

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

### **Inquiry into Public School Funding**

Melbourne – Wednesday 25 March 2026

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Michael Galea – Deputy Chair

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**WITNESSES**

Andrew Dalglish, President, Victorian Principals Association; and

Travis Eddy, Principal, Kennington Primary School.

**The CHAIR:** Welcome to the next session of the Legal and Social Issues Committee Inquiry into Public School Funding in Victoria. I am Joe McCracken, Chair of the inquiry. I will introduce our other members as well.

**Michael GALEA:** Good morning. Michael Galea, Member for South-East Metro and Deputy Chair.

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

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

**The CHAIR:** And we have also got Mr Tarlamis, who is online.

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 repeat those same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded. You will both be provided with a proof version of the transcript after the hearing. Once you have had a chance to look through them, those transcripts will ultimately be made public and put on the committee's website.

Just for the Hansard record, are you able to say your name and the organisation that you are appearing on behalf of? I will go to Travis and then Andrew.

**Travis EDDY:** Travis Eddy, Principal of Kennington Primary School.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you.

**Andrew DALGLEISH:** Andrew Dalglish, President of the Victorian Principals Association.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you so much. Welcome. Today we probably have about 5 minutes each for a verbal submission, and then we will go to questions. Who would like to go first?

**Travis EDDY:** You can, Andrew.

**Andrew DALGLEISH:** Thanks, Travis. Thank you, Chair, and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear today on behalf of the Victorian Principals Association. The VPA represents the leaders of Victorian government primary schools: more than 1100 principals and assistant principals working in around 1200 primary schools, supporting approximately 380,000 government school students across the state. Our members lead schools in every community in Victoria, from inner Melbourne to regional towns and rural communities, and what unites us is that commitment to ensure every child has access to high-quality education, regardless of their background or postcode.

Today I would like to make three key points. One, the impact of delaying Victoria's contribution to the SRS, what that delay means for students currently in our schools and why investment in government primary education matters for our state's future: the decision to delay reaching 75 per cent of the SRS until 2031 will have real and immediate consequences for students currently in our schools. For our principals this is not an abstract funding debate, it is about the daily decisions that we must make and they must make when resources are limited. It affects how many teachers they can employ; the support available for students with additional needs, and we are talking about tier 1, tier 2 and tier interventions for those students who have the greatest additional needs for support; whether early intervention programs can run and for which students; and vital professional learning for principals, teachers and support staff, and this is where the greatest impact and

improvements for students will always come from. Research continues to show that beyond family circumstances – and this should be no surprise – the greatest two impacts on student learning are teachers and school leadership. It affects whether school leaders have the capacity to focus on teaching, learning and wellbeing, rather than administration and compliance. Victoria's government schools are currently the lowest funded in Australia on a per-student basis, as you are aware. We are currently funded around 90 to 91 per cent in total of the SRS, while most other states are already at or rapidly moving towards 100 per cent. In practical terms, we are talking between \$2000 and \$2500 per student. When you multiply that across all students in our schools, the gap becomes extremely significant. It is why the VPA will continue to advocate for full and timely funding of the SRS for every student in every Victorian public school.

As I mentioned earlier, other states are moving close to or are at that percentage of 75 per cent of the SRS. The delay means that Victorian students will continue to receive less investment than their peers for at least another six years, and that is difficult to reconcile when we talk about Victoria's ambition to be the Education State. This decision has a compounding effect. The delay removes around \$2.4 billion that schools are expecting to see invested in their students. It also affects the Commonwealth funding because federal contributions are calculated against the same mark. When the state contribution is delayed, the total funding available to our students is lower than it otherwise would or should be. The students that are most affected are already in our schools. Children currently in primary school will have completed most if not all of their schooling before the funding occurs. It is patently not fair for this generation of Victorians; it means an entire cohort of students may pass through the system without the level of resourcing that governments have agreed is necessary.

In schools it shows up in practical ways. Principals are stretching budgets to provide literacy and numeracy intervention, support student wellbeing and address increased learning complexity as well as meet government community expectations. As a principal, there is nothing more confronting than having to decide which students receive additional support and which do not because funding is limited.

