

T R A N S C R I P T

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Public School Funding

Melbourne – Thursday 12 March 2026

MEMBERS

Joe McCracken – Chair

Michael Galea – Deputy Chair

Ryan Batchelor

Anasina Gray-Barberio

Renee Heath

Ann-Marie Hermans

Rachel Payne

Lee Tarlamis

WITNESS

Daryl Croke, Teacher, Glenroy College.

The CHAIR: Welcome back to the next session of the Legal and Social Issues Committee's Inquiry into Public School Funding in Victoria. I am Joe McCracken, Chair. I will introduce our members very quickly.

Michael GALEA: G'day. Michael Galea, Member for South-East Metro and Deputy Chair.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Ryan Batchelor, Member for the Southern Metropolitan Region.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Anasina Gray-Barberio, Northern Metro.

The CHAIR: All evidence taken is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information that you provide during the hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during the hearing, but if you go elsewhere and say the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript afterwards, so you can make any minor amendments that you like, but ultimately that will be made public and put on the committee's website.

Just for Hansard, can you please say your full name and the organisation that you are appearing on behalf of.

Daryl CROKE: My name is Daryl Croke. I am a teacher at Glenroy College, and I am the AEU sub-branch president.

The CHAIR: Perfect. Thanks. We will give you a couple of minutes to make an introduction, and then we will go to questions. Welcome, and thanks for coming along.

Daryl CROKE: Thank you. I am speaking today in a personal capacity, and I am sharing my experience. It is not my intention to be critical of the department or school policy. However, I will draw on my direct experience.

I have been teaching for 20 years, and I have taught every school level from prep to year 12. I started off teaching at Preston Girls, then moved to Mount Ridley College in Craigieburn. I spent one year at Lalor college, and this is my sixth year of teaching at Glenroy College. During this time, I have taken a range of leadership roles – school council, member of school improvement teams, domain and ICT leaders – and I have got a lot of experience with the curriculum. I have been an AEU representative on consultative committees, and I am now the sub-branch president of Glenroy and the regional president of the Broadmeadows region, which covers 48 schools from Pascoe Vale to Craigieburn North.

I want to skip talking about terms of reference 1 and 2 and talk directly to term of reference 3, and that is on the impact of delayed funding on schools. For the past few years our school has benefited from a tutor learning initiative program. That program was cut last year. That program was very successful in helping students with low literacy. So we have lost \$360,000 to our school to support students we were supporting for low literacy. Then the term talks about the delay in funding, which is a reference to the Gonski funding. My understanding is that that delay in funding means, on average, a shortfall of about \$2000 per student. With that understanding, I would say that my school needs roughly an extra \$1 million of funding per year.

The question is: what could we do with that money? So, one, support: the welfare inclusion staff that I have talked to emphatically stated that we need more speech therapists. Many of our students struggle with understanding verbal instructions, so we need more support and better programs to help these students. We need more educational staff. We are very clear that we want an ES, an educational support person, in every classroom, as well as a teacher, to help students who are really struggling with literacy.

Time – teachers need more time to prepare lessons and mark work. We need more time for differentiation. Currently there is not enough time to do the job properly. Every teacher I know is putting in at least 10 hours a week in unpaid overtime. Teaching must be one of the few professions where workers actually take a day off to catch up on work. We need smaller class sizes so we can effectively support all students in our class. Three, the burning issue is workload, as I have alluded to, about how much unpaid overtime staff are actually doing. Four, behaviour management: we need more money for behaviour management to address the complex needs of students.

Here is a bit of an insight to schools in my region. I am going to suppress their names. I am going to directly quote from an AEU member in our area:

If you want another antidote up your sleeve, XSPS primary school had a lockdown twice last week due to violent student behaviour. One time I could not take my class back from a specialist for some time, so they missed out on learning, and another time students needed to stay inside over their break. It was not safe. A large high school. However, tell the member that the situation in X college is now so dire that the school is in virtual standstill, with threats being made to teachers on a daily basis and intimidation being the daily experience of most staff at the college now.

What could we do with the extra funding? I want to give an illustration of one of my classes. To illustrate the above points, I want to focus on my year 8 digital technologies class. I have a class of boys. Even though I am a highly experienced teacher, I am struggling to support all the students. Currently students are learning about digital footprints, privacy, using advanced tools such as AI and working in teams. I have a range of abilities from grade 1 to year 9 in the one class. There are a number of students who struggle with basic sentence construction. One I think is close to being legally blind – no aide – and my top students are operating at year 9 level. So I really require extra support in the classroom, and I require more time to actually develop lesson activities to cater for all the needs of students in the class. If I had more time, I would be able to do that. The above is a snapshot, but classes like this exist in all schools and in all suburbs in our region.

