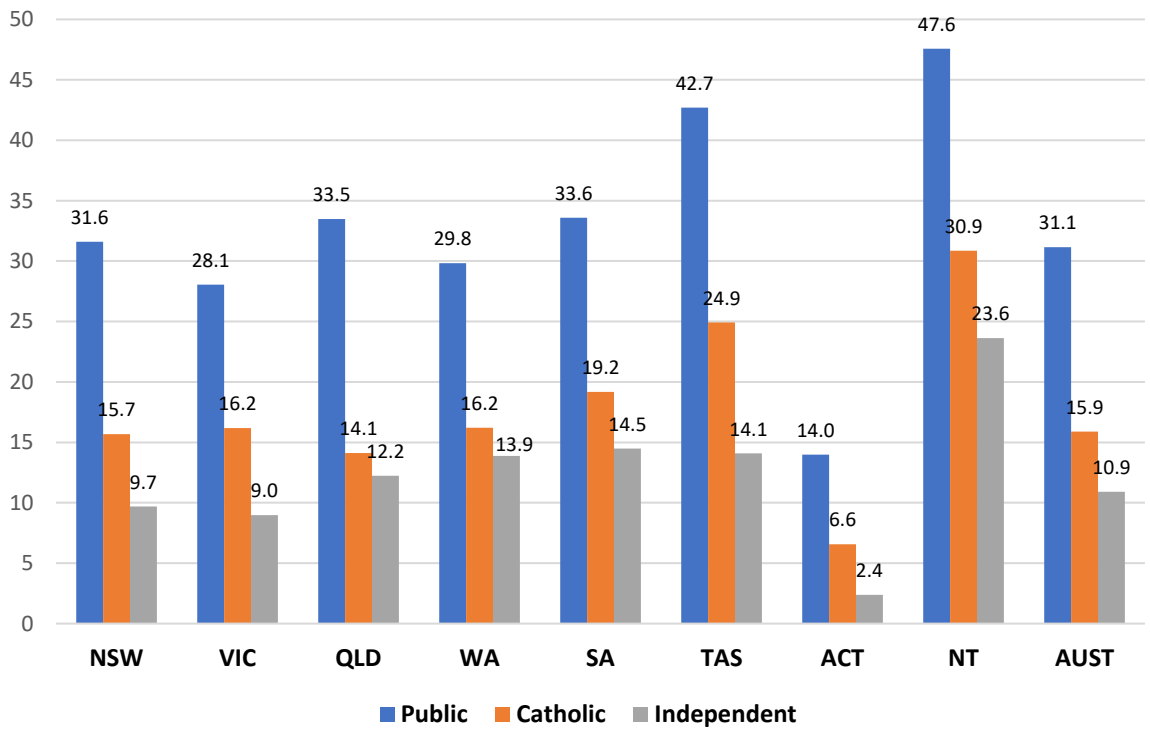
Chart 1: Socio-Educationally Advantage (SEA) Composition by School Sector, Australia, 2023 (% of sector enorlments)



Low SEA students comprise a high proportion of public school enrolments in every state except the ACT [Chart 2]. Nearly half (47.6%) of students in public schools in the Northern Territory are from low SEA families and 42.7% from this background in Tasmania. About one-

third of students in public schools in NSW (31.6%), Queensland (33.5%) and South Australia (33.6%) are from low SEA families, while 29.8% in Western Australia and 28.1% in Victoria are from such families.

Chart 2: School Sector Enrolments in Lowest Socio-Educationally Advantage Quartile, 2023 (% of sector enrolments)



The proportion of low SEA students in private schools is much lower than in public schools. The proportion of these students in public schools in NSW, Queensland and the ACT is double or more of that in Catholic schools. In Victoria, Western Australia, South Australia and Tasmania, the proportion of low SEA students in public schools is 73-84% more than in Catholic schools and over 50% more in the Northern Territory.

The proportion of low SEA students in public schools is about three or more times that in Independent schools in NSW, Victoria, Queensland, Tasmania and the ACT. It is over double that in Independent schools in Western Australia and South Australia.

Further details of the student composition of public, Catholic and Independent schools in each state are provided in Attachment 1.

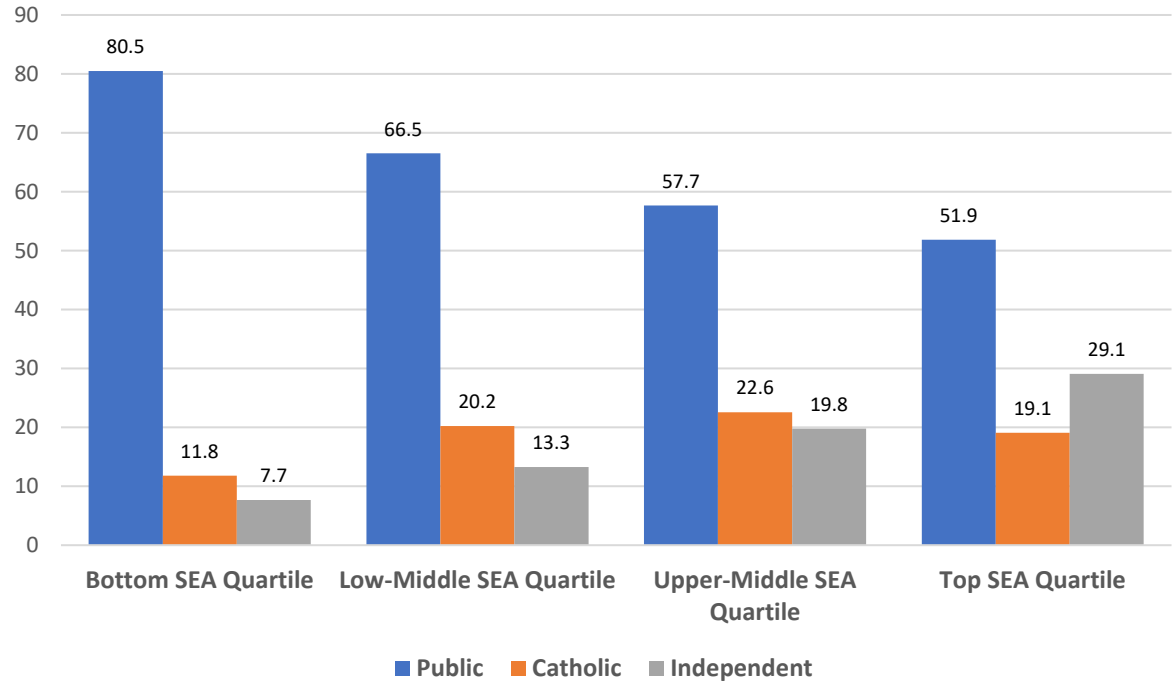
2. Public schools enrol the vast majority of low SEA students

Public schools also enrol most students of families in the bottom SEA quartile. Some 80.5% of these students attend public schools compared to 11.8% in Catholic schools and only 7.7% in Independent schools [Chart 3]. The high concentration of the lowest SEA students in public schools is disproportionate compared to all enrolments. In 2023, 64% of school students were enrolled in public schools, 19.7% were in Catholic schools and 16.3% in

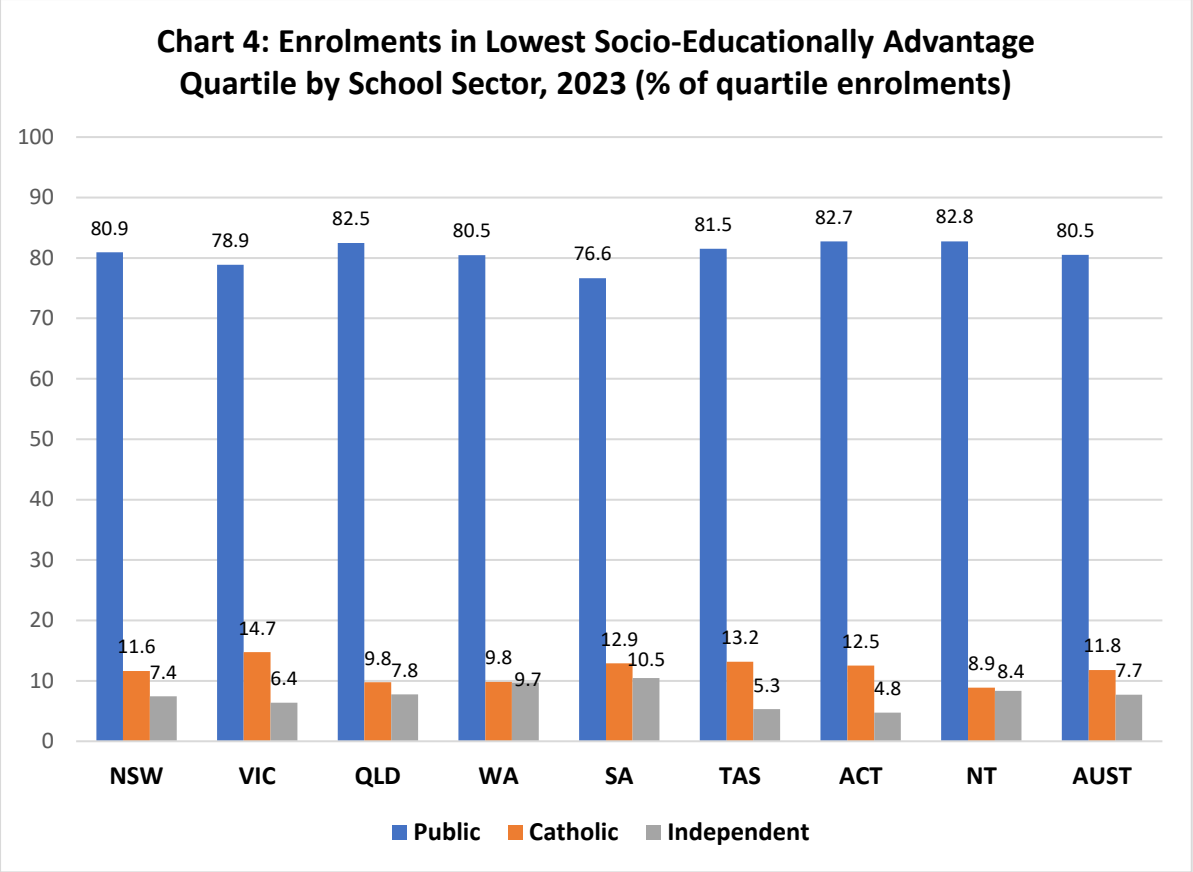
independent schools. The ratio of the lowest SEA students to all students in public schools is 1.26 compared to 0.6 for Catholic schools and 0.47 for Independent schools.

This is a stark contrast to the ratio of students in the highest SEA quartile to the proportion of all enrolments in each sector. The ratio for public schools is 0.81 compared to 0.97 for Catholic schools and 1.79 for Independent schools.

Chart 3: Enrolments in Socio-Educationally Advantage (SEA) Quartiles by Schhool Sector, Australia, 2023 (% of quartile enrolmets)



Public schools enrol the vast proportion of low SEA students in all states. Six states enrol over 80% of all low SEA students with the highest proportion being 82.8% in the Northern Territory and 82.7% in the ACT [Chart 4]. The proportion of low SEA students enrolled in Catholic schools ranges from 8.9% in the Norther Territory to 14.7% in Victoria. Independent schools enrol the smallest proportion of low SEA students, ranging from 4.8% in the ACT to 10.5% in South Australia. Further details of the proportion of all low SEA students in public, Catholic and Independent schools in each state are provided in Attachment 2.



3. Most disadvantaged schools are public schools

Disadvantaged schools are concentrated in the public sector. In 2023, public schools accounted for 69.5% of all schools in Australia but accounted for 90.9% of schools with more than 50% of their students in the lowest SEA quartile [Chart 5]. Only 4% were Catholic schools and 5.2% were Independent schools.

Public schools also dominate other measures of disadvantage concentration. They account for 83.1% of schools with over 75% of students from the lowest SEA quartile and 87.7% of schools with 30% or more students from the lowest SEA quartile.

Public schools account for 90% or more of schools with over 50% of their students from the lowest SEA quartile in each state except Western Australia and the Northern Territory [Chart 6]. In NSW, 94% of such schools are public schools while Western Australia has the lowest proportion at 83%. There is only one school in the ACT with over 50% of students from the lowest quartile and it is a public school.

Chart 5: Schools With a High Concentrations of Students in the Lowest Socio-Educationally Advantaged Quartile by School Sector, Australia, 2023 (% of category)

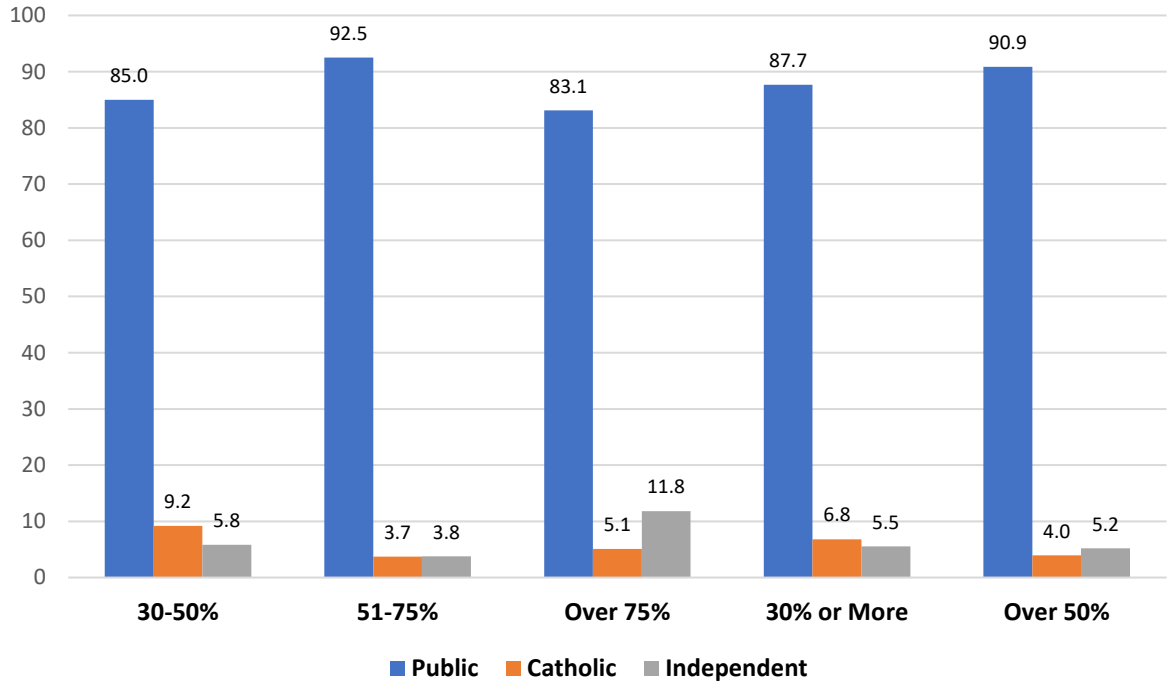
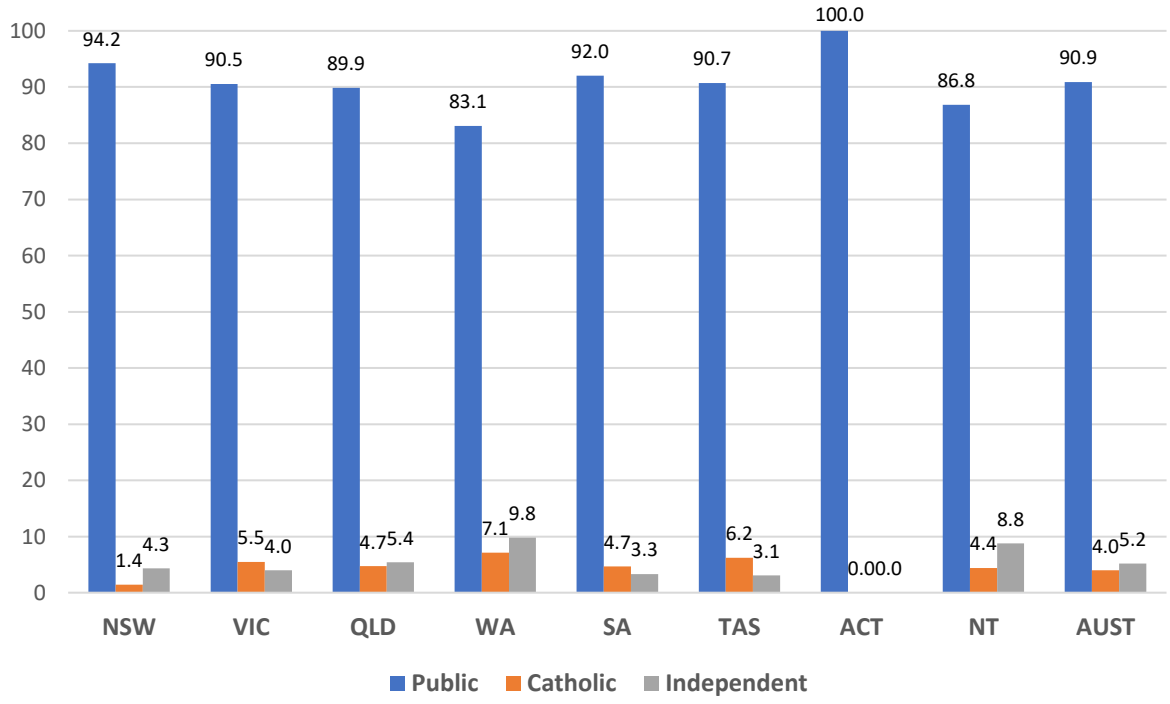
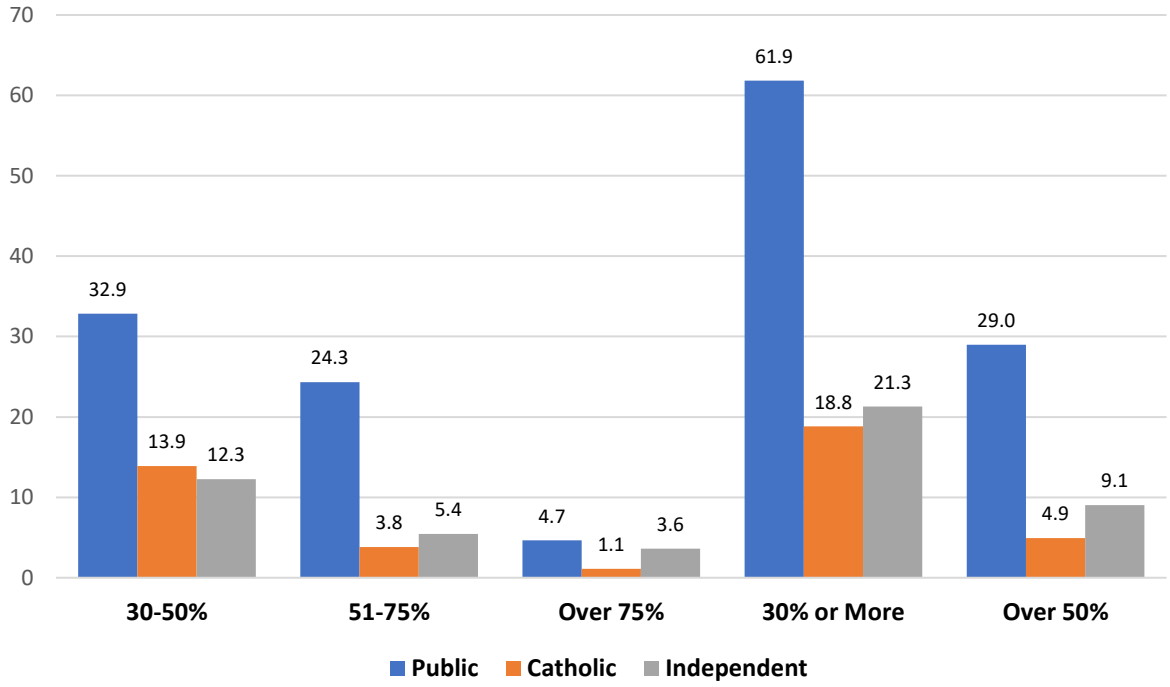


