



16 December 2025

Dear Committee Members,

Re: Inquiry into Public School Funding

1. Introduction

This submission makes three essential points:

- First, the funding gap between Victorian government schools and their interstate counterparts must be closed urgently—the delay until 2031 denies an entire generation of students the resources they need.
- Second, once funding equity is achieved, we must ensure clarity and effective implementation of policies, practices and programs that will deliver education equity for students in low-SES communities.
- Third, achieving this requires genuine partnership across the system, including meaningful collaboration with the students and teachers who experience these challenges daily.

Education Equity Alliance (EEA) has established two mechanisms to enable this partnership: a School Network supporting 40+ schools to work with their communities on shared improvement priorities for equity, and The Collective—an innovative collective impact initiative for education equity, bringing together [25 leading organisations](#) with a Leadership Council that unites students, teachers and sector leaders to guide systemic change.

2. The Urgent Imperative: Funding Equity as a foundation for Education Equity

Victorian government schools face a critical funding shortfall. We support Victorian Principals Association's analysis in their submission: these schools receive less per-student funding than their counterparts in other Australian states and territories. The government's decision to postpone reaching 75% of the Schooling Resource Standard until 2031 removes \$2.4 billion from schools serving Victoria's most vulnerable students—those who need resources most.

The consequences are immediate and compounding. Each year of delay represents another cohort progressing through primary education without access to adequate intervention supports, specialist programs, teaching resources, and modern learning environments. The VPA submission details how this impacts everything from basic classroom materials to professional learning, from building maintenance to employment of additional staff to reduce workloads. We strongly support their recommendation that the Victorian Government commit to full SRS funding no later than 2028.

Critically, this State funding delay also constrains Commonwealth contributions, as federal funding is calculated as a percentage of the SRS. Victorian students thus face a double disadvantage: reduced State investment and diminished federal support. This structural inequity cannot continue.

Yet while adequate funding provides the essential foundation, resources alone will not shift entrenched educational inequity. The system must also address how policies and programs are designed, coordinated and implemented in low-SES school communities. Schools currently navigate fragmented supports, unclear role expectations, and barriers to genuine partnership with students and families in shaping improvement efforts. Funding equity must be accompanied by systemic clarity and genuine collaboration.

3. Beyond Funding: Building System Conditions for Equity

Education Equity Alliance has spent the past year engaging over 2,000 students, teachers and stakeholders from low-SES school communities to understand what enables or prevents educational equity. Students tell us these conversations are often their first opportunity to discuss systemic fairness in education. Several patterns emerge consistently:

Relationships as pathways to equity. Strong connections between students and teachers unlock engagement with learning and wellbeing supports. When these relationships break down or lack key qualities—mutual respect, high expectations, genuine understanding of student backgrounds—opportunities are missed. What we have consistently heard is that these relationships are under the most strain in the low-SES school communities that need them most.

Fragmented rather than coordinated supports. Schools and students can access numerous programs and services, yet these often operate in silos. Schools may engage multiple community organisations without clear coordination mechanisms. This fragmentation reduces impact and can increase school workload.

Teacher capacity under pressure. Educators in low-SES communities work to implement evidence-based teaching, whole-school wellbeing approaches, behaviour frameworks, intervention programs, and enrichment activities—all while managing significant student needs. Without adequate time, clear whole-school systems, and reduction of competing demands, it can

be a source of significant pressure to endeavour to deliver what you know all students will benefit from.

Student voice largely absent. Young people want meaningful input into the supports designed for them and the learning opportunities they access. Yet students from low-SES school communities, especially those most at risk, rarely participate in designing improvement priorities or shaping program implementation.

From these insights, we have [mapped improvement priorities](#) across six system conditions: policies and practices (academic, wellbeing, engagement); resource flows (funding, materials, coordination, teacher time, leadership capacity); relationships and power dynamics (student-teacher, peer-to-peer, school-family, school-system); and mental models (beliefs about student aspirations, unconditional positive regard, shared visions for equity, role clarity). This map recognises these conditions are interconnected and require ongoing attention from all parts of the system.