Research shows the greatest educational economic returns occur in the early years of learning. The work of Nobel Prize winning economist James Heckman demonstrates that investment in early childhood and primary education produces the highest return at any stage of education. Therefore delaying that investment reduces the effectiveness of the system and increases costs later in schooling and beyond.

School leaders continue to be concerned about the impact on the education workforce. You have heard previously around schools, particularly in regional areas, continuing to experience challenges recruiting and retaining teachers. Funding constraints constrain the ability of schools to employ additional teachers as well, which would reduce workload pressures and provide professional support. In many schools principals now spend a significant proportion of their time managing compliance facilities and operational matters. One practical reform would be to invest in school operations managers. They are professionals who can manage those responsibilities and allow principals to focus on core business: leading the teaching and learning, the wellbeing of students and community engagement.

We will call for three immediate actions: firstly, for the state government to reconsider the timelines and restore the commitment to reaching 75 per cent earlier than 2031 as per the initial agreement and earlier if possible. Secondly, Victoria to work constructively with the Commonwealth to ensure that students receive their full share and it is not just a pathway to full and fair funding. And finally that future reforms are co-designed with the profession so that policy decisions are practical and sustainable in schools.

**The CHAIR:** All right. Thank you very much. Travis.

**Travis EDDY:** Thank you, Chair and members of the committee, for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Travis Eddy, and I am the principal of a government primary school in regional Victoria. I have been in education for 27-plus years, including nearly 20 as a principal or in the principal class. I want to be clear from the outset this morning: I am not here to speak about theory, and I am not here representing a system or an organisation. I am here as someone who is responsible every single day for making a public school work. What I am seeing is this: the gap between schools, what schools are expected to do and what we are resourced to do is widening. That gap is not abstract. It shows up in the classroom where students are presenting with increasingly complex needs: cognitive, behavioural, emotional and social. It shows up in staff who are working incredibly hard but are stretched across teaching, wellbeing, behaviour, support and intervention, often all at once. And it shows up in the role of a principal. The role now carries operational leadership, instructional leadership,

wellbeing leadership, HR, compliance and community management, often all within the same day. Schools are not pushing back on this work; we understand the responsibility to support every child. But what I am saying clearly is this: the current level of resourcing does not match the level of complexity we are being asked to manage at this stage, and this is consistent across the system. Public schools are carrying the highest proportion of students with disadvantage, disability and complex needs, while continuing to operate below the minimum funding benchmark required to support them.

The idea that funding can be delayed until 2031 assumes that children can wait. They cannot. Every year the support is not in place is a year of learning, development and opportunity that cannot be recovered. A child in grade 1 today will be in secondary school before that funding arrives, and for students already behind, the gap widens. At the same time this is placing increased pressure on the workforce. We are seeing a rising workload, burnout and difficulty retaining staff. When funding is not there, the work does not disappear – it shifts onto the people in the schools, who are already at capacity. If there is one thing I would want the committee to take away today, it is this: this is not about improving schools in the future, this is about ensuring schools can function effectively, safely and sustainably right now. Thanks.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. I will now hand over to Mr Galea to start off our questions.

**Michael GALEA:** Thanks, Chair. Thanks, both. I might ask you this first, Mr Eddy, and then I will seek comment from you, Mr Dalglish. You spoke about the increased expectations placed on schools, including, amongst other things, inclusion, compliance and behavioural support as well. As you said, you have been a principal or in schools for a long time. Can you describe the way in which this has changed over time and what the best solution is? Obviously we can simply say more resources, more funding, and that certainly sounds agreeable, but how do we actually put that to work? And what do we need to do to address these changes?

**Travis EDDY:** I will start with the part around the complexities and the nature of the job. The work at the moment has increased tenfold in my time in education. The number of students that were in the school where I started teaching that had identified disabilities or funding for those disabilities at the time was probably five or six. That was in a cohort of about 300. In my current education setting, there would be excess of 30 on PSD funding or disability inclusion funding, and there would also be another 120 students identified with additional needs across the school.

