



# GETTING STARTED WITH STUDENT VOICE

A quick guide for educators

## What is student voice?

Student voice is an umbrella term we use when we talk about anything that includes students in decision making, from the classroom level right up to the systems level.

There are many different definitions and understandings of the terms **student voice** (students having a say), **student agency** (students being empowered to take responsibility for their own learning) and **student leadership** (students advocating on behalf of their peers), including individual voice and agency vs. collective voice and agency.

We also talk about **student-teacher partnerships**, or student participation, where students and teachers work together at all levels of a school to change how education happens.



It is important that you start by talking with students and educators to create a shared understanding of what student voice means, and doesn't mean, for your school.

For more information on different definitions and models of student voice, check out our free online course, [Intro to Student Voice](#).

## How do we empower students?

Empowering and supporting students to lead or participate in any sort of work involves adults having to take a step back. You're there as a supporter, but not to drive discussion or push for certain decisions. A key part of empowerment is making sure students know the parameters of what they can do.

Empower students by providing them with the information they need to make informed decisions and by showing them you trust their decision-making ability.



VicSRC's *Framework for Including Students in Decision Making* (over page) outlines how to set your school up for success in empowering students to be active partners in education.

### Example scenario: lesson planning with students

To plan an engaging lesson, students will need to know:

- the curriculum content that needs to be covered
- the achievement standards that need to be reached
- how much time is allocated
- what the class's preferred learning methods have been, based on feedback from previous lessons

With this information and your guidance, students will be empowered to plan effective lessons with you.

# FRAMEWORK FOR INCLUDING STUDENTS IN DECISION MAKING



**1A** Make space for students that represent cohorts less likely to be heard through other mechanisms.

**1B** Enable students to identify their needs rather than impose current mechanisms or structures (i.e. SRCs, Prefects etc)

**2A** Be transparent around what changes are possible in the short, medium and long term and what the school's priorities are.

**2B** Support students to understand who makes which decisions in school.

**2C** Provide accurate timelines for decision making processes and change implementation.

**3A** Support students to identify and understand key internal and external policies that influence and impact decision making at school.

**3B** Provide students with appropriate local and system data sets where available.

**4A** Make specific space for students to contribute to school governance (council/board) meetings and provide clear updates for them to feed back to the student community.

**4B** Support student representatives to meet regularly with school leadership (principal/assistant principal) about student-led priorities in school.

**5A** Enable student representatives to be actively involved in annual and strategic plans, and goal setting.

**5B** Regularly invite students to provide advice and recommendations on new and existing school policies and procedures.

**5C** Involve students in curriculum reviews, learning and practice communities, and discussions about pedagogy.



## Using the framework

*Implementation ideas to get started*

<b>1. CO-CREATION</b>	<p>Before you make a plan, talk with and include students from the beginning. Have an informal discussion with a small group, asking:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How would they like to see this happen?</li><li>• Are they interested in it at all?</li><li>• What is essential to them for their engagement?</li></ul>
<b>2. PARAMETERS</b>	<p>If this is your school's first foray into including students in decision making, support students to pick something to focus on that is achievable – something small but impactful. The success of this will help students and staff buy in and see what is possible.</p>
<b>3. INFORMATION</b>	<p>Translate information into plain English and never assume knowledge:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Avoid or unpack jargon</li><li>• Explain all acronyms and initials</li><li>• Unpack “common” pedagogical and education policy language</li></ul>
<b>4. LEADERSHIP STRUCTURES</b>	<p>Already have a Student Representative Team or student leaders? You don't need to start over. Support them to have more input into decisions at school through being involved in staff committees and providing advice and recommendations on decisions being made or issues being investigated.</p> <p>Aim to create a whole school feedback loop where students, teachers and school leadership are all connected in some way through decision making and leadership structures.</p>
<b>5. OPPORTUNITIES</b>	<p>Don't get caught up in formality or only using one group of students for everything. Put out different opportunities to be involved in decision making to all students or to specific cohorts.</p> <p>As you build trust with students that their participation will be authentic, more students will want to be included.</p>

## Further resources and information

[VicSRC student voice fundamentals webinar](#)

[VicSRC student-teacher partnerships presentation](#)

[DET Amplify Toolkit](#)

[VicSRC Resource Hub](#)