Crucially, while schools can and do work to shift these conditions within their communities, they cannot achieve systemic equity alone. School leaders and teachers demonstrate extraordinary commitment and innovation in responding to their students' needs. However, some conditions sit beyond individual school control: funding structures that concentrate disadvantage; fragmented service systems that schools must navigate; policy expectations that place competing demands on limited time; and community-wide beliefs about education's purpose and value. Shifting these conditions requires government, the wider education sector, and community stakeholders to work in genuine partnership with schools. This is not about absolving schools of responsibility—it is about recognising that educational equity is a shared endeavour requiring coordinated action across multiple levels of the system. When schools carry sole responsibility for addressing systemic barriers, we set them up for challenging choices and the risk of significant burnout.

4. Mechanisms for Systemic Partnership: EEA's School Network and The Collective

Education Equity Alliance has established two interconnected mechanisms to translate these insights into action and to enable greater collaboration:

The School Network works with 40+ Victorian low-SES schools, supporting them to engage their students and teachers in identifying context-specific improvement priorities for improved equity. This builds school leadership capacity for strategic response while surfacing shared challenges and enabling both local and system-level collaboration to address them.

The Collective is an innovative collective impact initiative explicitly focused on education equity in Victorian low-SES communities. Twenty-five leading organisations—spanning education support, wellbeing services, research bodies, philanthropic foundations, and peak bodies—have

committed to collaborative action on shared priorities. Members include Alannah & Madeline Foundation, ARACY, Brian M. Davis Charitable Foundation, Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, Centre for Multicultural Youth, COOL-ORG, Country Education Partnership, Foundation House, Learning Creates Australia, Life Without Barriers, Living Ripples/The Phillips Foundation, Northern Centre for Excellence in Student Engagement (Banksia Gardens Family Services), Our Place, Parents Victoria, PMF Foundation, Project Rokit, The Ross Trust, Smiling Mind, State Schools' Relief, Teach For Australia, The Smith Family, VAEAI, Victorian Principals Association, and VicSRC.

Through extensive co-design processes, The Collective has identified three initial priorities that it is currently pursuing: establishing a shared practical definition of equity in low-SES school contexts (what does it actually look like in practice?); strengthening coordination of member supports through mapping coverage across Victorian schools and developing agreed partnership protocols; and identifying conditions that enable strong student-teacher relationships through action research led by students and educators. Findings from these groups will be shared at an Annual Summit in July 2026, informing both member practice and system advocacy.

The Leadership Council sits at the heart of The Collective's governance model. This Council brings students and educators from low-SES schools into shared decision-making with member organisation representatives. Students and teachers don't simply provide input—they exercise genuine authority over The Collective's strategic direction, priority-setting and advocacy positions. This model recognises that those experiencing inequity daily hold essential knowledge about what needs to change and how change can most effectively occur. The Council challenges traditional power dynamics where system stakeholders design solutions in isolation from school communities, instead, embedding co-leadership and shared accountability.

5. Conclusion: Partnership as Pathway

We acknowledge and celebrate the contributions of participating schools, member organisations, and the over 1,000 students, teachers and stakeholders who have shaped this work. Their engagement demonstrates both the hunger for systemic change and the expertise that exists within low-SES school communities and across our not-for-profit sector.

Restoring the full \$2.4 billion SRS funding commitment is essential and urgent. The Victorian Government must act to ensure students currently in schools receive the resources they need, not defer this obligation to future cohorts. We support the Victorian Principals Association's call for full State commitment by 2028 and achievement of 100% SRS by 2030.

Equally important is how the system partners with low-SES school communities in designing and implementing improvement efforts. The Victorian Government has an opportunity to demonstrate leadership by engaging with initiatives like The Collective's Leadership Council—models that genuinely share power with students and teachers in shaping systemic responses to inequity.

Educational equity requires both adequate resources and authentic partnership. Victorian students in low-SES communities deserve nothing less than full commitment to both.

Education Equity Alliance
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