Chart 6: Schools With Over 50% of Students From Lowest Socio-Educationally Advantage Quartile by Scoool Sector, 2023 (% of category)



A much larger proportion of public schools have a high concentration of students from the lowest SEA quartile than in Catholic and Independent schools. For example, 29% of public schools have over 50% of their students from the lowest quartile compared to only 5% of Catholic schools and 9% of Independent schools [Chart 7]. Some 62% of public schools have 30% or more of their students from the lowest quartile compared to 19% of Catholic schools and 21% of Independent schools.

Chart 7: Schools With a High Concentration of Students from the Lowest Socio-Educatioonally Advantage Quartile, Australia (% of sector schools)



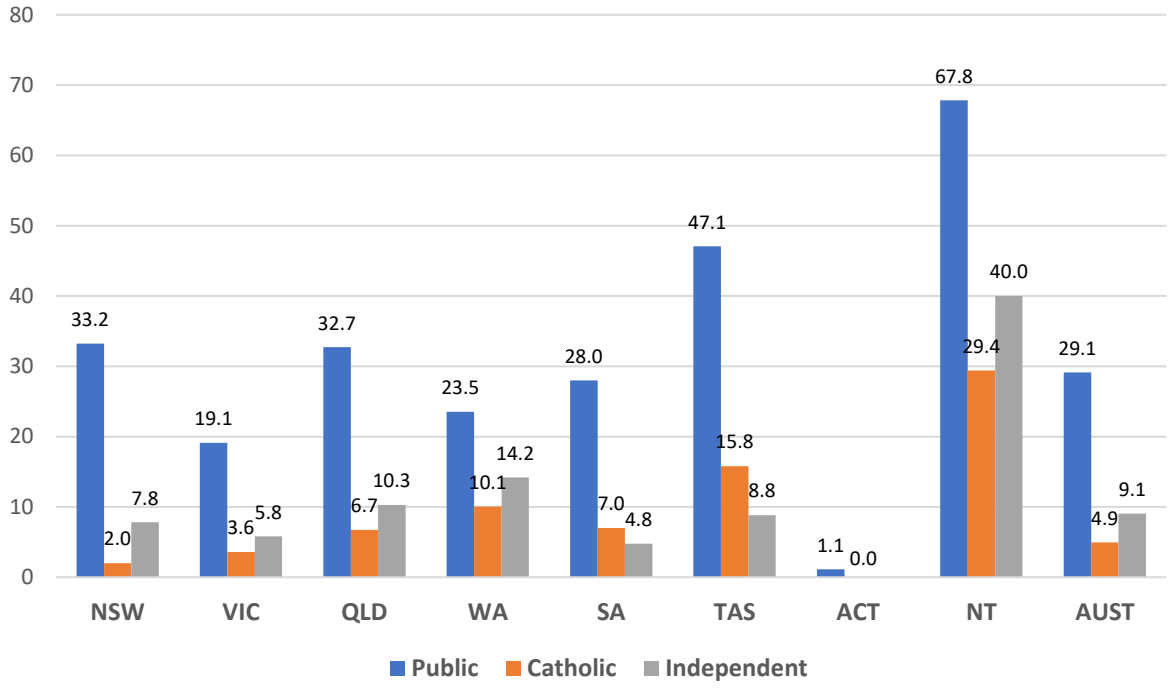
There is considerable variation across the states in the proportion of public schools with over 50% of students from the lowest SEA quartile. In the Northern Territory, 68% of public schools have over 50% of students from the lowest SEA quartile and in Tasmania it is 47% [Chart 8]. One-third of public schools in NSW and Queensland have this high concentration of low SEA students. Public schools in Western Australia and South Australia also have a high concentration of students in the lowest SEA quartile at 24% and 28% respectively.

By comparison with public schools, Catholic and Independent schools in all states except the Northern Territory have a low proportion of schools with a high concentration of low SEA students. For example, only 2% of Catholic schools and 8% of Independent schools in NSW have a high concentration of low SEA students compared to 33% of public schools. In Queensland, only 7% of Catholic schools and 10% of Independent schools have a high concentration compared to 33% of public schools.

As is the case for public schools, but not to the same extent, a large proportion of Catholic and Independent schools in the Northern Territory have a high concentration of low SEA students - 29% of Catholic schools and 40% of Independent schools. The Catholica and

Independent proportions are 10% or less in five states and the ACT. Interestingly, there is a larger proportion of Independent schools with a high concentration of low SEA students than Catholic schools in five jurisdictions.

Chart 8: Schools With Over 50% of Students from the Lowest Socio-Educationally Advantage Quartile, 2023 (% of sector schools)



4. The double jeopardy effect of disadvantage on achievement

The family background of students and the social composition of schools have a major influence on student achievement. This is what the Canadian educationalist, J. Douglas Willms, called a "double jeopardy" effect of disadvantage [Willms 2003, 2006, 2010]. Children from low socio-economic status (SES) families tend to be disadvantaged because of their family circumstances and they are likely to fare even worse when they are also segregated into low SES schools. For example, in a study drawing on the results from PISA 200, Willms found that evidence of a school SES effect in all participating countries and that the achievement of an average low SES student in a low SES school was about one year of learning behind a similar low SES student in a high SES school [Willms 2006].

Many international studies have investigated the relationship between school SES and student achievement since the seminal Coleman Report in 1966 [Coleman et.al. 1966; Jacksons & Moffitt 2017; Hill et.al. 2017]. They have shown that there is a school composition effect on student outcomes associated with high proportions of students from low SES and minority families. They include studies in the United States, UK, Europe and the OECD [Borman & Dowling 2010; Liu et.al. 2015; OECD 2016; Palardy G., Rangvid 2007; Palardy 2013; Rumberger & Palardy 2005; Sirin 2005]. They all found that students attending low SES schools are likely to have lower outcomes than students from a similar background

attending a high SES school. That is, the results for students of all socio-economic backgrounds tend to improve when they attend schools with a larger proportion of high SES students. These findings were supported by a meta-analysis of over 100 studies conducted in several countries [Sirin 2005] and a meta-analysis of 30 studies from OECD countries [van Ewijk & Sleegers 2010].

Several more recent studies have also found similar effects on school outcomes. A recent meta-analysis of 480 results from 97 studies of school SES impact conducted between found that school SES has a large impact on student outcomes [Tan, C. Y et. al. 2023]. It also found that the impact of school SES is larger than that for student SES. An analysis based on reading scores in the 2018 PISA cycle in six European countries found that school SES had significant effects on achievement even after allowing for student SES [Chzhen & Leesch 2023].

Several Australian studies over the past decade or more have also found that school composition has a significant effect on student achievement. A series of studies by researchers at Murdoch University [McConney & Perry 2010; Perry & McConney 2010a; 2010b] found large differences in reading, science and mathematics achievement by students in low and high SES schools. For example, a low SES student achieved on average 58 more points on the PISA reading scale in a high SES school than in a low SES school, a difference of about 18 months of learning. The differences were similar in mathematics and science.

Studies by researchers at the University of Canberra and the University of Melbourne also found similar results [Chesters 2019; Chesters & Daly 2015; Chesters & Daly 2017]. A recent study of the segregation of disadvantaged students in Australian secondary schools found they are two times less likely to achieve minimum academic benchmarks in disadvantaged schools compared to attending advantaged schools [Sciffer et al., 2022].

Several studies have also found that school SES is a stronger predictor of student achievement than student SES [Borman & Dowling 2010; Sirin 2005]. Others have found similar effects for school and student SES [Rumberger & Palaardy 2005]. A recent study based on Australian student results in PISA 2018 found a stronger effect of school SES on student achievement than student SES [Perry e.al. 2022].

Successive PISA results also show a significant effect of school composition in Australia. For example, the results from PISA 2022 show that the raw scores of students in Catholic and Independent schools in reading, mathematics and science were significantly higher than those in public schools [De Bortoli et.al. 2023]. The gaps between public and Catholic schools disappeared after adjustments for differences in family socio-economic background while the gaps between public and Independent schools were halved or more. After a further adjustment for the SES composition of schools, the results showed that student achievement in public schools was significantly higher than in Catholic schools and statistically similar to that of Independent schools.

Willms also hypothesised the existence of a “triple jeopardy” effect in that the impact of the concentration of low SES students in low SES schools may be stronger than the effect on high

SES students in low SES schools [Willms 2003]. This may occur because high SES families with students in such schools are able to draw on other resources such as extra tutoring or more help with homework to ensure academic success for their child.

However, the "triple jeopardy" effect appears to be weak. Willms found similar differences in results between low and high SES schools for both low and high SES students [Willms 2006]. An Australian study based on the 2003 PISA results found similar differences in reading, mathematics and science achievement between low and high SES schools by students from low and high SES families [Perry & McConney 2010a]. A recent study using data from Australia's 2018 PISA results in reading, mathematics and science also found that the negative impact of the concentration of low SES students in low SES schools is stronger than the effect on high SES students [Perry et. al 2022]. Alternatively, low SES students tend to benefit less than high SES students when enrolled in high SES schools.

5. Sector income and equity ratios show the disadvantage burden of public schools

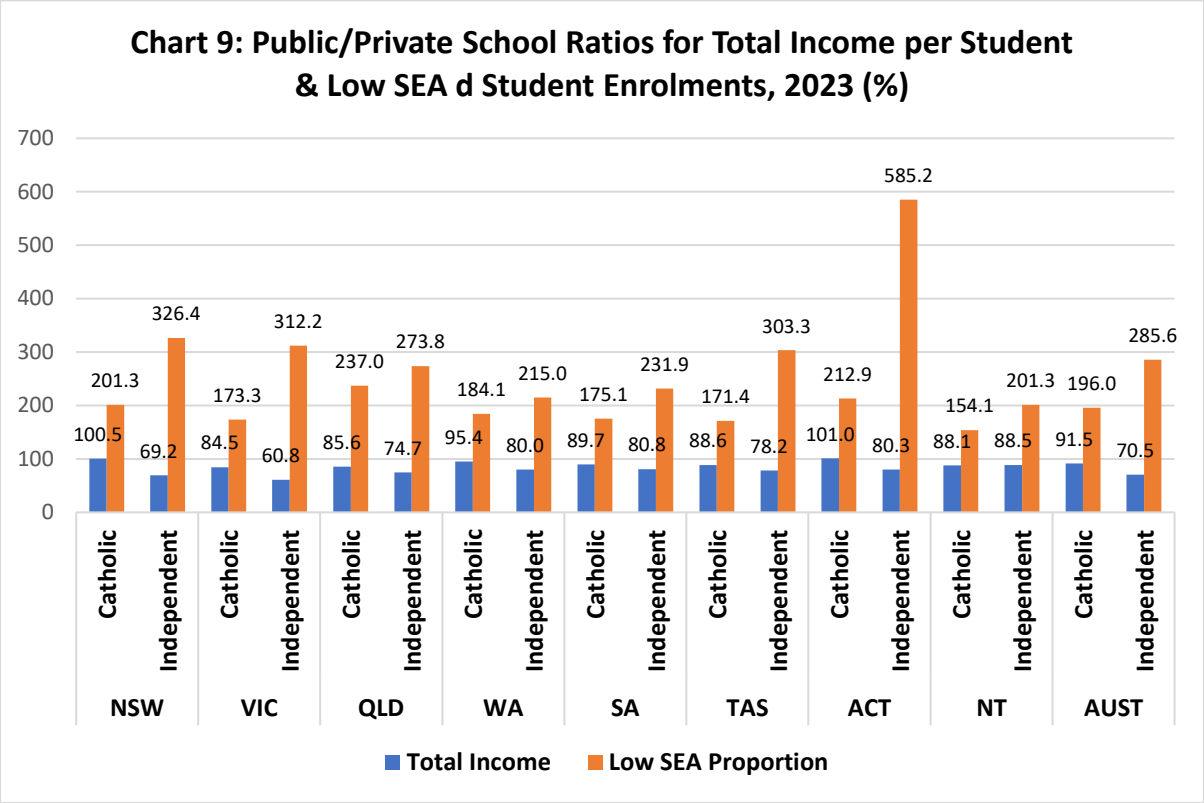
The relative government funding of school sectors should also be considered in assessing the burden of disadvantage because the availability of resources is a key factor in responding to disadvantage. This can be done by comparing the ratio of income per student in public schools to that in private schools with the ratios of low SEA enrolments in public and private schools. If private schools had the same disadvantage burden as public schools their low SEA enrolment ratios would be similar to their income ratio.

This is clearly not the case as shown in Chart 9. There are huge differences between the income and low SEA enrolment ratios. Across Australia, the total income per student in public schools is 91.5% of the income per student in Catholic schools but the percentage of low SEA students is nearly 200% if that in Catholic schools. The income per student in public schools is only 70.5% of that of Independent schools while the percentage of low SEA enrolments is 285.6% of that in Independent schools. Public schools have to do a lot more with far fewer resources than either Catholic or Independent schools.

