



committee for
**frankston and
mornington peninsula**

2026 Student Voice Forum – Report



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The Committee for Frankston & Mornington Peninsula (CFMP) is the peak advocacy body for the region.

We are an independent, non-partisan, member-based organisation which works beyond party politics to enhance the social, economic, and environmental sustainability of our region.

We work collaboratively across industry, business, not-for-profits, and local government to influence a better Peninsula.

As part of the *Committee for Frankston & Mornington Peninsula's Strategic Plan 2025-2030*, our guiding principles include:

“To partner with schools and education providers and ensure youth in our region are represented in forums, roundtables and policy discussions facilitated by CFMP.”

As the peak advocacy body for our region, we take our role in empowering our region's future leaders seriously – and we're delighted to be able to offer valuable forums for our school members and student leaders throughout the year.

This forum consists of two significant Committee-facilitated events which were attended by local representatives from all levels of government and business leaders from Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula.

- Friday 1 May, 2026
School Leaders Presentation Event, held at Peninsula Grammar, Mt Eliza.
- Friday 19 June, 2026
Student Voice Forum Workshop held at South East Water, Frankston.

At the Committee's **May School Leaders Presentation Event**, student leaders from CFMP member schools responded to the following topic:

"In 2026, the number one issue facing young Victorians is..."

Student leaders spoke on topics including:

Youth Disengagement in the Political System

Political system is not listening to young people

Tax and debt burden passed on to next generation creating generational inequality, without them having a say

Education Equity

Inequality between public and private schools growing

Generational inequity from school to tertiary education

Job security and Economic Independence

The rise of automation, AI and the future of work

Home ownership as a dream to hold...?

Youth Mental Health

Social Media anxiety, algorithms and data privacy

Support and funding from government meeting the need?

Cost of Living and Financial Security

Rental, housing stress for students to juggle with their schooling

Certain barriers create further hardship for families – including language and geograph

Connectivity and Public Transport

Roads are sub-standard, unsafe and unreliable

Driving age in rural areas to drop to 16?

Public transport as a lifeline, not a luxury

These topics then formed the basis of what Student Voice forum held in June would cover, when students would be provided a greater opportunity to directly engage with and provide feedback to locally elected representatives.

Across both events, we were pleased to be able to host as part of these forums the following local representatives across all three levels of government:

- Jodie Belyea MP, the Federal Member for Dunkley
- Zoe McKenzie MP, the Federal Member for Flinders
- Chris Crewther MP, the State Member for Mornington
- Anthony Marsh MP, the State Member for Nepean
- Anne-Marie Hermans MP, the State Member for South East Metro
- Cr Sue Baker, Mayor Frankston City Council
- Cr Emily Green, Frankston City Council
- Cr Paul Pingiaro, Deputy Mayor Mornington Peninsula Shire

Committee Member schools that participated across both events included:

- Frankston High School
- Flinders Christian Community College
- Balcombe Grammar
- Mt Eliza Secondary College
- Woodleigh School
- Mornington Secondary College
- Peninsula Grammar
- Toorak College
- Juniper College
- David Scott School
- Padua College
- John Paul College



At the **Student Voice Forum held in June**, the Committee ensured that student voices were listened to.

We provided students with direct access with key local decision-makers and local representatives, and facilitated workshops and an open panel Q&A.

The Workshops covered five key areas that were raised as critical issues at the School Leaders Presentation Event, including:

*Topic 1 – **Youth Disengagement in the Political System***

*Topic 2 – **Education Equity***

*Topic 3 – **Job security and Economic Independence***

*Topic 4 – **Youth Mental Health***

*Topic 5 – **Cost of Living, Financial Security and Public Transport***

Our workshop facilitators, led by Committee board members and business leaders, prompted conversations about solutions, proposals, initiatives and responses to some of these key issues.

Topic – Youth Disengagement in the Political System

Students see political education, accessible information, greater accountability, and stronger youth representation as essential to improving political engagement. While many feel disconnected from politics and distrust institutions, there is a clear desire to become better informed and more involved when given the right opportunities and education.

Key themes presented in this workshop included:

1. Lack of Trust and Representation

- Young people are frustrated by empty promises, party loyalty, and a lack of accountability among politicians.
- They feel they are heavily affected by political decisions but remain one of the least represented groups in politics.
- There is a perception that politicians are disconnected from young people.