In terms of the reasons that that is happening, I will leave that to the people that know the actual data and why that is happening. But what I can say is that the funding dollar can only stretch so far, and to assume that people come in as graduate teachers and they are ready to, or they have already learned how to, deal with students that have got additional needs – whether it is PDA, whether it is ASD, all of those things – is an assumption that is far beyond the control of what is happening in education at the moment. We are getting staff in that do not have those capacities at this stage, and to train them you need to actually stop them from doing what they are doing, like any other industry. Another organisation would stop work for the day and go and do that training. Teaching does not happen like that. As we saw yesterday, the show must go on, and thus the schools are carrying that problem.

In terms of being able to upskill people, that is where a real challenge lies. And then, also, how many things can you upskill one person in to make a significant impact in their classroom? We are not talking about just one teacher getting upskilled in PDA, we are talking about a teacher being upskilled in PDA, emotional, social. We are talking about ASD. We have got kids that have got identified disabilities in terms of being able to move around the school and things like that too. You have got a number of kids that might need to be PEG fed. There are a number of different things that happen in a classroom, and it is not stopping. Where do we draw the line in terms of how much we can expect a teacher to do, and how are we going to get that training across? Training is important. Funding for that training is important, but how do you fund it when you have got to be in front of the class? And how do you get that training done?

**Michael GALEA:** Mr Dalglish, would the experience of Mr Eddy be something that you have seen across the sector?

**Andrew DALGLEISH:** Certainly, Mr Galea, I have seen that as a practising principal myself, and I certainly hear those experiences from my members on a daily basis. I come back to your question from earlier around what is the solution. It is not as though school leaders, teachers and departments of education are not

working to find a solution. It is not as simple as one simple solution. There are incredible complexities within our community, and schools are primary places where young people come together for education – not just academic, we are talking social, emotional, physical, the whole range. Children come to school at varying states of preparedness for that or with varying differences, and a classroom teacher sees that with 22, 23, 25 plus children every day. The principal then sees that as: how do I best support those educators or assistant staff in meeting the needs of every individual as well as the whole group?

I think what is critical, and I mentioned it before, is that any future reforms are co-designed with the profession in the room as a part of that. Everyone is well meaning and wants to impact in an incredibly positive manner for our young people. We all want the same thing, but the profession needs to be front and centre with that, with academics and policymakers, to say, ‘How do we bring that lived experience to the fore, and how do we ensure that it is sustained and works well for young people? How do we prepare our teachers for those reforms?’ It does not just happen overnight. It takes time to build an understanding of the why, then the how and then the implementation and being adaptive to work within a school environment, because every school environment is different. I mentioned earlier that we have members and schools in every community in the state, the needs of what may be occurring in inner Melbourne compared to outer suburbs or to regional or remote areas are quite different. We are a small state. The complexities that occur in the likes of the Northern Territory, New South Wales or Queensland, which are much larger geographically, are also there, but they have different ways of managing them as well.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you. You spoke about the effectiveness of the earlier stage intervention and how the earlier it is the more effective it is. One thing that we have heard in this and other inquiries is about the role of early childhood education. With the rollout of not just free four-year-old kinder but free three-year-old kinder too, what difference do you expect that to make in terms of addressing some of these issues but also in preparing your incoming prep students? I am happy to put this to both of you, time permitting. Mr Eddy.

**Travis EDDY:** Thank you. That is a very good question. As much as we want the free access to kinder to be fantastic, a lot of that comes back to how we support, as an organisation or as a government, those families getting their kids there? It is okay to build the building and have the program available, but are those children actually getting there? And what is happening in those spaces? Kennington is an example where we have just had a new kinder being opened on the school site. We know the programs are fantastic and they work, and we know that the research would suggest that the kids get the best out of them. But how do we ensure that we get those kids there? If they are there, does it help? Absolutely. Does it help? Yes, it does, absolutely. I think we say that a lot too around school attendance and those sorts of things. It is one and the same. But I think the greatest challenge that we face is not just building the building and providing the spots, it is about having the kids there on a regular basis and getting them what they need while they are there.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you.