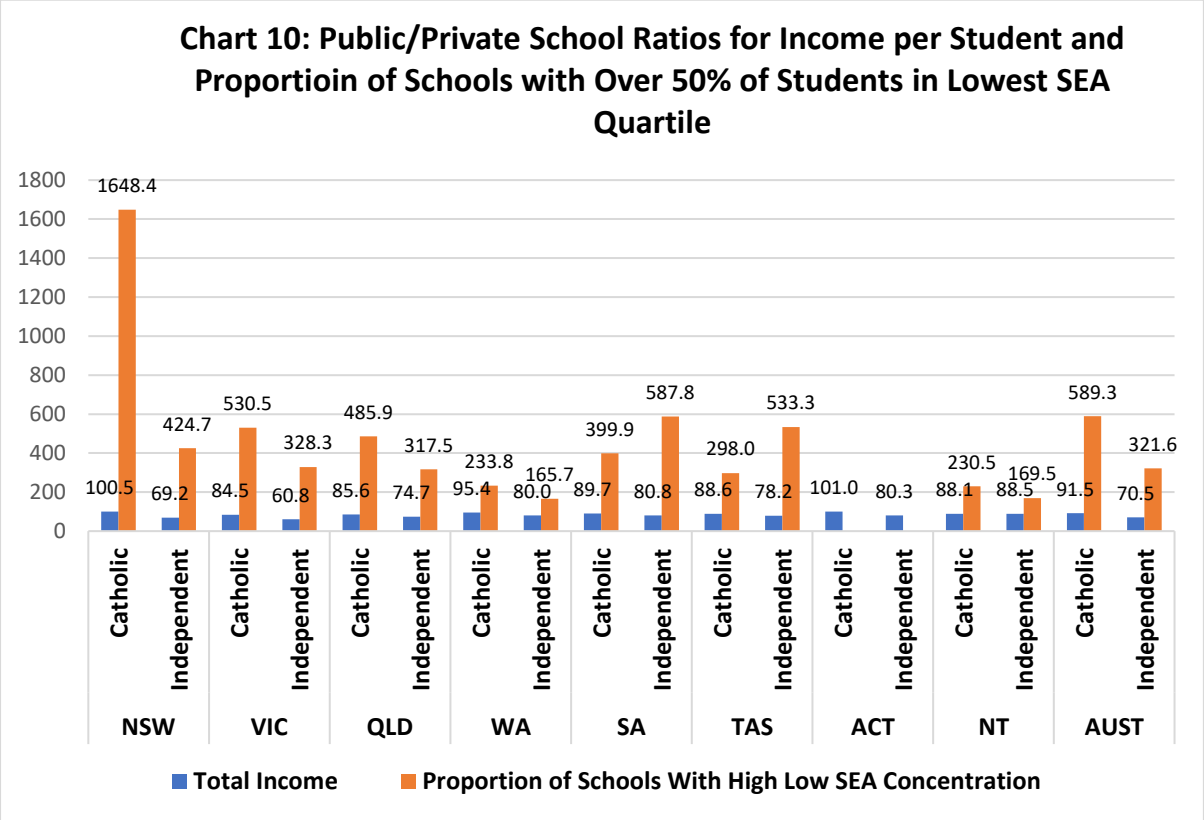
The disadvantage burden of public schools is far greater than for Catholic and Independent schools in all states and territories. For example, the percentage of low SEA students in public schools in Queensland is 237% higher than in Catholic schools but income per student in public schools is only 85.6% of that of Catholic schools. In NSW, the income per student at public schools is similar to that of Catholic schools but their enrolments of low SEA students are double that of Catholic schools. The low SEA enrolment ratio of public schools in Victoria is 312.2% of that of Independent schools but their income per student ratio is only 60.8% of that of Independent schools.

Further evidence that public schools do the heavy lifting on disadvantage is apparent from a comparison of the income and disadvantage concentration ratio as measured by the proportion of schools with over 50% of students in lowest SEA quartile. While income per student in public schools is only 91.5% of that of Catholic schools the proportion of schools with over 50% of students in the lowest SEA quartile is nearly 600% (589.3%) higher than for Catholic schools [Chart 10]. As noted above, income per student in public schools is only

70.5% of that of Independent schools but the proportion of schools with a high proportion of low SEA students is 321.6% more than that of Independent schools.



Note: Income per student is for 2022, latest available



Note: Income per student is for 2022, latest available

The burden of schools with a high concentration of low SEA students is far greater for public schools in all states and territories. The proportion of NSW public schools with a high concentration of low SEA students is a massive 1648.4% more than that of Catholic schools. In South Australia, the income of public schools is only 80.8% of that of Independent schools but their proportion of schools with a high concentration of low SEA students is 587.8% of that of Independent schools.

6. Private schools are not performing equity obligations expected for taxpayer funding

It is also clear that Catholic and Independent schools are not performing the equity obligations that should be expected in return for taxpayer funding. A central objective of Commonwealth and state/territory funding models is to support the learning of disadvantaged students. However, Catholic and Independent schools are under-performing in terms of equity as their enrolments of low SEA students is far from commensurate with their level of funding.

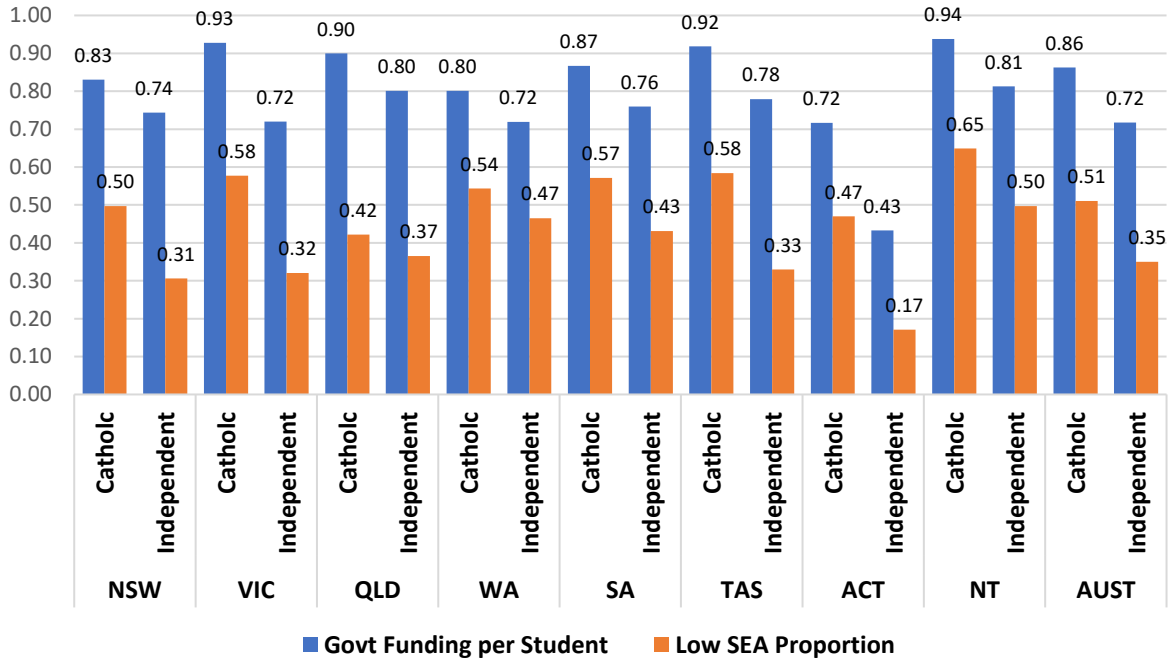
Government funding of Catholic and Independent schools is a significant proportion of government funding of public schools, yet the proportion of low SEA enrolments in private schools is a much smaller than that of public schools. Government funding of Catholic schools is 86% of that of public schools but the proportion of low SEA enrolments is only half (51%) that of public schools [Chart 11]. Government funding of Independent schools is 72% of that of public schools but they enrol only about one-third (35%) of the low SEA enrolments of public schools.

The ratio of low SEA enrolments in private schools to that of public schools is far lower than the funding ratios in all states and territories. The differences are generally very large. For example, Catholic schools in Queensland are funded at 90% of that of public schools but their low SEA enrolments are only 42% of that of public schools. Independent schools in Victoria are funded at 74% of that of public schools but enrol only 31% of the low SEA students enrolled in public schools.

In addition, while government funding for Catholic schools in Australia is 86% of that of public schools the proportion of Catholic schools with over 50% of their students in the lowest SEA quartile is only 17% of that of public schools [Chart 12]. Independent schools are funded at 72% of that of public schools but their proportion of students in the lowest SEA quartile is only 31% of that of public schools.

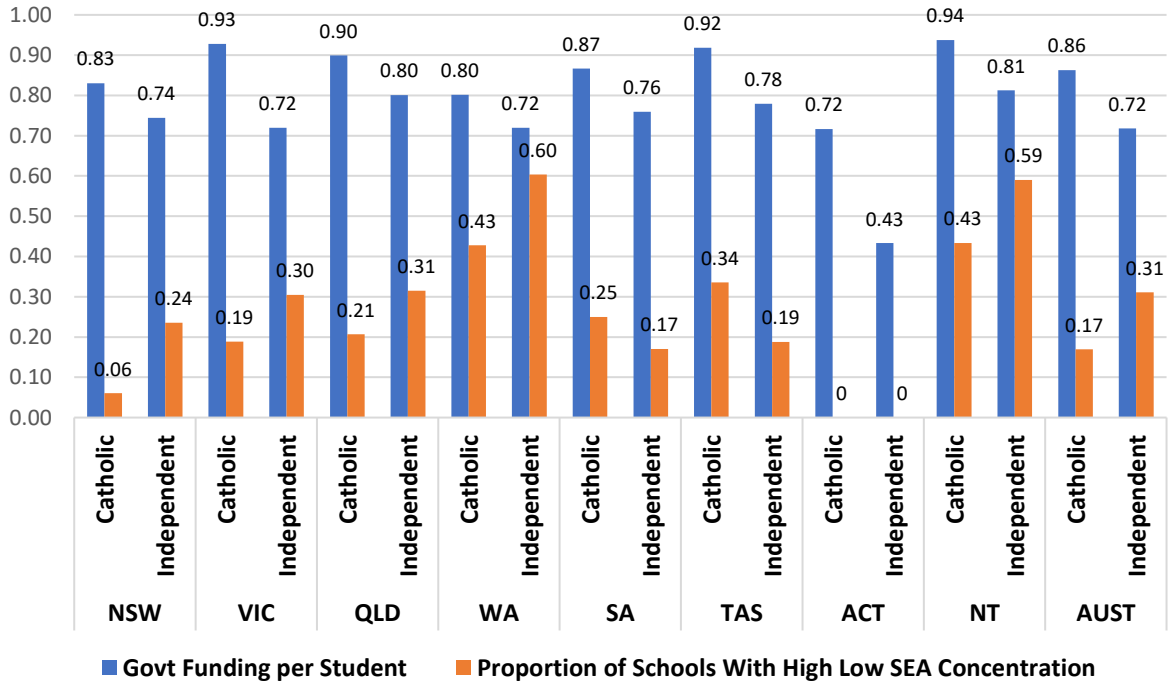
The disadvantage concentration ratios of Catholic and Independent schools relative to public schools are far lower than the government funding ratios in all states and territories. In NSW, the proportion of Catholic schools with over 50% of students in the lowest SEA quartile is only 6% of that of public schools despite receiving 83% of the funding of public schools. In Victoria disadvantage concentration in Catholic schools is only 19% of that of public schools despite receiving 93% of the funding of public schools. Interestingly, the ratio of the proportion of Independent schools with over 50% of students in the lowest SEA quartile relative to that of public schools is higher than for Catholic schools in several states and the Northern Territory.

Chart 11: Private/Public School Ratios for Government Funding per Student & Percentage of Lowest SEA Enrolments in School Sector



Note: Funding per student is for 2022, latest available

Chart 12: Private/Public School Ratios for Government Funding per Student and Proportioin of Schools with Over 50% of Students in Lowest SEA Quartile



Note: Funding per student is for 2022, latest available

A possible limitation of this analysis is that it relates only to low SEA students and does not include other forms of disadvantage that attract government funding loadings. These include funding for Indigenous and disability students and loadings for school location and size. However, the ratios of private school enrolments to public schools are generally far less than the funding ratio. For example, the Catholic school ratio for Indigenous students is only 0.47 and 0.33 in the case of Independent schools. The ratio of the two highest disability categories in Catholic schools is 0.71 and 0.58 for Independent schools, both ratios being significantly below the funding ratios. The only case where the enrolment ratio for a disadvantage category is higher than the government funding ratio is for the supplementary disability category.

7. Discussion

Public schools clearly do the heavy lifting in supporting the learning of low SES students. They enrol the large majority of these students and who form a much larger proportion of the sector enrolments than in Catholic and Independent schools. Moreover, public schools account for over 90% of schools that have a very high concentration of low SES students. Catholic and Independent schools account for a very small proportion of such schools.

The national Catholic education executive director Jacinta Collins has claimed that "By far the largest number of 'private' schools are Catholic schools serving the same communities as public schools" [Catholic News 2024]. This is clearly false. The evidence presented above clearly shows that claims by the Catholic sector that they serve a similar demographic profile as public schools is a myth. It is a myth that has long been exposed by studies commissioned by Catholic school organisations that showed low income Catholic families were being shut out of Catholic schools [The Age 2004; Pascoe 2007, Patty 2007]. Even Cardinal George Pell expressed his concern many years ago that thee "are not enough youngsters from poor families in Catholic schools" [Patty 2006].

The chief executive of Independent Schools Australia (ISA), Graham Catt, has claimed that 60% of families with students in Independent schools are from low to middle income households [Crowe 2025]. He has also claimed that the majority are from disadvantaged and middle-class families [Down 2025]. This is all demonstrably false. ISA has resorted to using vague definitions of 'middle class to mislead about their student demographic profile. The ACARA data show that less than 30% are of Independent school students area from the bottom two SEA quartiles while 41.8% are from the top quartile and 28.3% from the second top quartile.

Public schools in Australia face daunting challenges because they enrol the large majority of low SEA and other disadvantage students and they account for over 90% of disadvantaged schools. Large proportions of low SES students are not achieving international and national standards. One-third of 15 year-old low SES students did not achieve the basic proficiency standards in reading and science in the PISA 2022 results and 43% did not achieve basic mathematics proficiency [De Bortoli et.al 2023]. Nearly two-thirds of Year 9 students whose parents did not complete Year 12 and over half those of parents in the lowest paid occupation group did not achieve the national reading, writing and numeracy NAPLAN standards in 2024 [ACARA 2024].

Public schools are vastly under-funded for the learning challenges they face while private schools are over-funded. In 2024, on average, public schools across Australia were funded at only 87.6% of their SRS and there is no plan to ensure that they will ever be fully funded [Cobbold 2024a]. By contrast, on average, private schools were funded at 104.9% of their SRS and will remain over-funded until at least 2029.

As a result, public schools face greater shortages of educational staff than private schools. The gap in the index of shortage of education staff was the 10th largest in the OECD and significantly larger than the average for the OECD (OECD 2023, Table II.B1.5.2]. Public schools also face greater shortages in educational materials than private schools and the gap is the 9th largest in the OECD. The gaps between public and private schools in the percentage of students lacking access to digital resources are amongst the largest in the OECD.

Improving outcomes for low SEA students requires clear equity objectives matched by appropriate well-targeted funding. Governments continue to fail on both counts.

The new Better and Fairer Schools Agreement between the Commonwealth and state/territory governments fails to clearly define equity or set clear and consistent equity goals [Sahlberg & Cobbold 2024]. It could even worsen inequity.

While the funding agreements between the Commonwealth and Western Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory increase funding for public schools they will remain significantly under-funded until at least 2029 [Cobbold 2024b, 2024c]. The interim agreements between the Commonwealth and the governments of NSW and Queensland fail to provide any funding increase for public schools in 2025 [Cobbold 2024d).

The new funding agreements between the Commonwealth and the governments of Victoria and South Australia announced by the Prime Minister set a new standard [Albanese 2025]. They adopt key aspects of the 3-point plan proposed by Save Our Schools [2024]:

- The Commonwealth Government will increase its share of funding public schools to 25% of their SRS;
- State governments end the accounting tricks that allow non-SRS expenditures to be included as part of their share of funding the SRS of public schools;
- State governments increase their funding share for public schools to 75%.

The two new agreements will ensure that public schools in those states are fully funded, albeit, not until 2034. It is imperative that the agreements with the other states and the Northern Territory now be re-negotiated to align with the Victorian and South Australian agreements to ensure that all public schools are also fully funded in future.

Governments at all levels have badly neglected the learning of low SEA and other disadvantaged students and schools with a high concentration of disadvantaged students for far too long. As a result, there are huge achievement gaps between rich and poor of four to six years at age 15. Failure to fully fund all public schools blights the life options of students and will also restrict workforce skills, productivity and future national economic prosperity.