The other thing I alluded to before is behaviour management. In the past four years behaviour management has become more challenging, and as a local AEU region we meet two times a term. At nearly every meeting the issue of student behaviour has been raised. Staff do not feel supported. Many do not feel safe at work, and a number are dreading coming to work.

The third term of reference you talk to are the consequences of the funding cut on Victoria's staff and workforce. As stated above, too many teachers that I know are dreading coming to work. Many are feeling burnt out and leave. We work in tough schools. If early career teachers survive their first few years, they quickly realise that working in a tough school can actually be an asset, a career path. Basically, the experience that we are facing in the north is that if they survive, talented teachers move on to the openness of the private sector or they actually move on to the inner city. So that is the situation. We direly need support.

Now, at our school, Glenroy College, we have done a number of things to address the turnover of staff and we have done a number of things to address complex student behaviour, but that has cost the school money and we are struggling with the budgetary constraints in order to support the staff that we have.

The other thing I want to briefly talk about is the term 5, the lack of funding in terms of purchase of educational resources. First, I want to talk about NAPLAN. Currently we have only got one computer lab at my school. We have got another laptop lab, only one for 450 students. We had to stop the teaching of digital technologies and also industrial design because that laptop had to be taken away to support the NAPLAN students. We do not have enough resources in order to run normal classes and NAPLAN at the same time. I think I will leave it there, if you have any questions.

The CHAIR: Yes, sure. Do you want to go first?

Michael GALEA: Sure. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Mr Galea will go first.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Mr Croke. I just want to quickly ask: since you are in one of the schools that are covered by it, are there any comments you have on the *Merri-bek North Education Plan*?

Daryl CROKE: What was the question, sorry?

Michael GALEA: Any comments that you have on it. I understand there is a focus on increasing the number of elective options for students as one of the paths of that. Is that correct?

Daryl CROKE: My understanding is that is correct. I am not directly involved with that committee, so I have not seen that effect at my school. A few students have been enrolled in another subject in another school, but it has not had a dramatic effect.

Michael GALEA: Okay. We heard from students this morning from the Vic SRC about the importance of those options. Is that something that you would agree with from what you see from your students, that the variety and diversity of options is important?

Daryl CROKE: Yes, I would. But in order to make that happen, we need more funding. Here is concretely what would need to happen. If I have five students at the moment, I would like to run a course like computer studies at year 11, but if we do not have the funding we cannot run that class. So the way to get more classes is to actually increase funding so we can actually have more options on the table.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. In your comments as well you mentioned the tutor learning initiative. I am curious: there was an Auditor-General report that found there was no significant impact or effectiveness of the program at a wide stream level. I would be curious to have your thoughts on that from your perspective at your school but also on what we can most effectively do to support those students, like the ones that you mentioned, with that wide disparity of levels that they are coming into your class with.

Daryl CROKE: Okay. At my school I have talked to the people directly, and they emphatically said that it did make a huge difference at my school. And we campaigned around that. We did not want that funding to be reduced. I cannot talk about the wider issues; I can talk about what is happening in my school. I basically would want that funding reversed, because our school is down \$360,000.

Michael GALEA: What is the enrolment situation like at your school? Are you seeing increases in students or decreases?

Daryl CROKE: It is roughly about the same, or maybe it went up slightly.

Michael GALEA: Okay. Thank you. I do have more questions, but I am out of time, so thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Mr Galea. There are a lot of things I could ask you. We could probably talk all day about it, but I will try and keep my questions short, sharp and pointed. You mentioned there that teachers need more time. Do they need more time, or do they need to be doing less admin? Because that is something that has been definitely raised with this. Which would free up time for them to focus on the job that they are employed to do, which is teach our young people?

Daryl CROKE: Probably a bit of both.

The CHAIR: A bit of both? I thought that might be the case.

Daryl CROKE: But we definitely need more time. Unfortunately, if we do create more time, like in the last agreement, someone will come up with an idea how to take that time up. So we do spend a lot of time on admin, but we do also need more time, and I think basically what the teaching staff need is actually more control about how they spend their time as well. Then we can start to really home in on how that time could be effectively spent.

The CHAIR: Yes, because I do not think it is so effective, a teacher doing admin time when they should be focusing on teaching.

Daryl CROKE: Yes. We fundamentally agree.

The CHAIR: You said that there were challenges with behaviour management, student behaviour, those sorts of things, and you mentioned staff not feeling as though they want to come in to work. The cut of \$2.4 billion – if that was reversed, what could that be put towards that would alleviate that problem that you identify?

Daryl CROKE: Fundamentally, I believe that if a student is being very disruptive, they need to be exited from class so the rest of the class can continue. Now, that costs money, because someone has to be in an area to look after that student. So fundamentally what I would be saying is that there needs to be, in every school, someone who is dedicated to spending a lot of time looking after students. That would probably mean an extra \$100,000 in every school. But if we had that, then the class could continue. There would be someone looking after that student all the time, and I think that would make a huge difference.