**Andrew DALGLEISH:** I certainly agree with what Travis has said. Having those three-year-old and four-year-old kinders in place and free funding for that is critical, and we believe there will be a significant knock-on effect down the track. But this is not just for the education system to deliver. It is about how we engage with families and parents and bring them on that journey as well, because it is a partnership; it is not all up to parents and it is not all up to schools or kindergartens. With that co-location that Travis was mentioning, again, the opportunity for sharing of incredibly rich information in their transition between early childhood and primary school is critical. We see those benefits and applaud the investment that has occurred in early childhood, but we also say that investment needs to occur in government primary schools as well as our secondary schools. I could speak with you for hours about the funding inequities between each of those levels and what happens at state and federal, but fundamentally this is about what has been agreed upon and getting the funding into our schools sooner rather than later so that current students can access those reforms. It is not just about money, it is about the reforms and how educators are part of that process in implementing them and having an impact on young people.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks. I will go for a few questions. Firstly to you, Andrew: you said before about daily decisions that are needed to be made due to funding delays, funding cuts or whatever you want to call it –

\$2.4 billion. What are some of the examples of the daily decisions principals are making because there is a funding shortfall?

**Andrew DALGLEISH:** I mentioned earlier decisions around intervention. We talk about the importance of literacy and numeracy interventions, wellbeing interventions – you know, fortunate to have support provided for tutoring and so on. But when funding is limited, principals have to make real decisions about which child accesses that funding if it is limited. Or do we water it down to a level, or not water it down, but bring it back to a level that it is really only touching the surface? You know, ideally, as a school leader I would love to be able to provide significant intervention and support for every young child, but currently that is not the case. It is those decisions that principals make around: what do I take away from to get that learning in place? Again, for every year that a child is not getting to the level they need to be the disadvantage continues to grow.

**The CHAIR:** And it snowballs.

**Andrew DALGLEISH:** It snowballs.

**The CHAIR:** Travis, you mentioned before about if the funding is restored, it is not like it is getting you above and beyond – it is just to the very basic standard that it needs to be for a school to function, and I think you said – I am paraphrasing here – to meet the basic level of what a student requires. Is that your experience at your school?

**Travis EDDY:** Absolutely. Yes. I think over a number of years and over a number of different schools the conversation about funding and what is the right amount of funding has been on the table for a long time. I was a principal when Gonski went through, and at that time we were celebrating. We thought, ‘Here we go. This is going to be great.’ And it never eventuated. You know, we have to make decisions on a day-to-day basis, like Andrew said, based on where the money goes and who it goes to and what that looks like in real terms, and then the consequences of those decisions every time you make one. We are in it for the kids, as I said before. We are not silly; we know what we are there for. We will stand by that. But definitely being able to support a child, it is that equity conversation. What is equitable? What does that child actually need? And where do I get that money from? Now, some children, as Andrew pointed out and as has been said a lot, will need more than other kids. How do we provide that for them if we do not have the funding for it? You know, we talk about tutoring, we talk about interventions and those sorts of things. They are the first thing to go as soon as you cannot find a staff member – that is where the person comes from. And, you know, what is that saying about that program, what is that saying to those children and what is that saying to those families when we do that? So yes, it is a real decision day in, day out. And certainly it is never – you know, will it ever be enough? Probably not. But we have drawn a line in the sand, we have set a standard. And are we okay to say, ‘No, we’re not going to meet that standard. It doesn’t matter. These kids don’t matter’?

**The CHAIR:** And that is the message that you think is being sent?

**Travis EDDY:** Loud and clear.

**The CHAIR:** You are Kennington Primary School, which is in, I think, the Premier’s electorate. Is that correct?

**Travis EDDY:** That is correct.

**The CHAIR:** Have you reached out and tried to put these concerns to the Premier in any way as your local member of Parliament?

**Travis EDDY:** I have spoken to the Premier a number of times about school funding.

**The CHAIR:** What was the response?

**Travis EDDY:** ‘Yeah, we’ll get there.’ I have had meetings with Ben Carroll about it as well via the AEU, and it is all about ‘Yes, we’ll get there; yes, we’ll get there; yes, we’ll get there.’ And that is what they are doing – they are going to get there.