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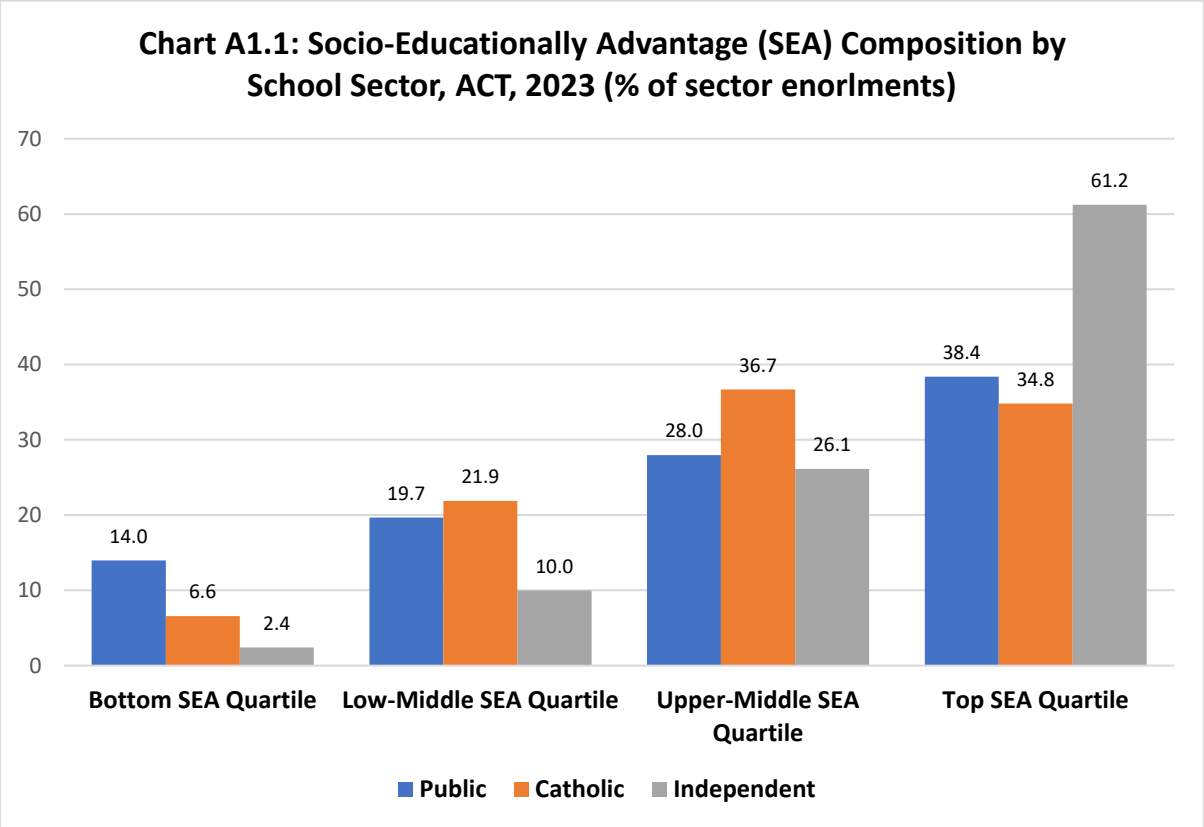
Attachment 1: Social Composition of School Sectors



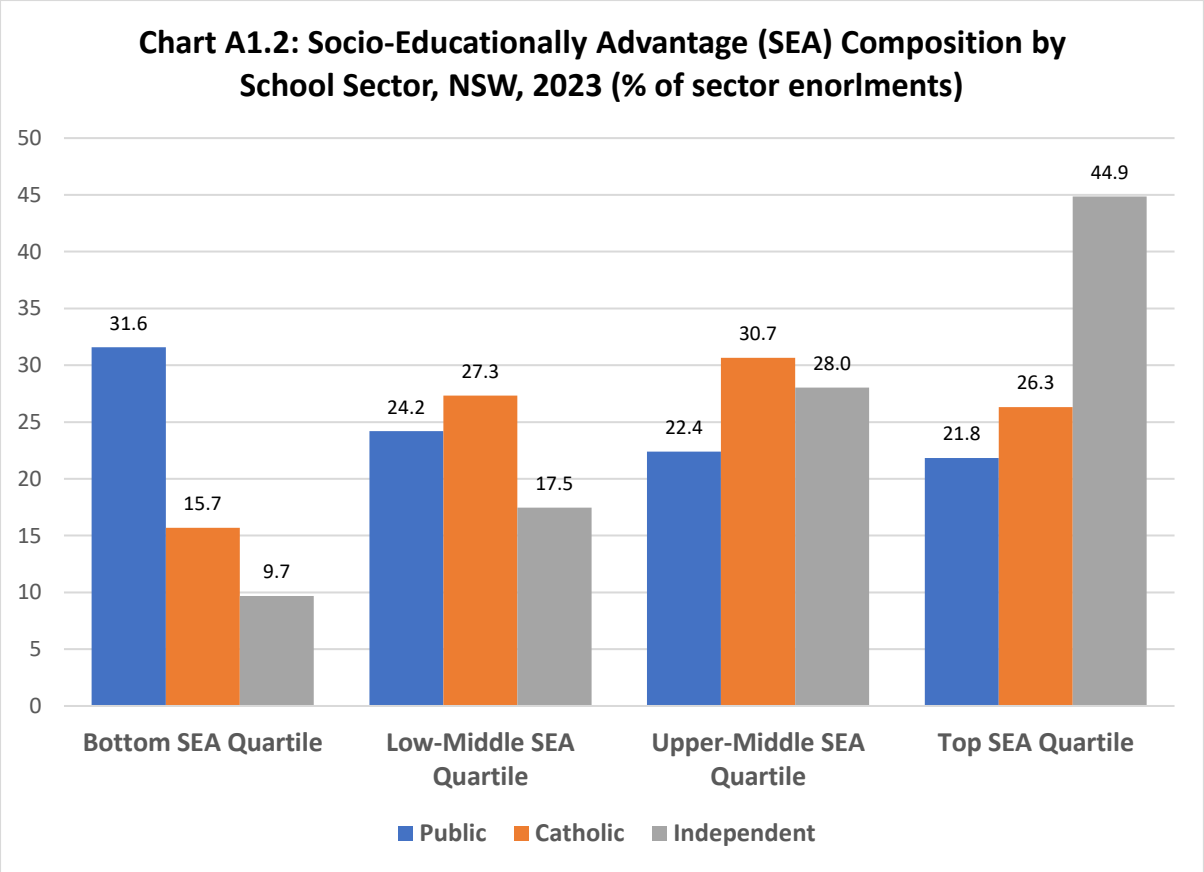


Chart A1.3: Socio-Educationally Advantage (SEA) Composition by School Sector, NT, 2023 (% of sector enorlments)

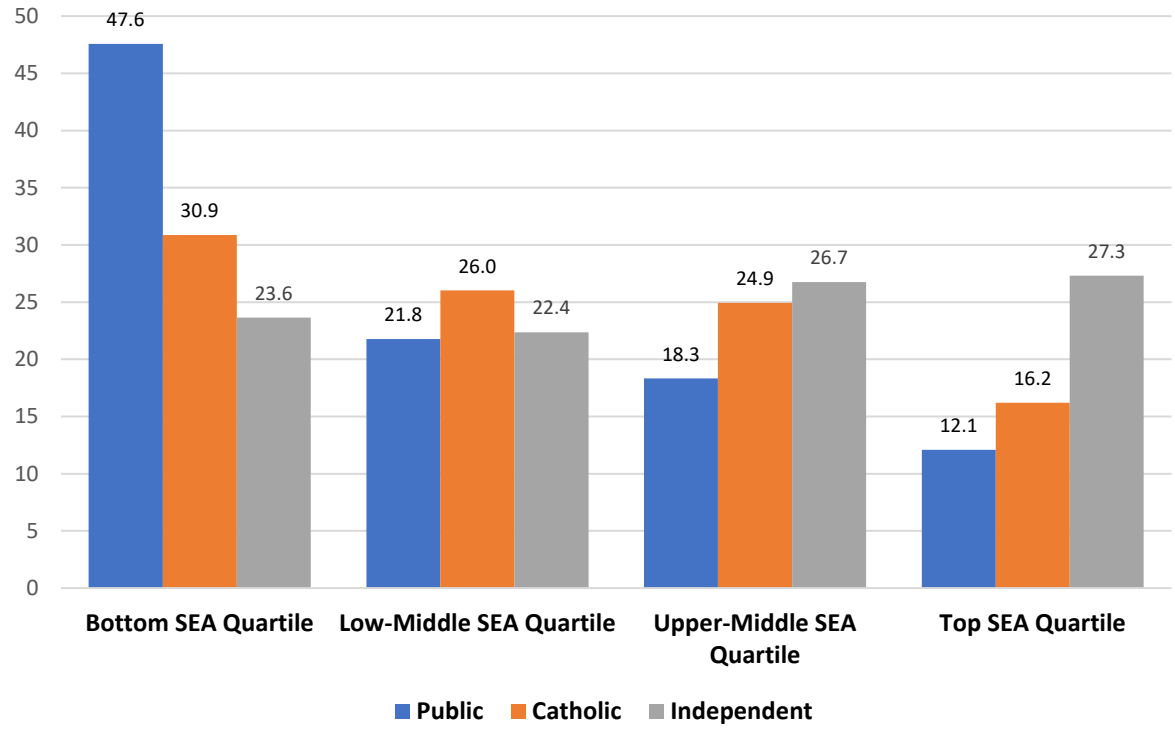


Chart A1.4: Socio-Educationally Advantage (SEA) Composition by School Sector, QLD, 2023 (% of sector enorlments)

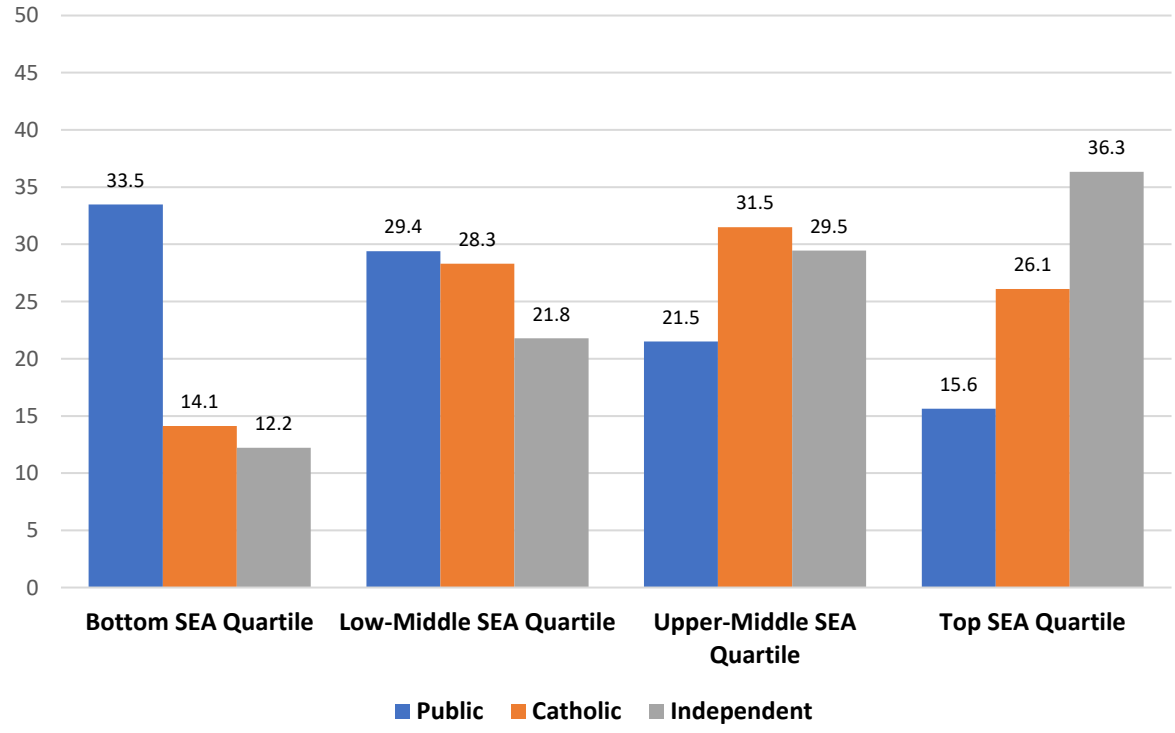


Chart A1.5: Socio-Educationally Advantage (SEA) Composition by School Sector, SA, 2023 (% sector enorlments)

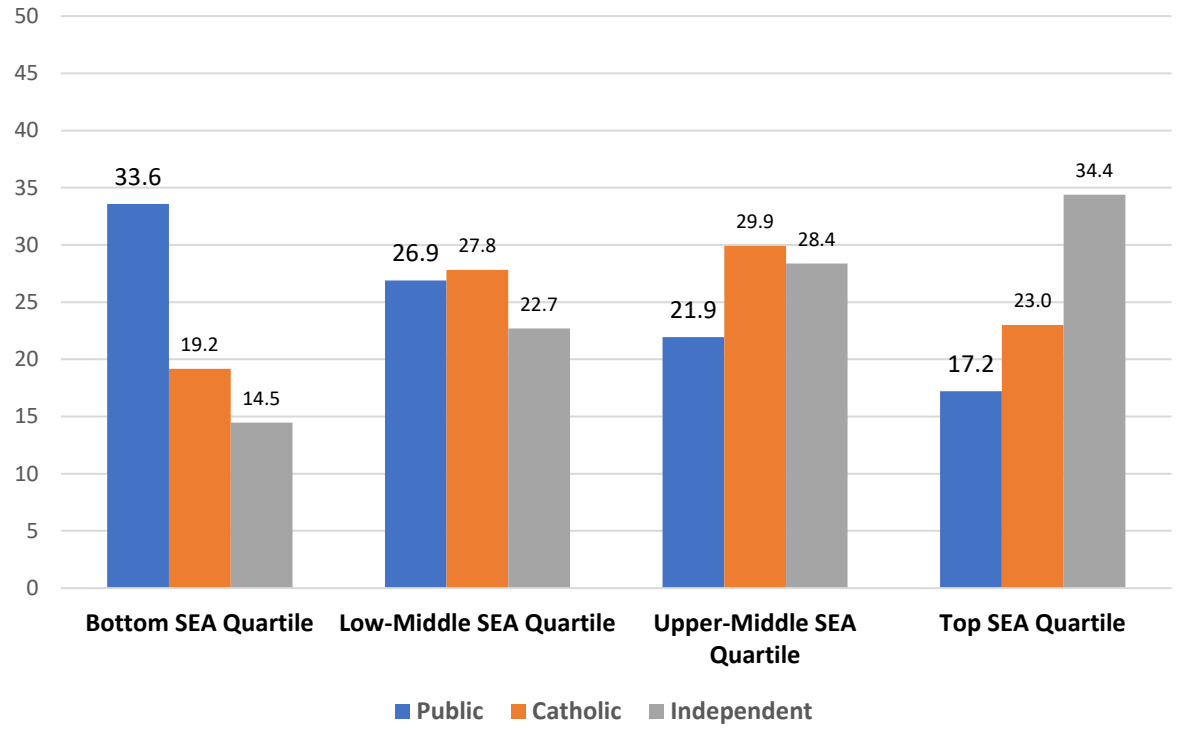


Chart A1.6: Socio-Educationally Advantage (SEA) Composition by School Sector, TAS, 2023 (% of sector enorlments)

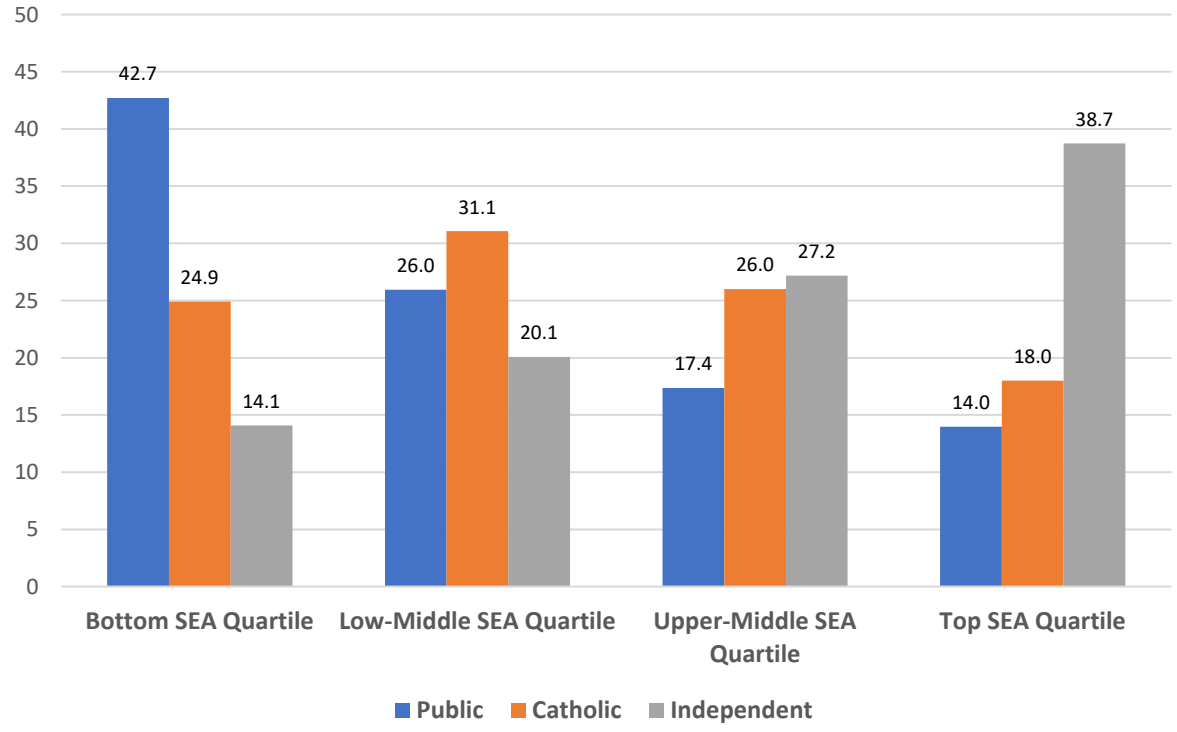


Chart A1.7: Socio-Educationally Advantage (SEA) Composition by School Sector, VIC, 2023 (% of sector enorlments)