2. Strong need for political education

- Participants consistently emphasised the importance of political and civics education from an early age in schools.
- Civics and Citizenship should be mandatory, particularly in Years 11 and 12 as young people prepare to vote.
- Many argued that if voting is compulsory, education about voting and government should also be compulsory.
- Education should cover:
 - How government and voting systems work.
 - Political parties, their histories, values, and policies.
 - Political systems in other countries to provide context and appreciation for Australia's system.
 - The real-world consequences of political participation and disengagement.

3. Political engagement and apathy

- Many young people observe widespread apathy among their peers, with some believing politics does not affect them.
- Constant exposure to news and global events can feel overwhelming and contribute to disengagement.
- Participants felt the Mornington Peninsula is particularly disengaged from politics compared with other parts of Metropolitan Melbourne.

4. Influence of family, peers, and media

- Family beliefs and household attitudes significantly influence young people's political views and voting behaviour.
- At the same time, young people are encouraging each other to become more informed and seek independent sources of information.
- Tools that provide accessible information about politicians and voting records are viewed positively.

5. Concerns about media and political communication

- Participants expressed concern about media bias across the spectrum.
- Media coverage focuses heavily on negative stories, which further fuels political disengagement.
- American political ideas and culture are increasingly influencing Australian political discussions, particularly through social media.

6. Demand for accessible information

- Young people want clear, jargon-free political information that is easy to understand.
- They are seeking practical, digestible explanations of political issues, systems, and policies.

7. Desire for greater political choice

- Many participants want alternatives to the two major parties.
- They expressed interest in a broader range of political options and greater diversity of views within the political system.

Topic – Education Equity

Participants identified educational inequality, funding disparities, and geographic disadvantage as major barriers to opportunity on the Mornington Peninsula. They emphasised the need for fairer resourcing, expanded local education options, improved career guidance, and greater recognition of diverse pathways to ensure all young people can access quality education and achieve their goals.

Key themes presented in this workshop:

1. Equity and funding in education

- Participants expressed concern about significant disparities between public and independent schools, particularly in facilities, resources, and opportunities.
- Government schools on the Mornington Peninsula were seen as under-resourced compared to independent schools with modern facilities.
- There was a strong view that funding levels influence educational outcomes, raising questions about why some schools continue to fall behind.
- Suggestions included reviewing federal funding arrangements for non-government schools and directing more resources toward public education.
- Larger student populations in public schools create pressure on teachers and reduce opportunities for individual support.

2. Teacher support and school resources

- Public school staff face significant time pressures and workload challenges.
- Increased funding was seen as a way to attract and retain quality staff and provide more support personnel.
- Industrial action by public school staff can disproportionately affect public school students through lost classroom time.

3. Access and opportunity on the Mornington Peninsula

- Participants highlighted unique regional disadvantages despite the Peninsula's metropolitan classification.



- Challenges include:
 - Higher transport and fuel costs.
 - Longer travel times for education and employment.
 - Fewer local job opportunities.
 - Reduced access to tertiary education and training options.
- These factors can limit educational outcomes and future opportunities for young people.

4. Tertiary education and career pathways

- There is a perceived expectation that young people should pursue tertiary education after school.
- Participants questioned the value proposition of university compared to emerging alternatives, including AI-assisted learning.
- Concerns were raised about the limited range of courses available at the local university campus, restricting opportunities for residents to study close to home.
- There was strong support for expanding local tertiary education offerings.

5. Recognition of diverse career pathways

- Arts and creative subjects were viewed as undervalued and often dismissed as legitimate career pathways.
- Participants emphasised that passion and personal interests should be considered alongside labour market demands when making career decisions.
- Young people need greater recognition and support for a wider range of educational and career pathways.

6. Cost of living impacts on students

- Rising living costs are placing additional pressures on students and families.
- Some students are working to contribute financially to their households, which can affect their educational experience and outcomes.
- Financial barriers can also influence decisions about schooling and further education.



7. School choice and accessibility

- School zoning arrangements, particularly around Frankston High School, were seen as limiting educational choice and opportunity.
- Some participants suggested exploring a HECS-style support program to help students access nearby independent schools where they may offer better outcomes or be more accessible.
- Greater flexibility and choice in accessing quality education were recurring themes.

8. Better information and career guidance

- Students require more comprehensive information when making decisions about VCE subjects, tertiary study, and career pathways.
- Access to career counselling and pathway planning was seen as inconsistent across schools.
- Participants called for stronger and more consistent career education to help students make informed post-school decisions.