**The CHAIR:** But just delayed.

**Travis EDDY:** Yes. When is the appropriate time? And as I said before, are we okay? Actually, we probably are, because we have okayed it for a number of years, ever since Gonski came out. As a community we have okayed the fact that our kids will miss out.

**The CHAIR:** Do you think we should be just satisfied with an okay, though?

**Travis EDDY:** No, absolutely not. You know, I have got kids in government schools. Am I okay with that? No, I am not. I have got 600 children in my school. Am I okay with that? No, I am not.

**The CHAIR:** Our whole remit as a committee is to look at this \$2.4 billion worth of cuts and make recommendations to the government, to the Premier and to those who are in power that have got the levers to pull. What is your message?

**Travis EDDY:** Now. The time is now. We have had enough time.

**The CHAIR:** Do not delay.

**Travis EDDY:** Yes. We have made this decision, and effectively we are saying it is okay for these kids to miss out. It is not okay for these kids to miss out. Delaying it any further is a detriment. And I believe delaying it any further is saying that as a community we are okay. It is not okay.

**The CHAIR:** Andrew?

**Andrew DALGLEISH:** Look, I tend to agree. You know what, education funding is not simply an expenditure, and unfortunately we hear that regularly. It is actually an investment. We need to change the language around that very clearly. To not fully fund our government schools when other jurisdictions are fully funded sends a message to our community. And that is the wrong message: that we do not value the education of our government school students in Victoria as they do students in other countries. Again, we hear it is not all about the money. In this case, it is.

**The CHAIR:** I am a former teacher myself. I hear a lot from some of my old colleagues saying, 'Is Victoria really the Education State anymore?' Do you hear that from your principal colleagues as well?

**Andrew DALGLEISH:** I get the privilege of working with colleagues across all states and territories. Even the ACT, which was mentioned earlier, are fully funded. They all say, 'It's still not enough.' When we look at the fact that it is to cover 80 per cent of our students – this is the work of Gonski back in 2012. Are we still seen as the Education State? Sometimes I will get comments around that. We should still be proud of what we are doing, but it does not mean we cannot do better. And I believe that is one of the big frustrations: that we could and we should for this generation of young people.

**The CHAIR:** Yes. Very well timed. Well done. I will hand over to Mr Batchelor.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** Thanks very much, Chair. Travis, Andrew, thanks for your evidence today. Obviously as principals you have got leadership responsibilities, and you work very hard to make the school that you are responsible for work. What do you think would better support principals in being able to effectively do their job? I think, Travis, you might have mentioned the kinds of structures and supports. What sorts of things, practically, do you think would better support principals to deal with the increased complexity and expectations that you are talking about?

**Travis EDDY:** If you look at it purely from a budgetary point of view, and that is what we are looking at at the moment, it is the amount of jobs that align within a school. If we are talking about a normal business, you might have a HR manager, you will have somebody that does the wellbeing side, somebody that looks after mental health and all of those things. In schools we are said to have that. It comes through as a line item, or there is funding for it. The people that run those particular elements of the work in schools – be they a principal, a leading teacher or an assistant principal – have all got other jobs as well. There are not too many industries where we expect people to take on six different roles and do their job effectively; yet in education, we do. We always do and we always have.

I can take you to schedule B around the roles of what a principal does or what they are expected to do. And part of that is when that comes in: 'Here's the money – how do we do it?' I know, for instance, that, particularly at

our school, we have had learning specialists. They have all been cut back. Why – because we cannot afford to have them out of the classroom anymore. Yet the investment in our teacher training and in our teacher support from those people is enormous. They have had to be put back in the classroom. They cannot do that any longer. So from a principal point of view, to be able to support the workload of all of those things would be an absolute godsend. People will say, ‘You’ve got office staff who can do this and who can do that.’ They cannot. They are not trained in it, or they do not have access to those things through the department. So really, we need to be able to separate what the real work is from the organisational work. I think that is the challenge when it comes to this funding: what money have we got to spend, first and foremost, and what is being taken away from us?

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** Yes. Andrew?