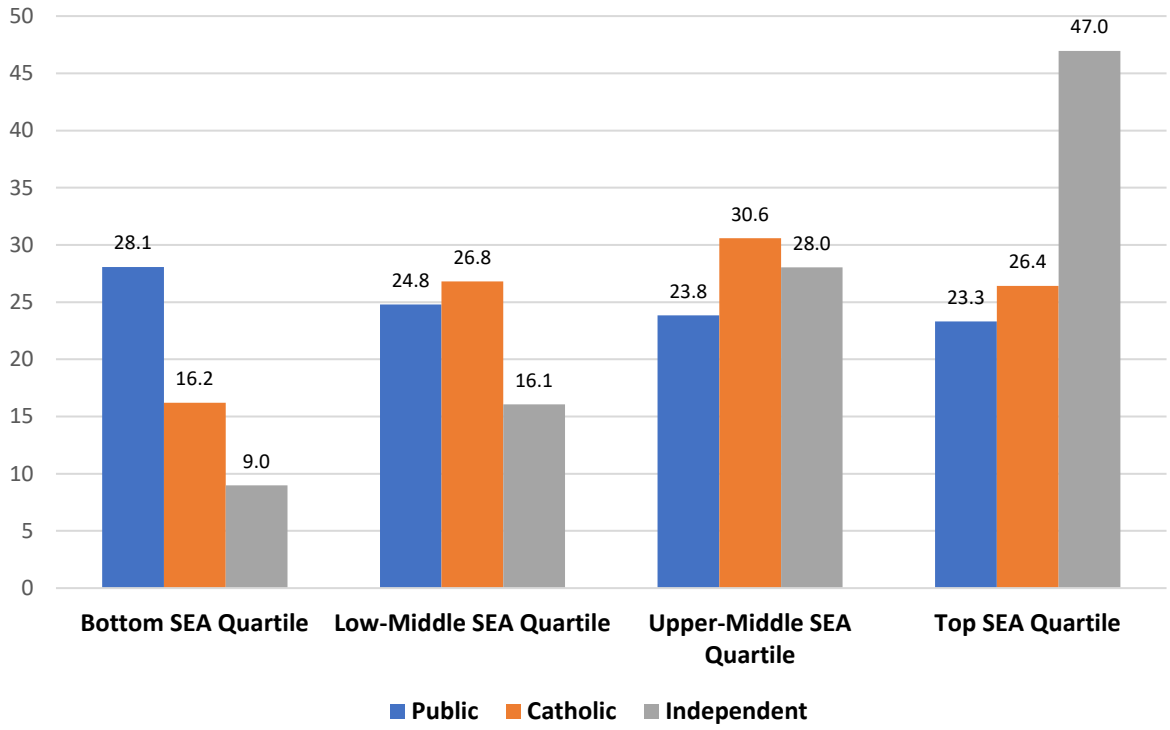
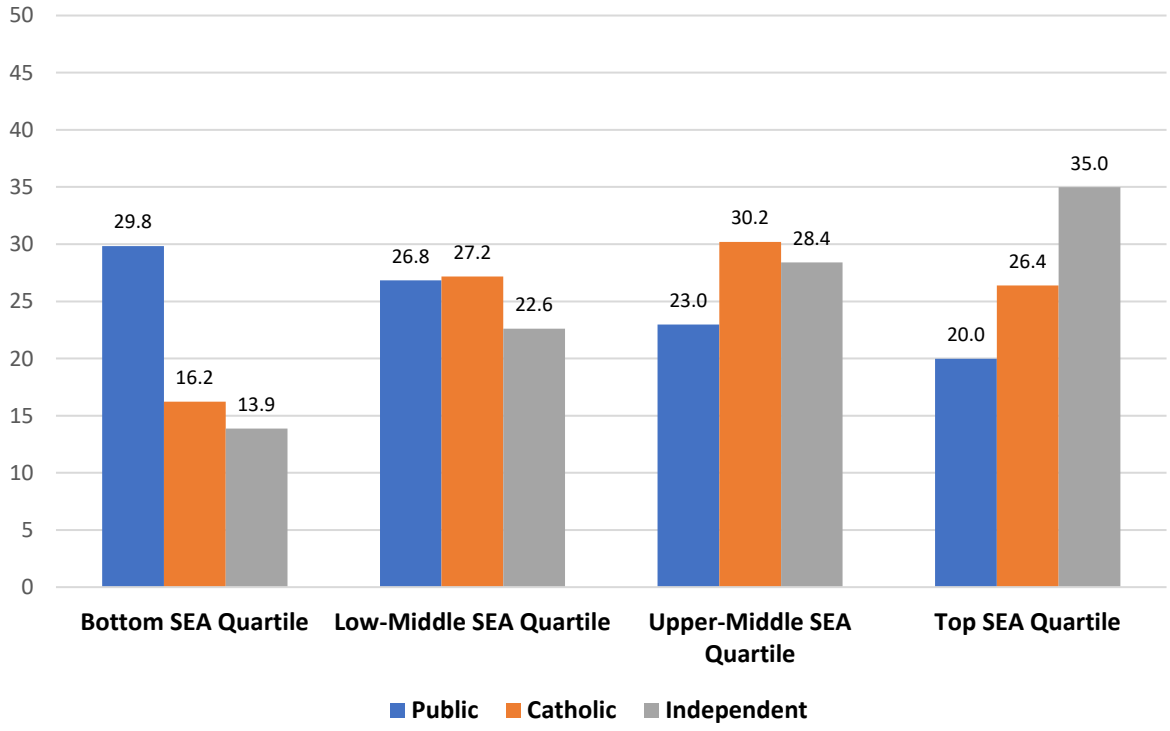


Chart A1.8: Socio-Educationally Advantage (SEA) Composition by School Sector, WA, 2023 (% of sector enorlments)



Attachment 2: Enrolments in Socio-Educationally Advantage Quartiles

Chart A2.1: Enrolments in Socio-Educationally Advantage (SEA) Quartiles by School Sector, ACT, 2023 (% of quartile enrolments)

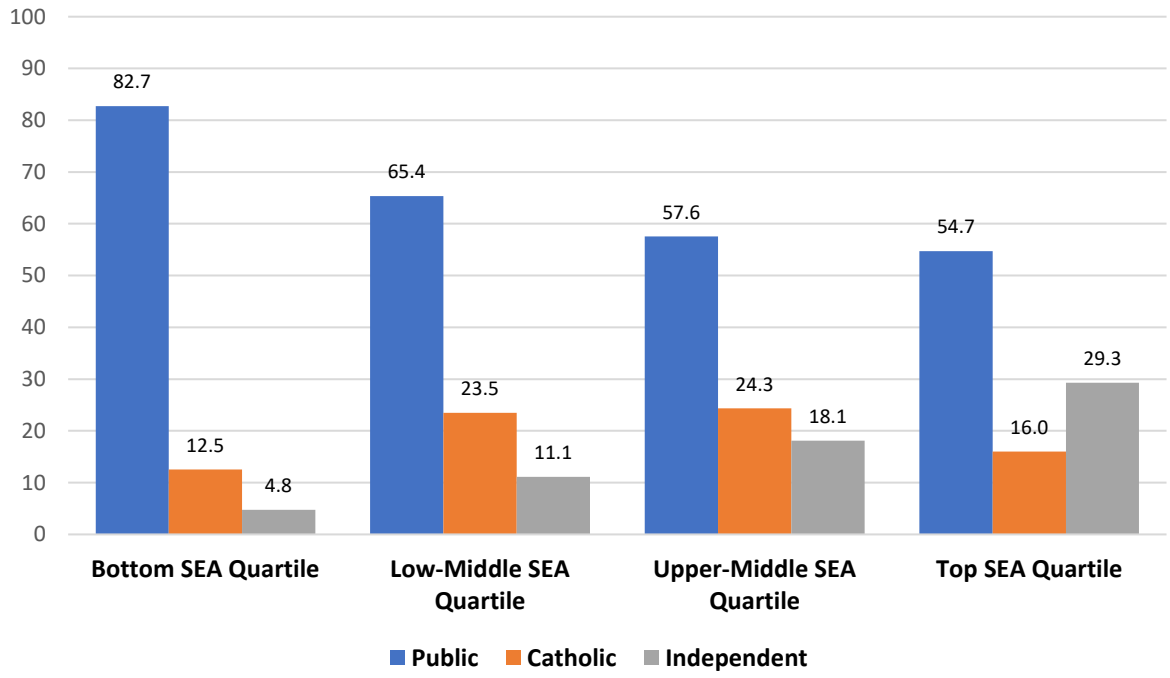


Chart A2.2: Enrolments in Socio-Educationally Advantage (SEA) Quartiles by School Sector, NSW, 2023 (% of quartile enrolments)

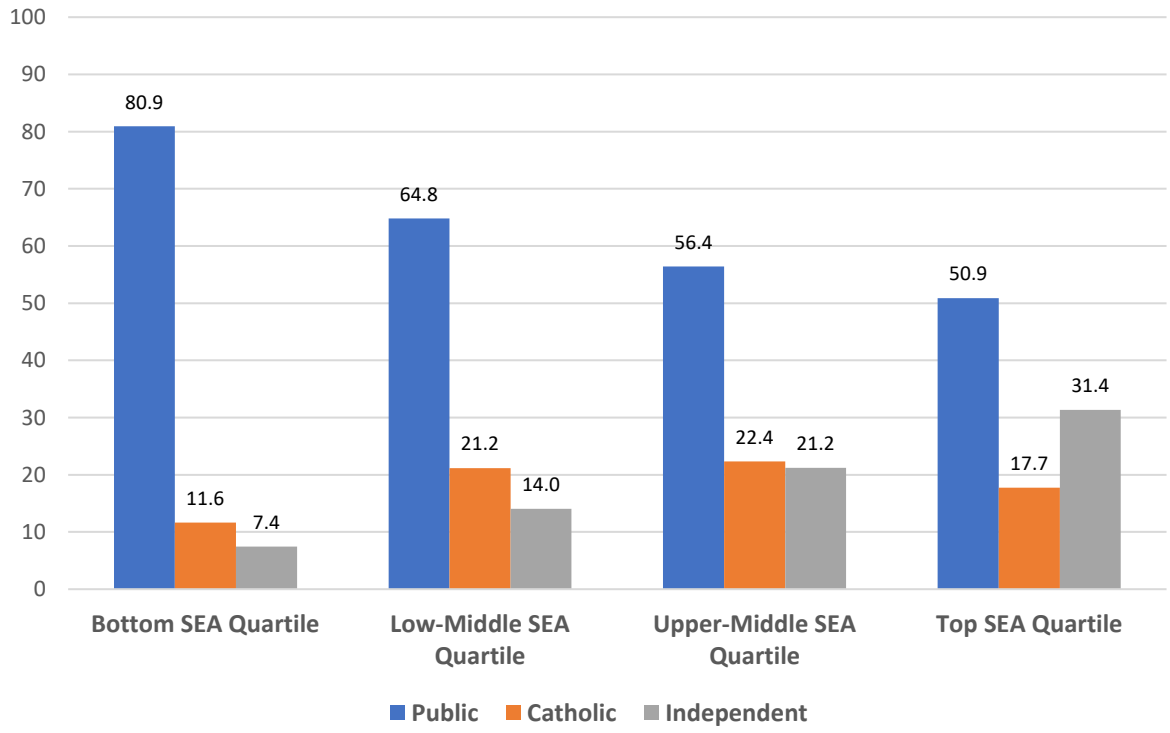


Chart A2.3: Enrolments in Socio-Educationally Advantage (SEA) Quartiles by School Sector, NT, 2023 (% of quartile enrolments)

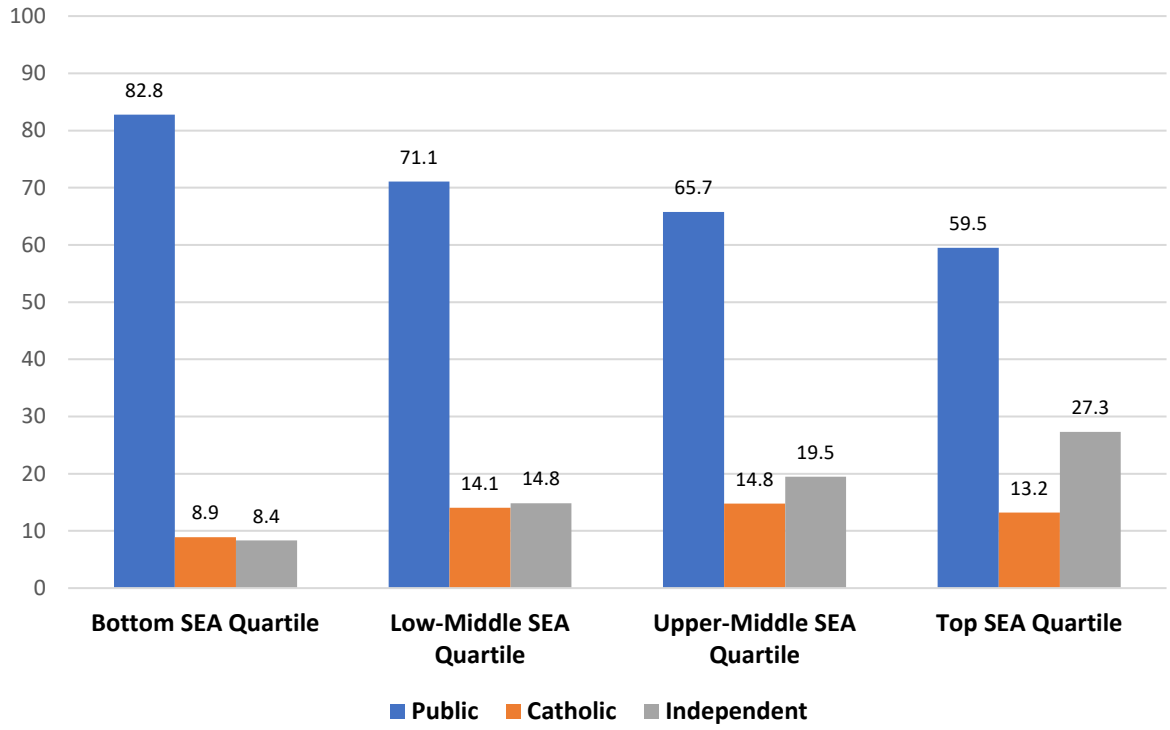


Chart A2.4: Enrolments in Socio-Educationally Advantage (SEA) Quartiles by School Sector, QLD, 2023 (% of quartile enrolments)

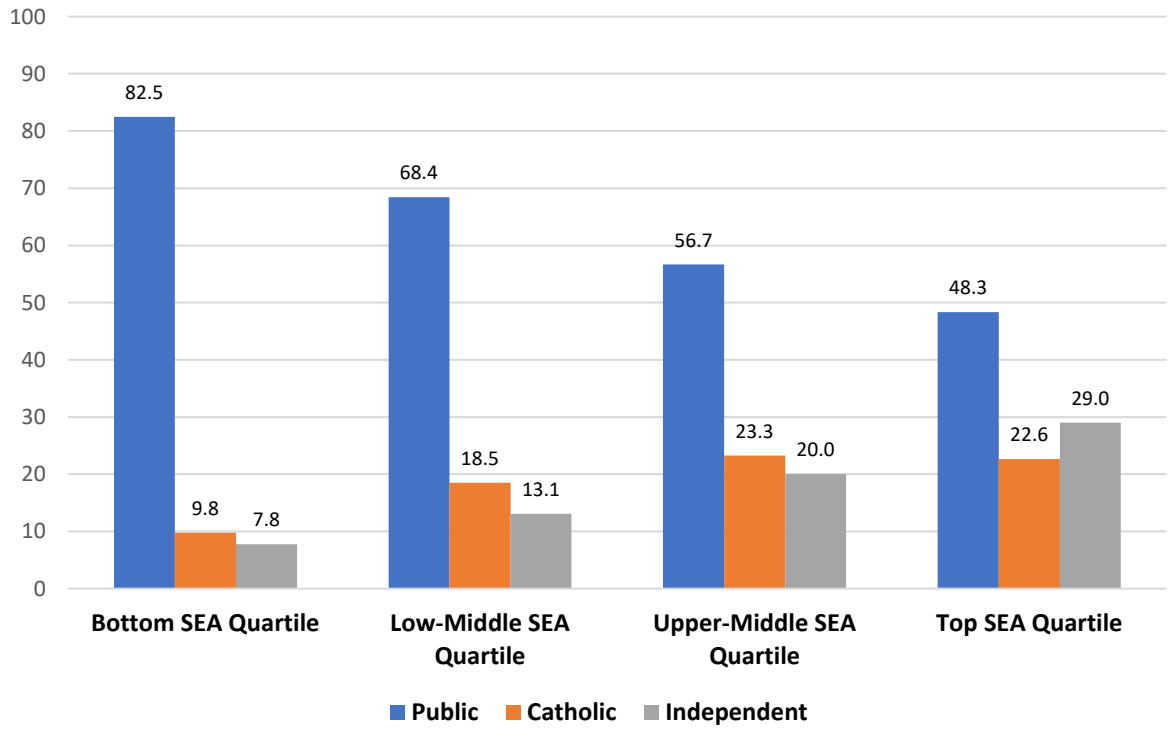


Chart A2.5: Enrolments in Socio-Educationally Advantage (SEA) Quartiles by School Sector, SA,, 2023 (% of quartile enrolments)