Topic – Job security and Economic Independence

Young people expressed significant concern about their long-term financial future, particularly regarding housing affordability, student debt, cost-of-living pressures, and changing employment markets. Many feel they face greater financial and economic barriers than previous generations, with AI, inflation, and limited pathways into secure employment contributing to uncertainty about their future prospects.

Key themes presented in this workshop:

1. Financial security is harder for young people

- Participants believe they are less financially secure than previous generations.
- Housing costs consume a much larger proportion of income than they did for their parents, making financial independence more difficult.
- Many expect to remain financially reliant on their parents for longer than they would like.

2. Housing affordability and HECS debt

- Housing affordability and HECS debt emerged as the two most significant financial concerns.
- The combination of student debt and high housing costs creates uncertainty about long-term financial stability and home ownership.
- Some participants reported reconsidering career paths due to the financial burden associated with lengthy or expensive study requirements.

3. Employment challenges and career Progression

- Young people face difficulties securing well-paid work early in their careers.
- Many jobs available to under-18s are low-skilled and low-paid, limiting opportunities to build financial security.
- Career progression often requires moving beyond retail and hospitality into industries with greater advancement opportunities.
- There is concern about the transition from university study into employment, particularly around securing stable, meaningful work.

4. Impact of AI on future employment

- Participants expressed concern that artificial intelligence could reduce employment opportunities in sectors such as accounting, banking, technology, and other knowledge-based professions.
- AI is perceived as reducing the number of entry-level roles that traditionally provide pathways into professional careers.
- This contributes to uncertainty about future job markets and career planning.

5. Desire for stable career pathways

- Young people value stable and predictable career pathways but feel the future is becoming increasingly uncertain.
- Inflation, housing affordability, and the impact of AI were identified as the three biggest drivers of uncertainty.
- There is concern that traditional pathways from education into secure employment are becoming less reliable.

6. Access to education and opportunity

- Participants highlighted challenges accessing higher education and related support due to the Mornington Peninsula's classification and location.
- Some felt local residents miss out on regional concessions, payments, or support programs despite facing geographic disadvantages.
- Access to university and tertiary opportunities can be more difficult for Mornington Peninsula residents compared to other regions.

7. Cost of living and everyday expenses

- Rising living costs are affecting young people's ability to meet basic needs and plan for the future.
- Access to healthy and nutritious food was identified as a challenge, with cheaper food options often perceived as less healthy.
- Energy affordability was also discussed, with interest in renewable energy and battery technologies as potential ways to reduce household costs over time.



8. Impact on career choices

- Financial pressures are influencing educational and career decisions.
- Some participants indicated they may avoid industries such as medicine and academia because of the cost, length, and financial uncertainty associated with entering those professions.
- Economic considerations are increasingly shaping career choices alongside personal interests and aspirations.

Topic – Youth Mental Health

Young people see mental health as a growing challenge that requires stronger prevention, education, and early intervention. They highlighted the pressures of academic expectations, the lingering effects of COVID-19, and gaps in school-based support services. Participants called for more visible and accessible mental health resources, greater focus on wellbeing and social connection, and increased investment in the future mental health workforce.

Key themes presented in this workshop:

1. Inconsistent access to mental health support

- Participants noted significant differences in the availability and quality of mental health services between schools.
- Many felt students are not provided with enough information about available support services, how to access them, or strategies for managing mental health challenges.
- There was a strong call for support systems to be more visible, accessible, and integrated into everyday school life.

2. Academic pressure and stress

- VCE, exams, academic expectations, and pressures to achieve high ATAR scores were identified as major sources of stress.
- Students often feel pressure to conform to a narrow definition of success centred on academic achievement.
- Expectations from peers, families, teachers, and the broader education system can contribute to stressful school environments.

3. Need for better mental health education

- Participants felt schools do not do enough to teach students practical skills for managing stress, building resilience, and maintaining wellbeing.
- There was strong support for preventative mental health education rather than only responding once issues arise.
- Young people want greater awareness of coping strategies, support networks, and early intervention options.

4. Reducing stigma and improving school-based support

- While stigma around accessing school counselling is decreasing, it remains a barrier for some students.
- Participants suggested counsellors should be more embedded within school communities and classrooms to build trust and everyday relationships with students.
- Younger support staff and teacher aides were often seen as more approachable and easier for students to connect with.