**Andrew DALGLEISH:** Look, Mr Batchelor, we understand governments have to make tough budget decisions. As school leaders we have to do the same. I mentioned earlier that one practical solution may be along the lines of an operations manager in a school. This is particularly for primary schools, because our funding is different at different levels. We have a lower leadership density. Sometimes that is because of the size of the school, and secondary schools are much larger. If I can deviate slightly – and this is not a Victorian issue – the difference in funding between years 6 and 7 funded from the federal level is \$3713 per child, year 6 to year 7. So let us go to average class size: 47 children in grade 6. When they go to year 7, that is \$220,000 roughly per school. It is significant. So an operations manager, which allows the principal in a primary school to delve in and focus around teaching, learning, wellbeing and community engagement – that is where I believe you will get your biggest impact. School leaders in primary schools particularly are managing the complexities of accountability requirements around facilities, maintenance, risk assessments and occupational health and safety. As Travis mentioned before, in larger organisations you will have different lines around that. That is the accountability that sits with the school leader now. They do not shy away from that. In fact they accept the accountability, but it is about how we make sure we impact better on every single young child. We will talk about some of the evidence, being that up to 75 per cent of the time for a school leader in a primary school can be spent dealing with compliance and administration. How good would it be if the lead teacher is the principal, trained in education, trained as an educator, coming through as a powerful impact on curriculum and teaching and learning? Then they have to move aside from that.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** Get the lead teachers focused on the educational side, and provide some new solution or support structure that can deal with some of the running of the place side of that: do you think that is something that we should be doing a bit more thinking about in our schools? You mentioned scale and size. We have obviously got primary schools of very different sizes. Travis, yours is about 600 students. We just had a former school council president in dealing with a school of 120. I mean, they are very different sized beasts. How do we make sure that it does not matter how many kids are enrolled and that the structures that we have for the school work effectively and are not so dependent on the size of the student enrolment? Is there a different way we can structure regional supports? I am really interested in how we can fix that problem.

**Andrew DALGLEISH:** I think part of that is being school led. Quite often schools will have a relationship or a partnership with other schools around them where, depending on size, they may not need a full-time person who undertakes those roles. They may be able to share some.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** Does the system set up for that kind of sharing effectively? Could you have someone who was employed at your school half-time to do wellbeing and at another school half-time, or whatever it is, to do operations half-time? Does the system facilitate schools being innovative in halving off those things that can be shared between one, two, three schools or not?

**Andrew DALGLEISH:** I think there are definite opportunities here. We have got examples of some that do that really well, particularly in regional areas, out of necessity, and have done for a long time. But it is an opportunity to investigate and go deeper.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** More efficient use of our –

**Andrew DALGLEISH:** Absolutely. Because if the same person has skills, attributes and knowledge and they are working across one, two, three of four, you would think there would be time savings and dollar savings as well.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** Thanks, Chair.

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

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO:** Thank you very much, Chair. Thank you both for being here. Mr Eddy, you made a very compelling opening statement about the time being now for investment. You both made a case that this is not expenditure – the \$2.4 billion – and that there needs to be a reframing of the language; that it should be looked at as investment, because it assumes that children can wait. You met with the Premier. How many times did you meet with the Premier specifically around advocacy around public school funding?

**Travis EDDY:** Specifically? I note other conversations always occurred around that, but it was always a conversation that came up.

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO:** And what was her commitment to respond to these really important issues that are being faced across the state, especially in our public school system?

**Travis EDDY:** Not necessarily a commitment – definitely a conversation that has been on the table for quite some time.

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO:** Does the Premier understand what is on the line here in terms of students' futures? You said you spoke about a gap between expectation, resourcing and complexity. Do the Premier and the education minister understand this?

**Travis EDDY:** I suppose I will probably reframe that and say: has the decision been made to fund government schools appropriately? That is where the answer would be found, in that if they are not funding it properly, do they understand it? Do they have a clear intent around where that money needs to go and what we do need to see in schools? That probably answers that question, I would suggest.

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO:** What I am hearing is a lot of burden and weight being carried by principals, our teachers, the support staff and parents. Where is the accountability from the Premier and the education minister and the government here? 2031 – that is such a long-time that students are having to wait. Where is the accountability from the Premier and this government?

**Travis EDDY:** That is a that is a very, very good question, isn't it, because, again, it is not just this government; it has been governments before this one.