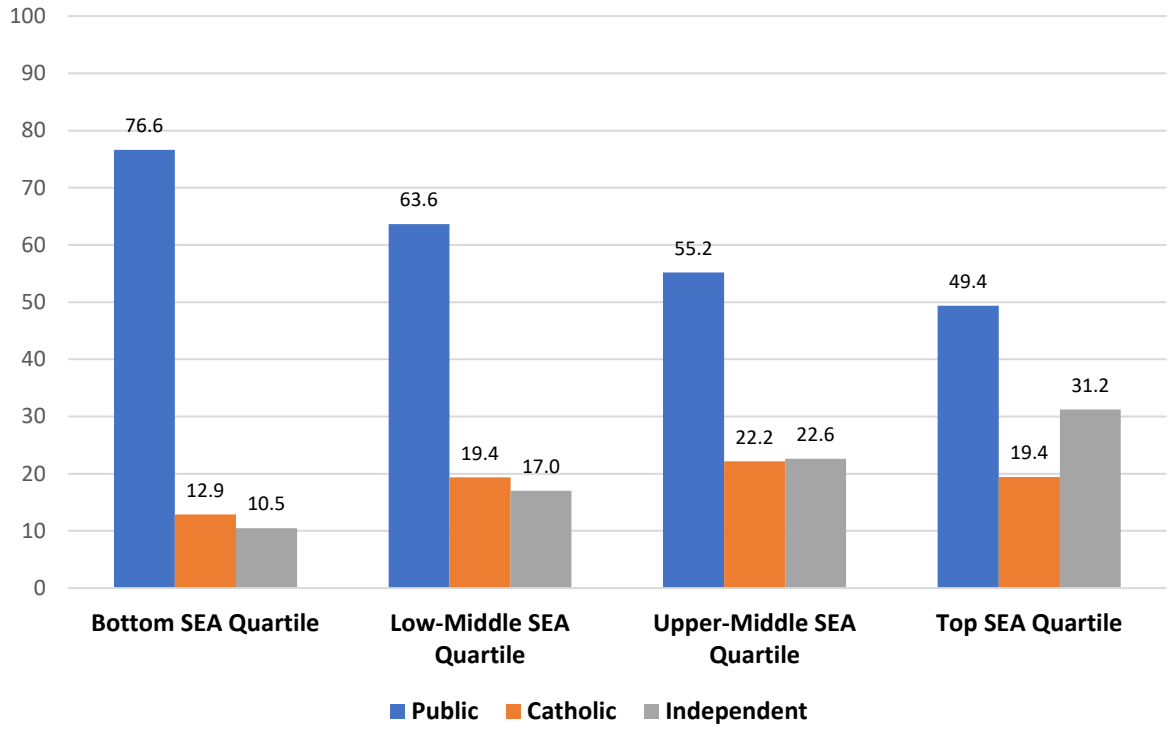


Chart A2.6: Enrolmentsiny Socio-Educationally Advantage (SEA) Quartiles by School Sector,TAS, 2023 (% of quartile enrolments)

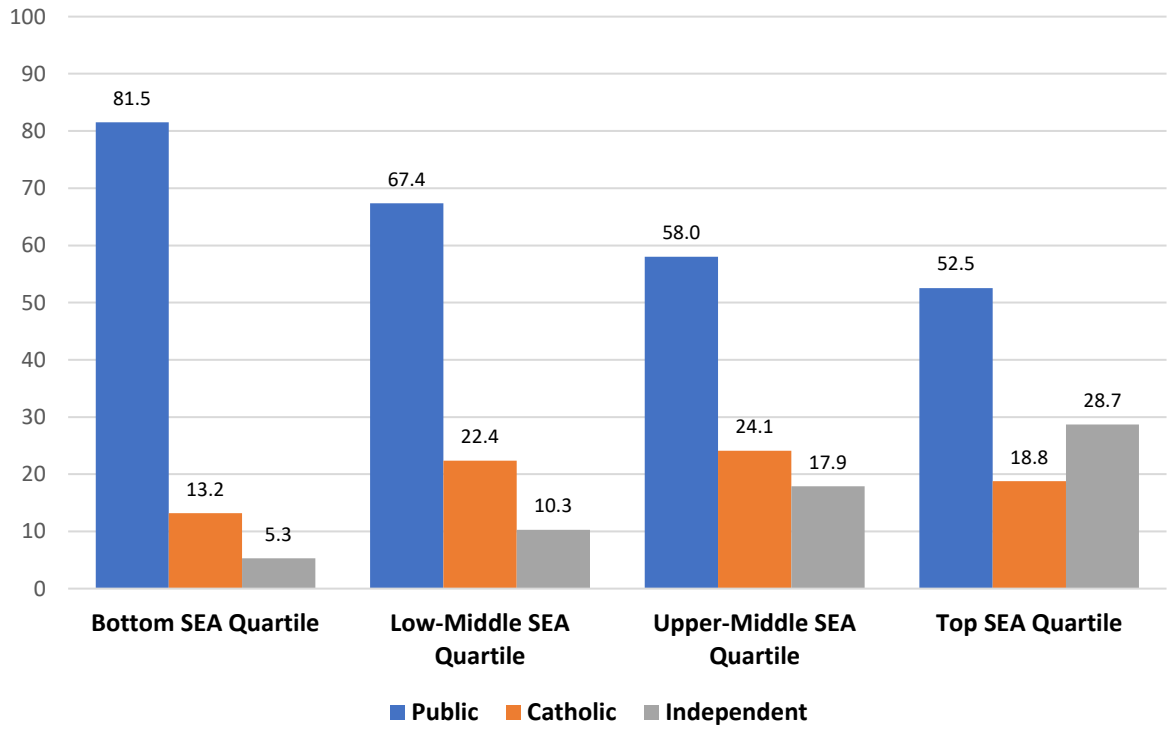


Chart A2.7: Enrolments iny Socio-Educationally Advantage (SEA) Quartiles by School Sector, VIC, 2023 (% of quartile enrolments)

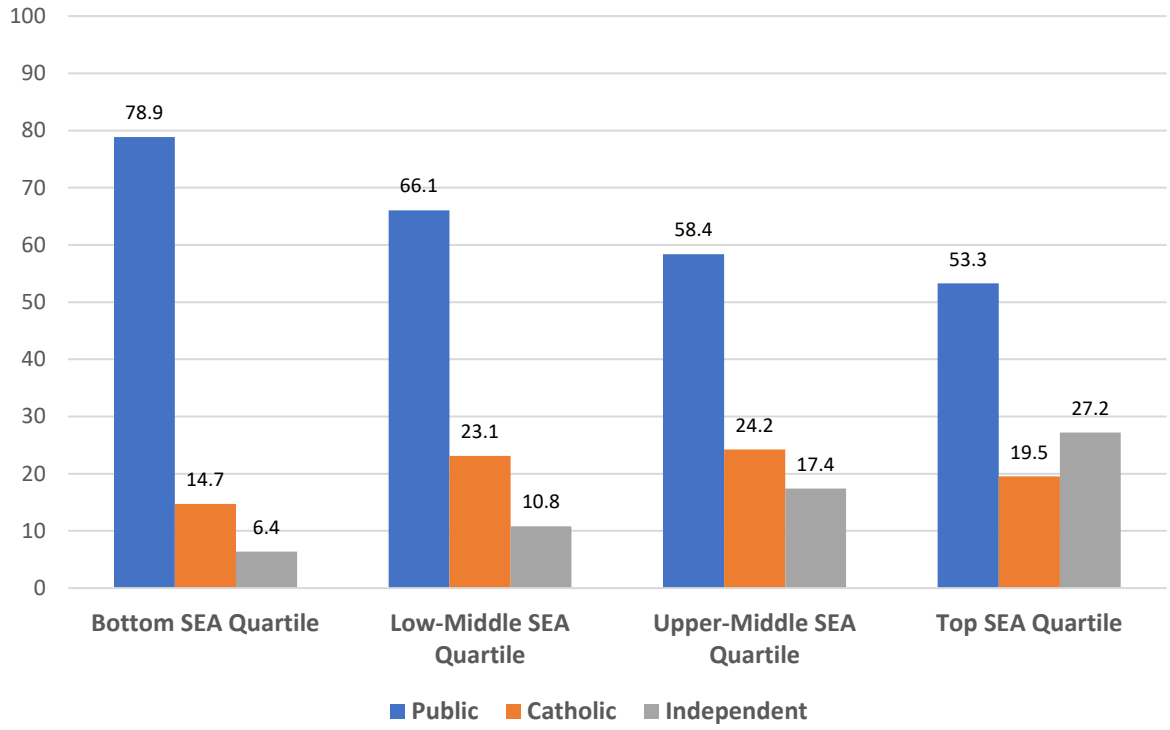
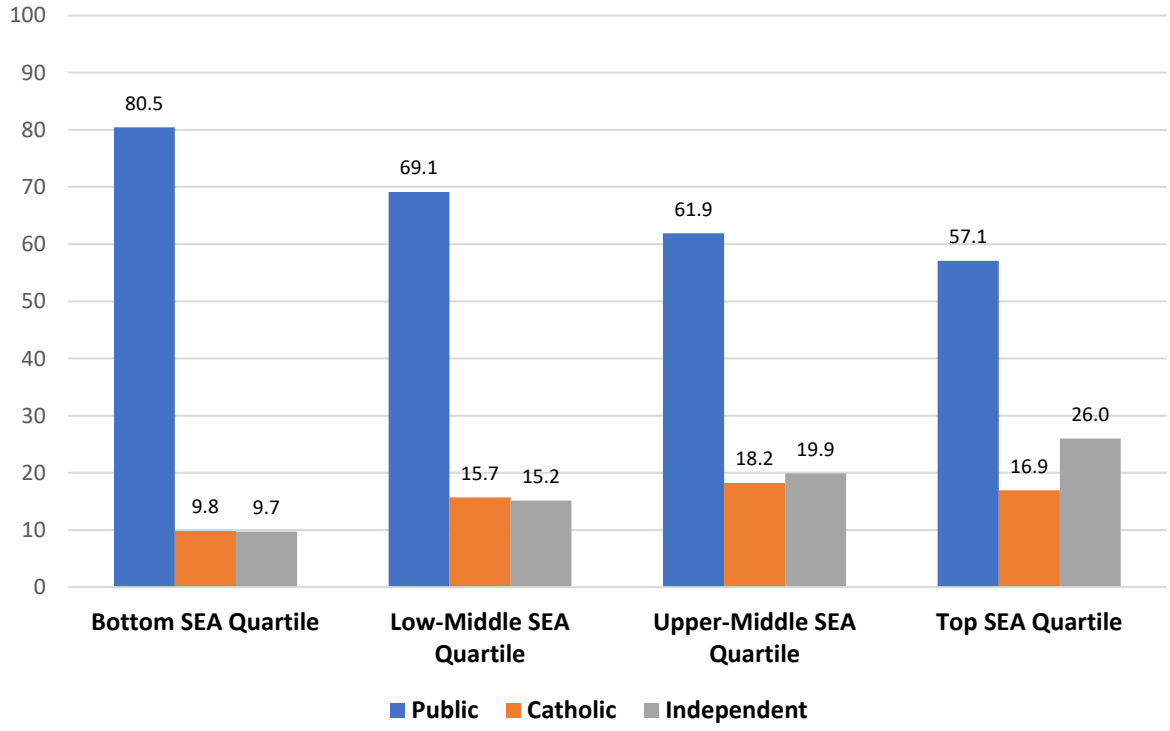


Chart A2.8: Enrolments in Socio-Educationally Advantage (SEA) Quartiles by School Sector, WA, 2023 (% of quartile enrolments)



Attachment 3: Schools With a High Concentrations of Students in the Lowest Socio-Educationally Advantaged Quartile – Quartile Schools

Chart A3.1: Schools With a High Concentrations of Students in the Lowest Socio-Educationally Advantage Quartile by School Sector, ACT, 2023 (% of concentration category)

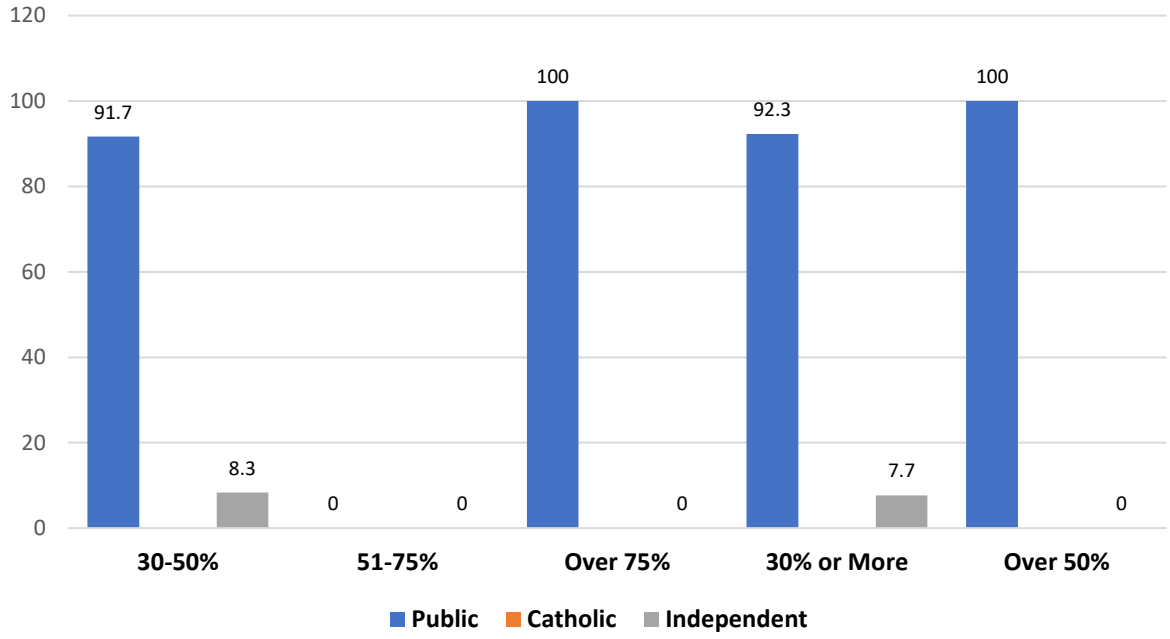


Chart A3.2: Schools With a High Concentrations of Students in the Lowest Socio-Educationally Advantage Quartile by School Sector, NSW, 2023 (% of concentration category)

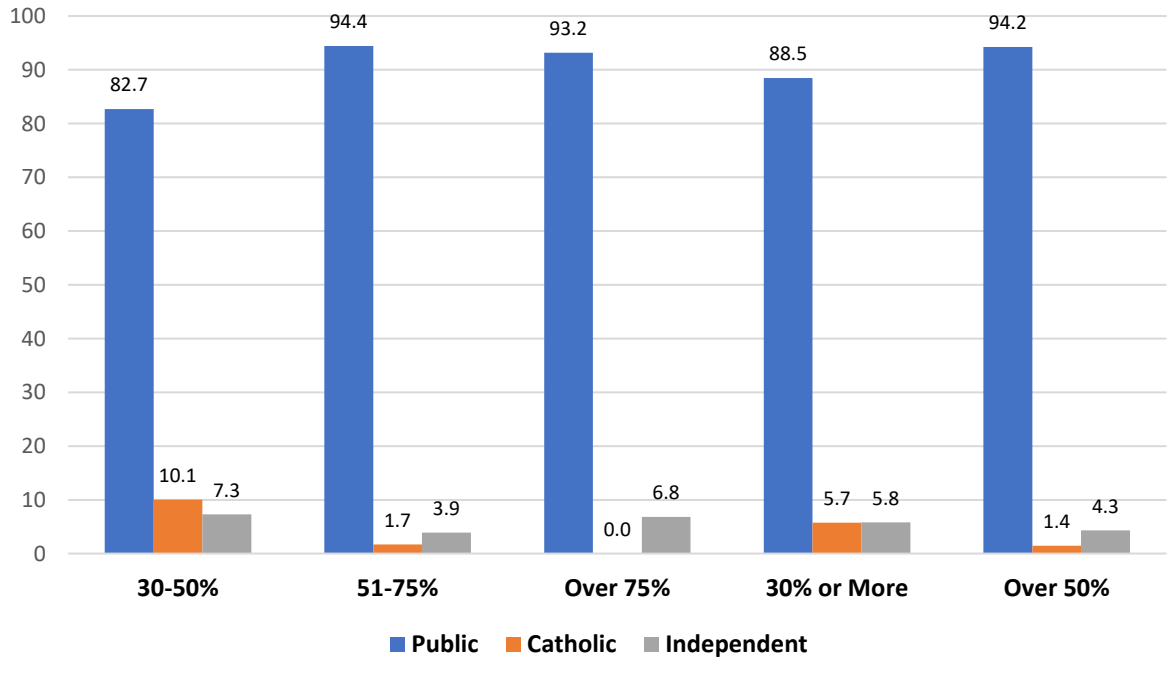


Chart A3.3: Schools With a High Concentrations of Students in the Lowest Socio-Educationally Advantage Quartile by School Sector, NT, 2023 (% of concentration category)