5. Importance of prevention and early intervention

- A recurring theme was the need to shift towards preventative mental health services within schools.
- Early identification and support for students experiencing difficulties was seen as critical.
- Participants also highlighted the importance of strengthening support after mental health treatment, including better outpatient and follow-up services for young people leaving inpatient care.

6. Supporting diverse student cohorts

- Participants identified a need for greater understanding of mental health challenges experienced by LGBTQIA+ young people and neurodivergent students.
- More research, targeted support, and inclusive approaches were viewed as important for improving outcomes for these groups.

7. Social connection and the lasting Impact of COVID-19

- Young people continue to observe social and behavioural impacts from COVID-19 lockdowns and remote learning.
- Concerns included:
 - Reduced social skills and social confidence.
 - Increased isolation and difficulties forming relationships.
 - Higher rates of behavioural challenges and eating disorders among some cohorts.
- Schools were encouraged to provide more group-based activities and opportunities to rebuild social connections and cohesion.



8. Promoting healthy and active lifestyles

- Participants supported greater emphasis on physical activity, sport, outdoor experiences, and social activities as tools for supporting mental wellbeing.
- Schools were encouraged to promote positive conversations about mental health and create environments that support healthy lifestyles and social engagement.

9. Addressing bullying and online harm

- Preventing bullying, discrimination, and harmful behaviour on social media was identified as a priority.
- Participants recognised the significant impact online interactions can have on young people's mental health and wellbeing.

10. Building the future mental health workforce

- Concerns were raised about the availability of mental health professionals.
- Participants suggested government incentives for psychology and related degrees to help grow the mental health workforce, particularly younger counsellors and practitioners who may be more relatable to young people.

Topic – Cost of Living, Financial Security and Public Transport

Young people described cost-of-living pressures as one of the most significant challenges affecting their generation. Rising housing, education, transport, and everyday living costs are placing increasing financial strain on students and families, often forcing difficult choices between work, study, and personal wellbeing. Participants called for stronger financial support, improved financial literacy education, more affordable access to essential services, and policies that help young people build financial security and independence.

Key themes presented in this workshop:

1. Growing financial pressure on young people

- Participants reported that many students are contributing financially to their households through part-time work, helping cover essentials such as rent, groceries, and bills.
- These responsibilities create additional stress and can negatively impact educational outcomes and wellbeing.
- Many young people feel that the financial challenges they face are significantly greater than those experienced by previous generations.

2. Rising cost of living and affordability challenges

- Cost-of-living pressures are affecting nearly every aspect of young people's lives, from daily expenses to long-term planning.
- Young wages are perceived as not keeping pace with rising costs.
- Everyday expenses, including food, transport, and education-related costs, are becoming increasingly difficult to manage.
- Participants expressed concern that the gap between those who are financially secure and those who are struggling continues to widen.

3. Education and University costs

- Decisions about pursuing university are heavily influenced by the combined costs of tuition fees, travel, accommodation, and day-to-day campus expenses.
- Students feel that the overall cost of higher education can be a significant barrier to participation and future opportunities.

- There was support for better financial assistance and concessions to help students access education and training.

4. Work, study, and financial trade-offs

- Some students are prioritising paid work over school attendance in order to support their families financially.
- Participants highlighted the difficult balance between educational commitments and earning income.
- Young people want greater opportunities to save money and build financial independence while continuing their studies.

5. Need for financial literacy education

- Strong support emerged for more practical financial education in schools.
- Areas identified for greater focus included:
 - Tax and taxation systems.
 - Housing and renting.
 - Debt management.
 - Budgeting and saving.
 - General financial decision-making.
- Participants felt these skills are essential for navigating adulthood but are not adequately covered in schools.

6. Access to experiences and quality of life

- Young people expressed a desire to save for life experiences such as travel and holidays, but many feel these opportunities have become increasingly unaffordable.
- Participants noted that experiences once considered common for previous generations are now out of reach for many young people.

7. Cost of essential items and basic needs

- Concerns were raised about "period poverty" and the affordability of essential hygiene products.
- Participants felt more support should be available to ensure young people can access basic necessities without financial hardship.
- Access to affordable essentials was seen as an important aspect of addressing broader cost-of-living pressures.