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO:** Well, we are talking about this Victorian Labor government right now. This is why we are here in this inquiry. So where is their accountability?

**Travis EDDY:** It should be to the public. It should be to the people that are saying this is not okay. But to me, it does not seem like there is a great deal of accountability around it. If we can keep pushing back and keep saying that we will not fund to what we know is a resource standard, then that is on them. We are not making that decision.

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO:** Do you not also believe that it is also on our Victorian students?

**Travis EDDY:** Absolutely.

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO:** I mean, they are the ones who are going to have to pay for this.

**Travis EDDY:** They are the ones who are going to miss out. But we are talking about children aged between four and 18, and where do they get an opportunity to have a say? I know they will have a say here. I noticed that there is SRC representation and student council representation on the inquiry. When do they have an opportunity to really understand what this looks like for them in the future? I understand it. I have got kids.

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO:** We actually had some evidence in the last inquiry. We had some young people present to us, and it was really important, obviously, for the inquiry to hear young people's voices. One of the key things that they highlighted was wellbeing. So what is that looking like on the ground as a consequence, as a ripple effect, on students, on their wellbeing, if schools cannot even provide wraparound wellbeing staff? That is what we are hearing so far.

**Travis EDDY:** Yes. It is a massive implication for them as they move through their schooling life and into life – it is huge – and I think the focus around mental health and wellbeing is amazingly huge and more so since the pandemic. But whether it is your students, whether it is your staff, whether it is your community, it is massive. And for our kids as they move forward, to be able to learn how to understand themselves, to have good mental health and wellbeing moving forward into their education or into their work choice, it is imperative to how our system and how our community run. We talked about an investment. If we are not investing, we pay for it later – that is a given, we know that. That happens in every element of what we do. If we do not invest early, we pay for it later.

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO:** We heard evidence from Youthlaw around the risks to youth or young people of being engaged in the justice system. That speaks to the later that you are you are talking about. Teachers who do a magnificent job have – we have also heard, as a committee, the extra hours that they are having to put in on top of their contracted FTE hours. Can you please let the committee know, how bad is it? How many hours are teachers doing voluntary because the demand is too high?

**Travis EDDY:** The amount of extra hours is effectively indefinite, and it is indefinite in the sense that: when does the work actually stop, and when does it start?

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO:** And then what happens to their wellbeing?

**Travis EDDY:** That is what we are faced with at the moment. You know, we are faced with more –

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO:** And the \$2.4 billion obviously does not help. Does that exacerbate things, the conditions and the environment that teachers are having to teach in right now?

**Travis EDDY:** I think part of what happened yesterday and what is occurring at the moment is not just about pay, it is actually about what is happening in –

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO:** And yesterday – you are referring to the teachers strike.

**Travis EDDY:** The teachers strike, yes.

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO:** Do you support that strike?

**Travis EDDY:** Absolutely.

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO:** Did you attend?

**Travis EDDY:** No, because I am on leave at the moment.

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO:** No worries.

**Travis EDDY:** But my point is that one of the key elements there is: how can we expect people to continue to work in this environment when it is not funded properly, full stop? You cannot do any of the things that you have mentioned already in your questioning around the wellbeing of students, the wellbeing of staff, the extra work hours – all of those things, you cannot fix that. You cannot even begin to have a conversation about it when there is no funding. You would not do it in any other organisation or any other business, so why would we do it in the public education system?

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO:** Thank you very much.

**The CHAIR:** All right. We have got a few minutes left, so I am going to give each of the committee members a minute to fire a last question at any one of you, and then I will give you a little bit of time for some final comments, and we will wrap up from there. I will hand over to Mr Batchelor.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** Thanks, Chair. Andrew, you talked about the importance of future reforms being co-designed. Can you unpack that for me a little bit more? What do you think the form of the co-design process needs to look like, and who needs to be at the table?