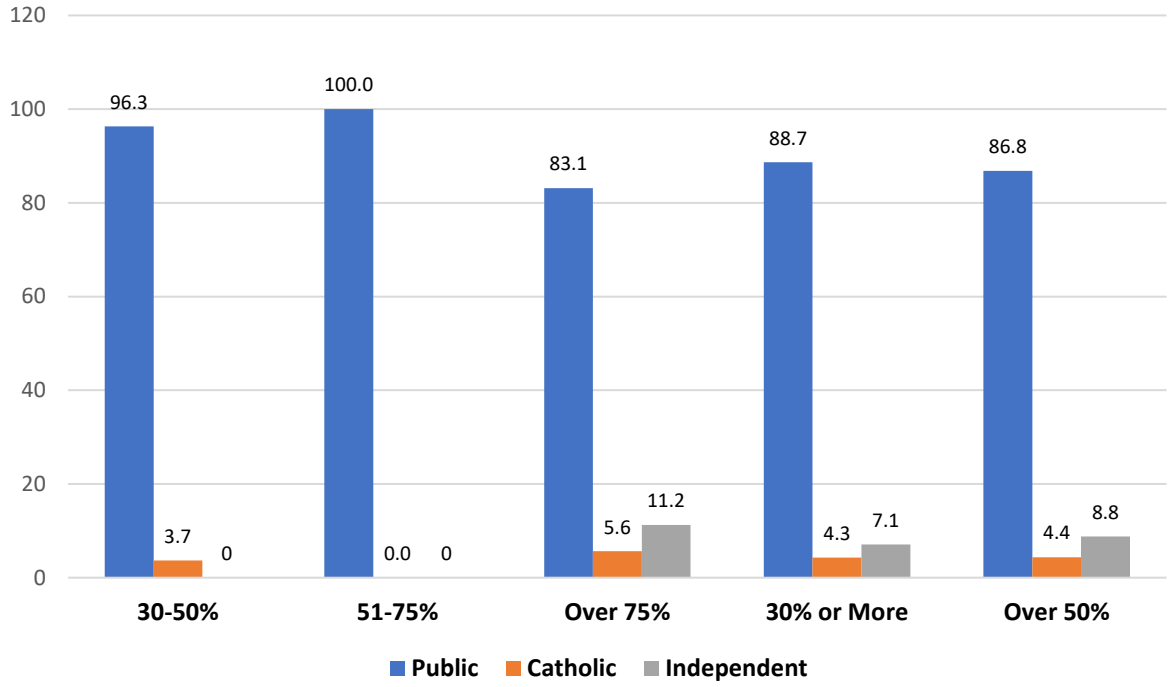


Chart A3.4: Schools With a High Concentrations of Students in the Lowest Socio-Educationally Advantage Quartile by School Sector, QLD, 2023 (% of concentration category)

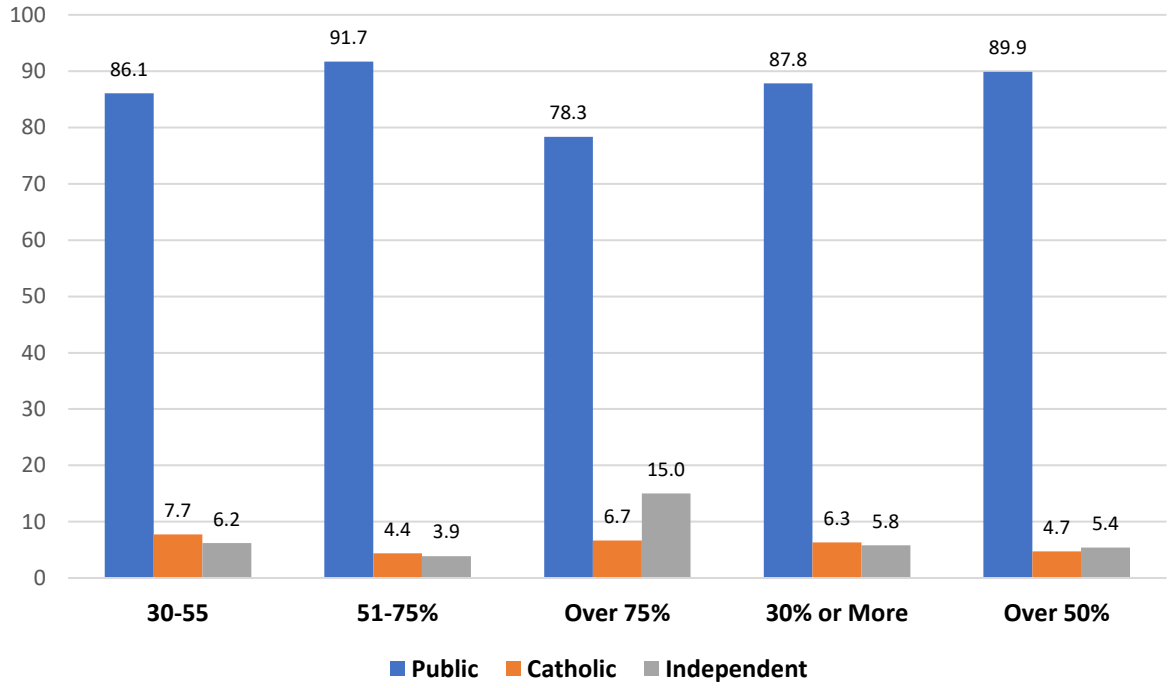


Chart A3.5: Schools With a High Concentrations of Students in the Lowest Socio-Educationally Advantage Quartile by School Sector, SA, 2023 (% of concentration category)

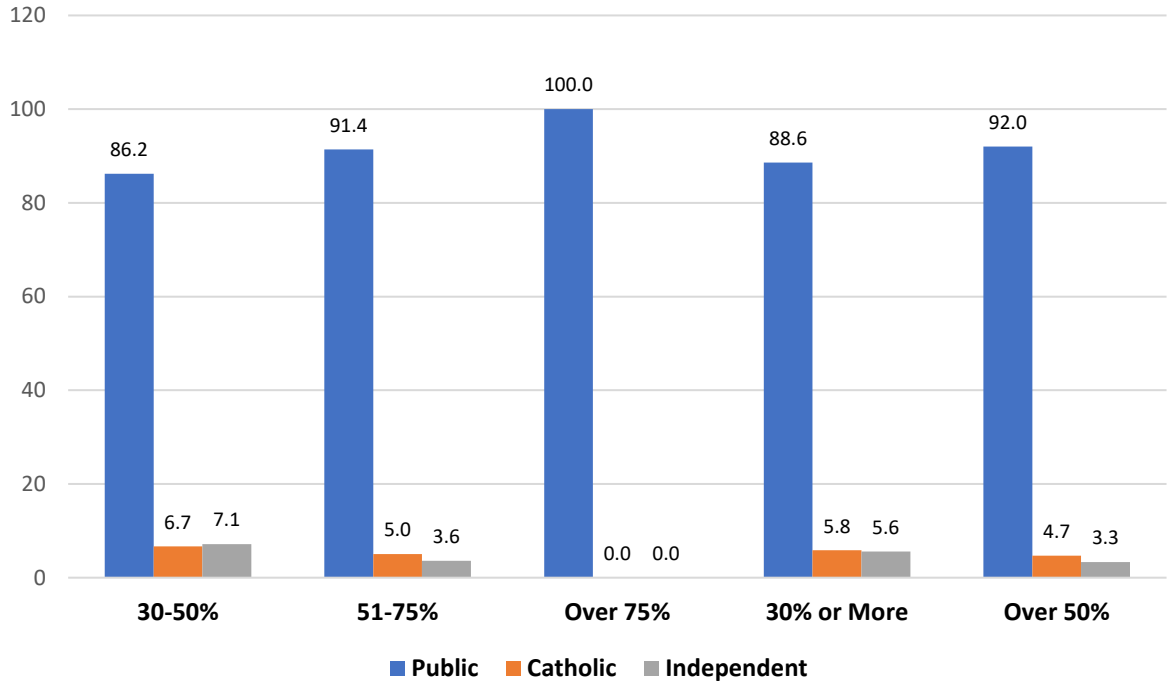


Chart A3.6: Schools With a High Concentrations of Students in the Lowest Socio-Educationally Advantage Quartile by School Sector, TAS, 2023 (% of concentration category)

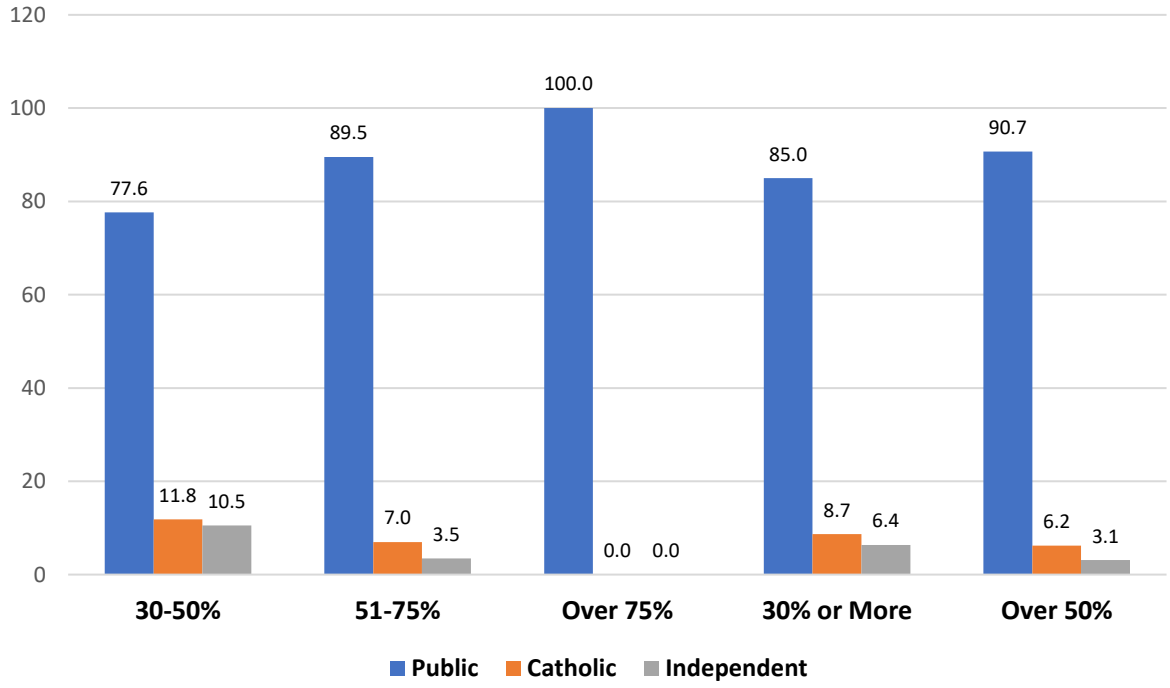


Chart A3.7: Schools With a High Concentrations of Students in the Lowest Socio-Educationally Advantage Quartile by School Sector, VIC, 2023 (% of concentration category)

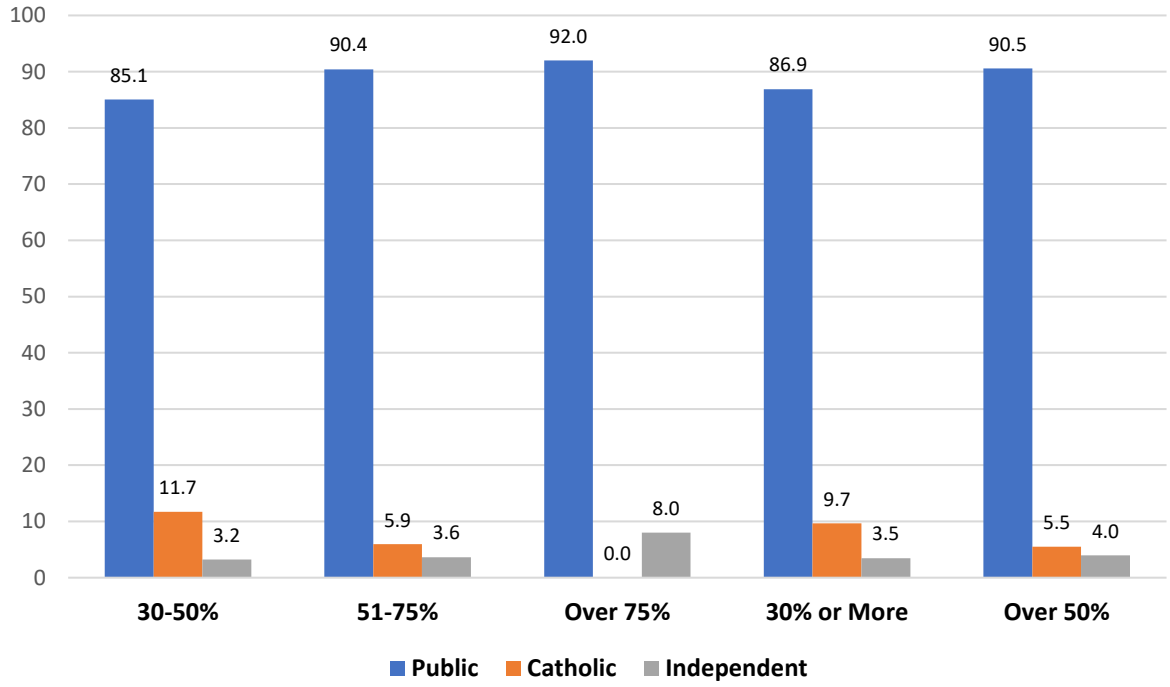
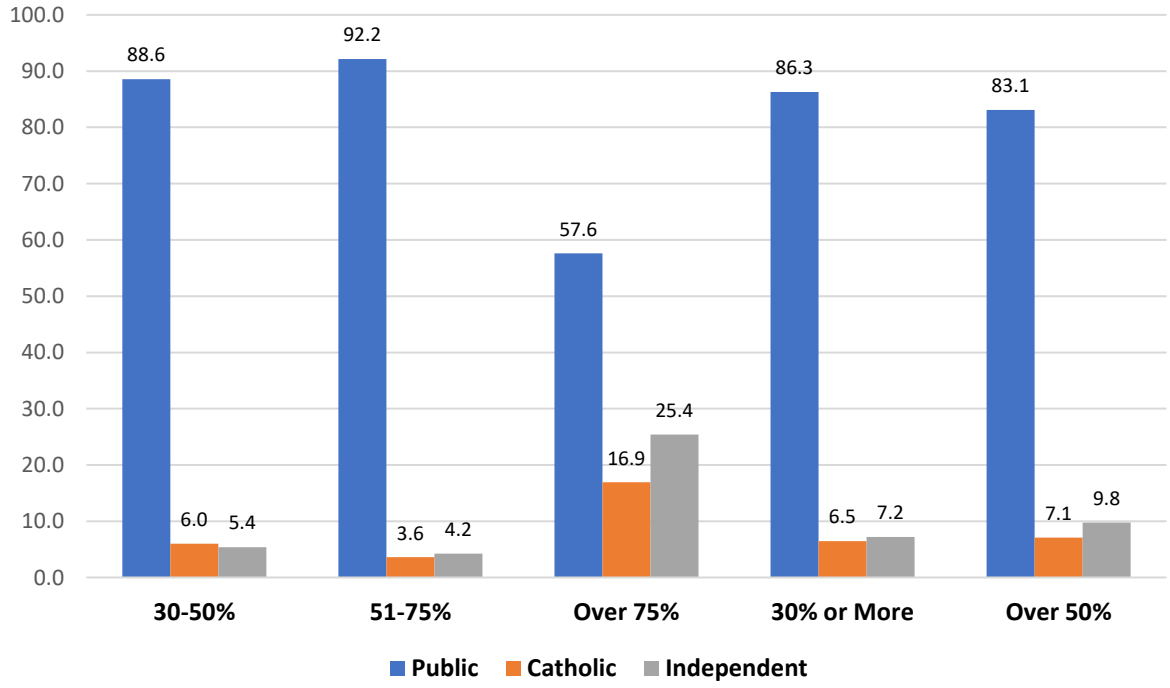
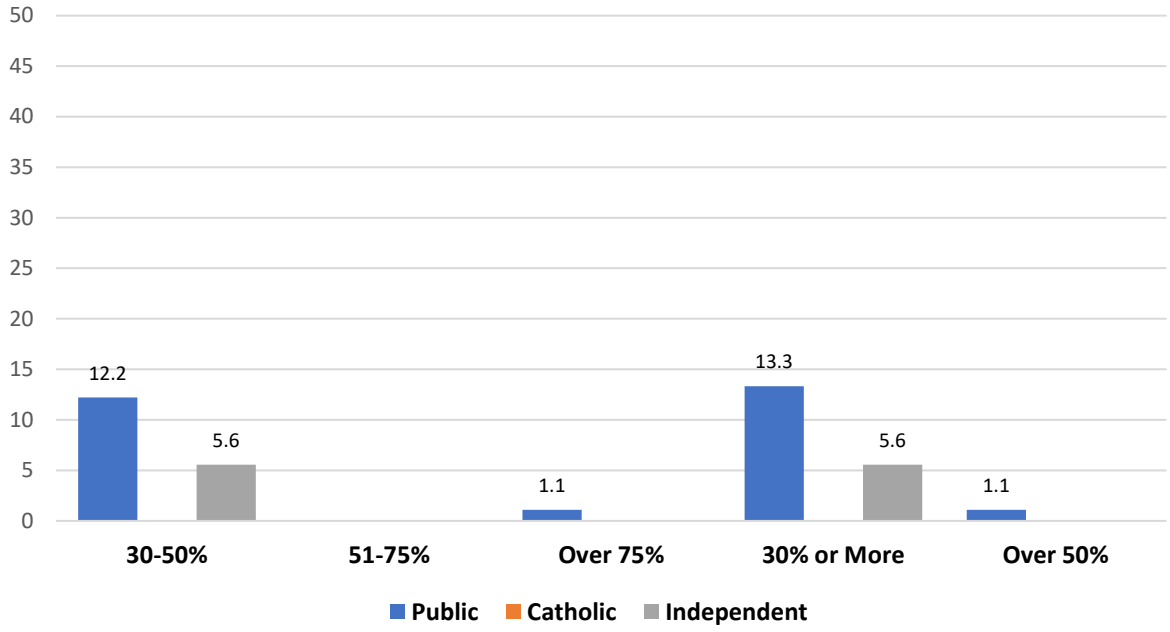