The CHAIR: And particularly to staff as well – do you think that would increase and improve retention, recruitment and school culture, particularly for staff?

Daryl CROKE: Yes. I fundamentally believe so, yes, because at the moment staff do not feel supported. In fact they feel blamed for student behaviour. There is a culture where people feel like they are blamed for anything that happens in the classroom.

The CHAIR: That is just so not the case many of the times.

Daryl CROKE: That is true.

The CHAIR: All right. My time has run out. I am going to hand over to Mr Batchelor.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Thanks, Chair. Thanks, Daryl, for joining us today. Building on what Mr McCracken was talking about – just with ways you think we can ensure that the classrooms are there to support all of the kids, not just being taken up by some who are being disruptive – what other sorts of measures do you think we need to put into place to create positive learning environments in the classroom?

Daryl CROKE: If we had more time, we could differentiate lessons better. So we could actually address some of those students when they are starting to misbehave. If we had smaller class sizes, we could also spend more time with those individual students as well. I think fundamentally that is what I am saying. If students are struggling, we could create different programs to help those students who are struggling as well.

Ryan BATCHELOR: And in your experience, what sorts of programs work best with those sorts of students?

Daryl CROKE: Sometimes it could be withdrawal from class and, really, they might be in a modified timetable for some classes they might find particularly challenging. It could be an aide that could help them as well.

Ryan BATCHELOR: On another point, just to follow up, you talked about teachers having more control over the time that they have and less demands placed on that. I assume that is the time that is not in front of a classroom. How would schools make that time more effective for teachers?

Daryl CROKE: I think that there are aspects in the agreement that talk about protected teacher time. That is an aspiration, the agreement. That needs to be actually not an aspiration but something that actually really exists in all schools. Our time gets eaten away with other demands, so I would like a culture where teachers could actually put a pair of noise-cancelling headphones on and really not be interrupted and actually have some dedicated time to plan and to do what they need to do. In a lot of schools, there are just constant interruptions all the time, so it is hard for teachers to focus on what needs to be done.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Sure. Thanks. Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I will hand over to Ms Gray-Barberio.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Thank you. Mr Croke, with the tutor learning initiative program that you spoke about – 360K funding cuts – what is at stake here for students?

Daryl CROKE: They are not getting the support they need.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: You also mentioned welfare, inclusion and speech therapists. That also came up throughout other evidence presented to the committee. Do you have a speech therapist at your school at the moment?

Daryl CROKE: I am not sure. We do have psychologists at the school as well, so that is something. When I went to welfare, I said, ‘What do we need?’ and they said, ‘This is what we need: more speech therapists.’

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Are parents having to do a lot of fundraising activities to make up the shortfall?

Daryl CROKE: I am not sure. At my school that does not happen. It does not. I am not aware of that happening, no. Basically what happens is we are trying to support those students, but something else in the program would have to give.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Okay. How has the school curriculum at Glenroy College been impacted by the funding cuts of \$2.4 billion compared to other public schools nearby?

Daryl CROKE: I go back to the point you raised before, if we had more money, we could have a wider variety of subjects as well. We could be doing a lot of subjects that would have interest for the students, but we would not be able to have a class of 20. If we could run a class of 10 or a class of seven or a class of five –

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: So you are talking about specialist subjects?

Daryl CROKE: Yes.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Such as chemistry, physics –

Daryl CROKE: Physics –

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: You do not have that at Glenroy College?

Daryl CROKE: We do have some of those subjects, yes. But we would have a wider variety as well.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Would the 75 per cent SRS funding help with the examples that you gave around lockdowns and so forth? Because it is based on Gonski’s needs of students, would that help to address some of that?

Daryl CROKE: The way that I would do it is I would allow each school to determine what their needs are at that school. So if you have a school with high needs of behaviour management, maybe that is where the money goes first. If you have a need –

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Is it getting worse for public schools in the north?

Daryl CROKE: I would say yes.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Do you think that the government is out of step with their decision to delay \$2.4 billion in government school funding?

Daryl CROKE: Yes, I do.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Have you met with the Minister for Education?

Daryl CROKE: Yes.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: And the response?

Daryl CROKE: I would –

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Or the excuse? Would you like to answer that?

Daryl CROKE: Okay. Well, he seems sympathetic, but what I am looking for is a timeline.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: You are not – more than that, surely? Action as well?

Daryl CROKE: Yes. Yes, of course.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Thank you very much.

The CHAIR: Thanks so much, Daryl. That, unfortunately, brings an end to our time in this session. Thanks so much for your contribution and your evidence that you have given. As I said, you will get a proof version of the transcript to have a look through and make any minor edits if you see them there. But from us, thanks very much for your time. We appreciate it.

Daryl CROKE: No worries. Thank you.

Witness withdrew.