**Andrew DALGLEISH:** When I talk about co-design it is about a genuine co-design, so that is from the profession. I am talking about the teachers, the school leaders, the policymakers and the researchers together –

not after events or after announcements, but actually being together to work around these reforms, because that means there is a greater level of accountability and buy-in. If you as an educator and as a principal and a teacher are part of the design of those reforms, you have got co-ownership and therefore that accountability sits with you, whereas it can be far too easy at times to say, 'Someone else decided that. I don't necessarily agree.' Now, that is not what educators do. They lean in and do the work. Do they truly believe some of it? Yes, but how deeply do they engage in ensuring it is sustainable for the long term?

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** Thanks.

**The CHAIR:** Over to you.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you. I want to ask in a very quick way, if possible, about the workforce. With both of you having experience in regional schools in particular, what are the trends we are seeing in recent years? I know class-to-teacher ratios are better than most states, if not all states, but what are we seeing as the challenges and what needs to be particularly focused on?

**Travis EDDY:** Very quickly, I will give you some stats. When I started at Kennington nearly 10 years ago, we would have had about 100 graduate applicants for jobs and very similar numbers for non-graduate jobs, so jobs that are at a higher level. In recent years we get maybe five or six. That is what it is doing in regional areas.

**Michael GALEA:** Right.

**Andrew DALGLEISH:** Look, it is well documented, the challenges that have been in our system and others, across the world even, around the shortages. We are starting to see those lessen, but that does not mean that there are not challenges, particularly for our regional and remote areas more so and some particular pockets. Again, how we make sure that this is an attractive role for any young person who wants to enter the profession is a critical part of that, as well as for school leaders who feel the message is clear: we have funded you fully as agreed, therefore we value this.

**Michael GALEA:** And those pressures are easing, but there is more to do.

**Andrew DALGLEISH:** Yes.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** My question is similar. What are the biggest or the top three things that we can do to support attraction and retention of teachers in our school networks? It is a huge issue. Is it about pay? Is it about conditions? Is it about ratios? What do you think?

**Andrew DALGLEISH:** Whilst it is probably not necessarily within the terms of this inquiry, I think it is a little bit of everything, but I think it is also the message that is sent clearly to those who are considering the profession, as well as retaining those that are in the profession.

**The CHAIR:** By that are you saying the profession is not as valued?

**Andrew DALGLEISH:** That you matter. You matter, and you matter incredibly. Being told you matter is one thing, but as I mentioned earlier, if our jurisdiction is not fully funded as per others, it actually sends a message, and that is the wrong message.

**The CHAIR:** You can talk the talk but not walk the walk, essentially.

**Andrew DALGLEISH:** And that is with all due respect. We understand that budget decisions have to be made, but with all due respect, other jurisdictions are there. We are not there yet.

**Travis EDDY:** Money in mouth – I think it is really important. I agree absolutely with what Andrew said. What are we saying to the people that are (a) in the profession already or (b) looking at coming into the profession? 'Come into this job, but we won't fund you properly.' 'It would be great, but we won't fund you properly.' 'Come in here, you can look after kids, but they won't get what they need either, and nor will you.'

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Anasina.

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO:** Thank you, Chair. I just wanted to ask if you have got any statistics. You spoke about when principals are having to balance the financial pressures, the first things to go are intervention programs and tutor programs. Do you have any statistics or any figures that you can provide to the committee around how many tutor programs or intervention programs have been cut in the last year as a result of this \$2.4 billion delayed funding?

**Andrew DALGLEISH:** No is the answer. I cannot give you exact statistics and figures, but it is anecdotal conversations that I am hearing with my members as the result of that. Travis, you may see it differently at your level.

**Travis EDDY:** No statistics or figures, but definitely from a person on the frontline. The tutor learning initiative that came out after COVID is all but gone. It is hanging on by a grim thread at the moment. The funding is no longer isolated for those particular positions. Those people have been absorbed into classrooms. That is probably the biggest one at the moment, but also the fact that the intervention-type programs that we can provide with the amount of money that we have got are becoming limited as well. Definitely on the ground we are not seeing those positions upheld.

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** All right. Thank you very much. That brings an end to our hearing. Thanks so much for the evidence that you have given today and the time and effort you have taken to get here. You will be provided, as I said, with a proof version of the transcript so you can have a look through it and make any minor changes as you see fit. But from us, thanks very much. We really appreciate it.

**Witnesses withdrew.**