Chart A3.8: Schools With a High Concentrations of Students in the Lowest Socio-Educationally Advantage Quartile by School Sector, WA ((% of concentration category)



Attachment 4: Schools With a High Concentrations of Students in the Lowest Socio-Educationally Advantage Quartile by School Sector

Chart A4.1: Schools With a High Concentration of Stdents in the Lowest Socio-Educationally Advantage Quartile, ACT, 2023 (% of sector schools)



Charat A4.2: Schools With a High Concentration of Stdents in the Lowest Socio-Educationally Advantage Quartile, NSW, 2023 (% of sector schools)

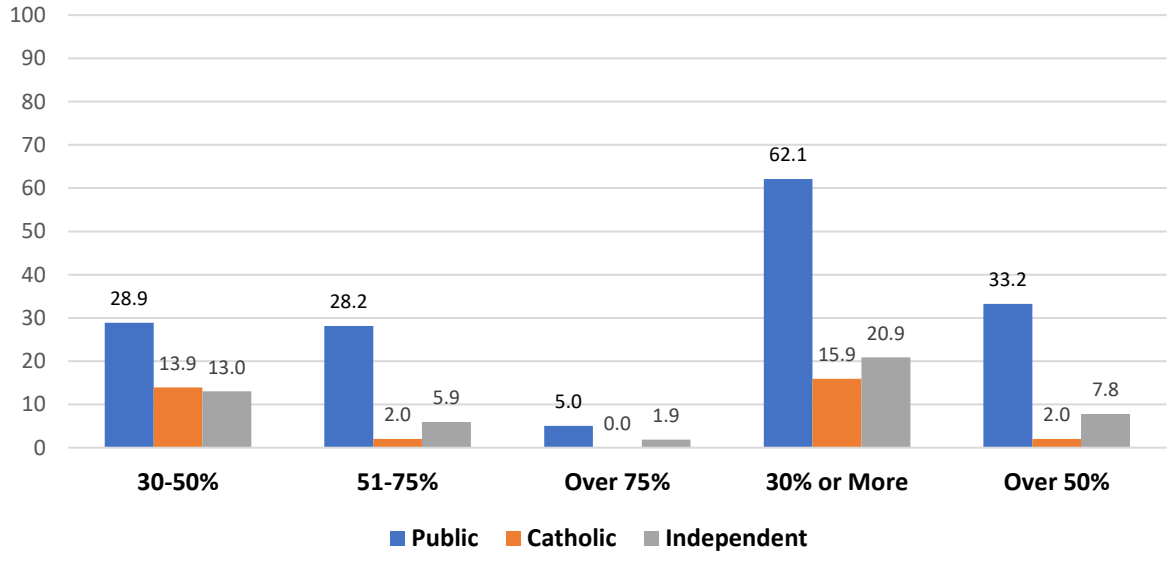


Chart A4.3: Schools With a High Concentration of Stdents in the Lowest Socio-Educationally Advantage Quartile, NT, 2023 (% of sector schools)

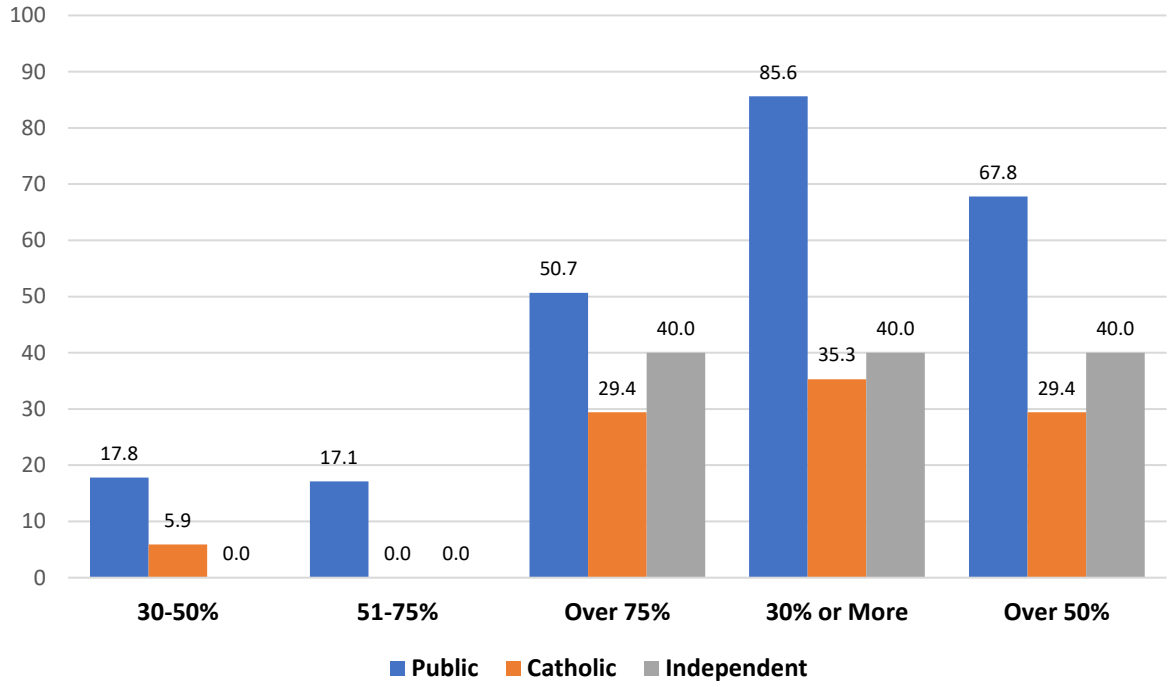


Chart A4.4: Schools With a High Concentration of Stdents in the Lowest Socio-Educationally Advantage Quartile, QLD, 2023 (% of sector schools)

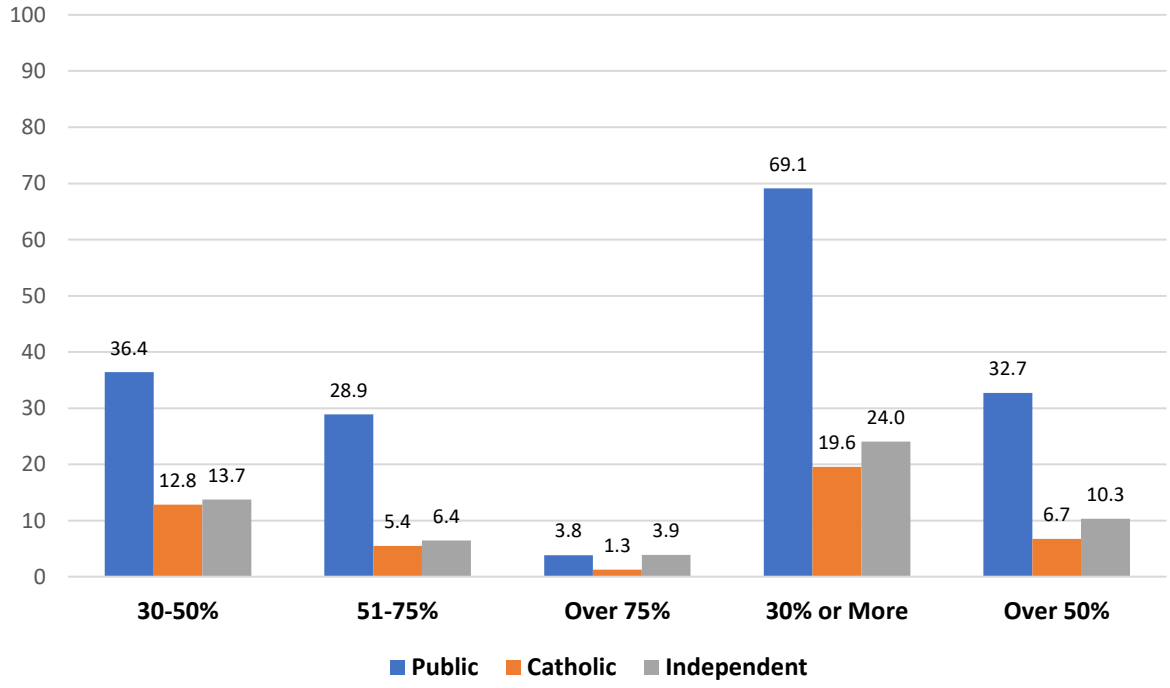


Chart A4.5: Schools With a High Concentration of Stdents in the Lowest Socio-Educationally Advantage Quartile, SA, 2023 (% of sector schools)

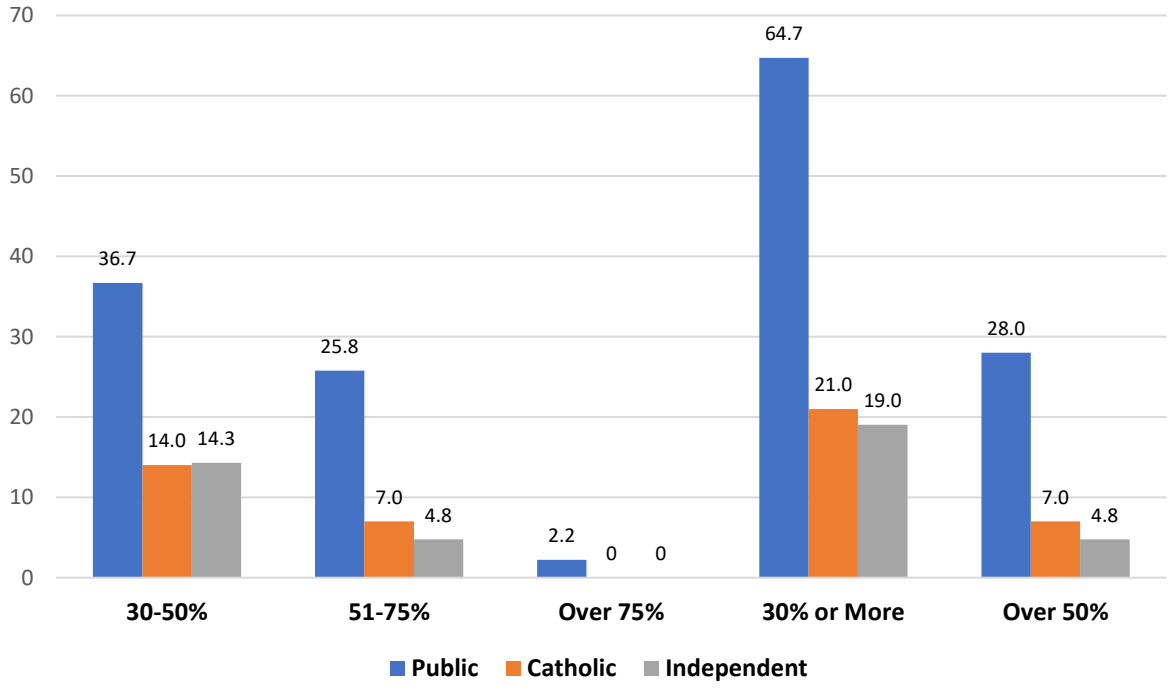


Chart A4.6: Schools With a High Concentration of Stdents in the Lowest Socio-Educationally Advantage Quartile, TAS, 2023 (% of sector schools)

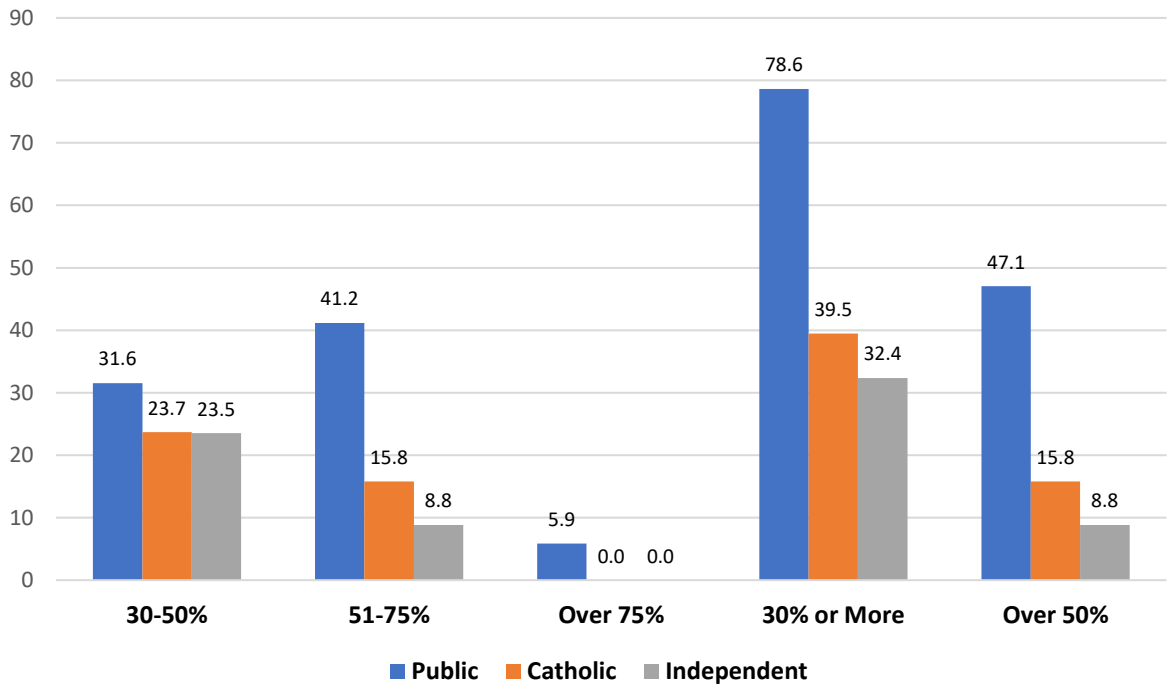


Chart A4.7: Schools With a High Concentration of Stdents in the Lowest Socio-Educationally Advantage Quartile, VIC, 2023 (% of sector schools)

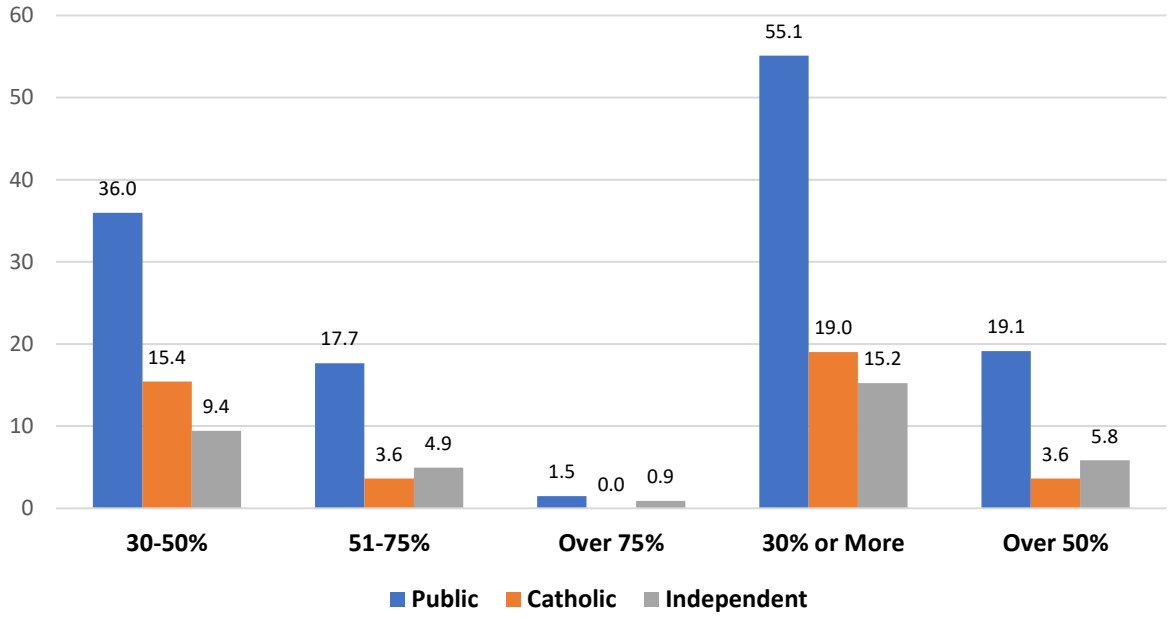


Chart A4.8: Schools With a High Concentration of Stdents in the Lowest Socio-Educationally Advantage Quartile, WA, 2023 (% of sector schools)