8. Transport and infrastructure frustrations

- Public transport was identified as a significant challenge, particularly on the Mornington Peninsula.
- Key concerns included:
 - Limited bus services.
 - Frequent train disruptions and rail interruptions.
 - Ongoing roadworks and infrastructure-related delays – particularly on Peninsula Link and main roads.
- Participants felt transport limitations increase living costs and reduce access to education, employment, and social opportunities.

9. Perceptions of economic fairness and government support

- Some participants expressed concern that large corporations and supermarkets are making significant profits while households face increasing financial pressures.
- There was support for greater government assistance through concessions, financial support measures, and tax settings that better recognise the circumstances of young people and students.
- Suggestions included reviewing tax thresholds and incentives to encourage workforce participation and increase disposable income for young workers.



Summary, & Key Findings

Across the two forums facilitated by the Committee for Frankston & Mornington Peninsula, more than 110 students from 12 local schools participated and provided their insights as student leaders.

At each event, students were able to directly raise with local MP's and councillors what issues student leaders from Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula would like their local representatives to advocate for with decision makers at local, state and federal government level.

Key findings from this year's forum includes:

Across all workshops, five issues consistently emerged as the most significant concerns for young people on the Mornington Peninsula.

1. Cost of Living, Housing and Financial Security

This was the most prominent issue across multiple workshops.

- Housing affordability is increasingly out of reach and home ownership feels unattainable.
- HECS debt, rent, groceries, transport and everyday expenses are creating significant financial pressure.
- Many young people are contributing to household finances and expect to remain financially dependent on their parents for longer.
- Rising costs are affecting educational choices, career decisions, wellbeing, and future planning.
- Participants felt they face greater economic barriers than previous generations.

Financial insecurity is influencing almost every aspect of young people's lives, from education and employment to mental health and independence.

2. Access to Education and Unequal Opportunities

Young people expressed strong concerns about fairness and access within the education system.

- Significant disparities exist between public and independent schools in resources, facilities and opportunities.
- Geographic disadvantage on the Mornington Peninsula limits access to education, employment and tertiary study.
- Students need better career guidance and more information about pathways after school.
- Local tertiary options are limited, reducing opportunities to study close to home.
- Educational opportunities are increasingly shaped by a family's financial circumstances.

Participants viewed education as the foundation for future success, but many felt opportunities are not distributed equally.

3. Mental Health, Stress and Wellbeing

Mental health was consistently identified as a growing challenge for young people.

- Academic pressures, particularly around VCE and ATAR performance, are major sources of stress.
- Mental health support varies significantly between schools.
- More preventative mental health education and earlier intervention are needed.
- COVID-19 continues to affect social skills, confidence and social connection.
- Bullying, discrimination and social media harms remain significant concerns.

Participants saw mental wellbeing as critical to educational success, social connection and long-term life outcomes.



4. Employment Uncertainty and Future Career Pathways

Young people expressed concern about whether traditional pathways to secure employment still exist.

- Stable career pathways feel less certain than for previous generations.
- Entry-level opportunities are becoming harder to access.
- AI is creating anxiety about future employment prospects and career security.
- The transition from education to meaningful employment is increasingly difficult.
- Financial pressures are influencing career choices, with some avoiding professions requiring lengthy study.

Young people want stable, meaningful work but are uncertain about how to achieve long-term economic independence.

5. Political Disengagement and Lack of Representation

Participants highlighted a disconnect between young people and political institutions.

- Young people feel underrepresented despite being significantly affected by government decisions.
- There is low trust in politicians and concerns about accountability.
- Political information is often seen as inaccessible, overly complex, or influenced by media bias.
- More civics and political education is needed to build understanding and engagement.
- Many young people want more diverse political choices and stronger youth representation.

Participants believed improving political literacy, representation and trust is essential to ensuring young people feel heard and engaged in decision-making.

While the workshops covered a range of topics, the strongest overarching message was that young people feel increasingly uncertain about their future.

Rising living costs, unequal access to opportunities, mental health pressures, changing employment pathways, and limited trust in institutions are creating a sense that achieving the milestones enjoyed by previous generations is becoming more difficult.

Participants consistently called for greater investment in education, wellbeing, opportunity, and youth voice to address these challenges.

The Committee for Frankston & Mornington Peninsula will deliver this report to all attendees, CFMP member schools and local representatives.

The Committee would like to thank our school members and student leaders for their leadership and passion for our region.

We look forward to hosting these opportunities again in 2027.

Josh Sinclair

CEO

Committee for Frankston & Mornington Peninsula