



# STUDENTS ON SCHOOL COUNCIL

A quick guide

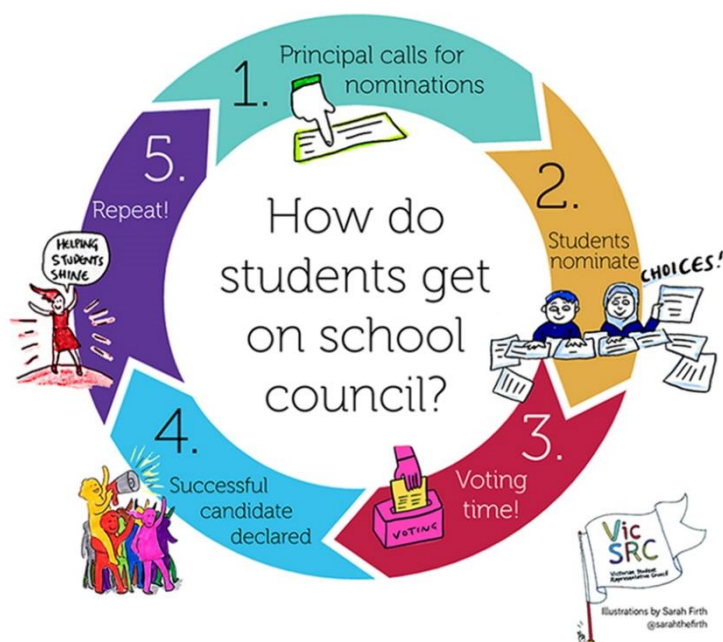
## About students on school council

In Victoria, it is mandatory for all government secondary schools to have two elected student members on school council.

Student members on school council are:

- Full voting members of the school council
- Elected by the student body specifically to school council (not for school captain or other leadership positions)

The opportunity to nominate and vote for school council student members should be open to all students from year 7 to 12. School council elections happen every year in February and March.



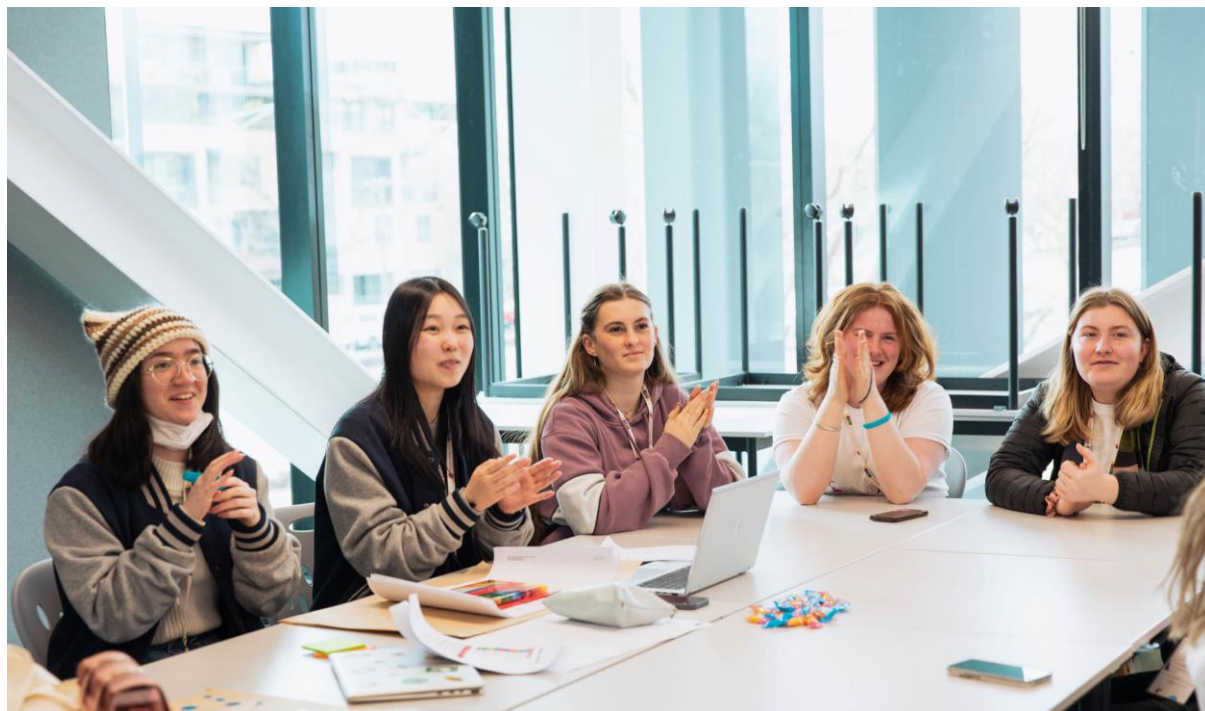
Even if students on school council is not mandatory at your school, this guide will be helpful in understanding the importance of including students in education decision-making and supporting them to do so.

Students are the biggest group of stakeholders in a school, and in education systems. It is important that students are involved in making decisions that affect them, and that decision-makers consider student needs, wants and perspectives when making decisions.

## What is a school council?

School councils are made up of elected members from school staff, the school community, the local community, and students. They are responsible for:

- Setting the direction and vision for the school, including creating a strategic plan
- Leading school community conversations about key issues and challenges in education
- Developing and updating school policies, such as student safety and behaviour, curriculum development and uniform
- Making sure that the school is responsive to the needs of the local community



## Further resources and information

[Victorian Department of Education and Training School Council Training and Good Governance](#)

[Victorian Department of Education and Training School Council Policy](#)

[Victorian School Governance Network](#)

[Damn Good Advice for School Councils](#)

# INCLUSIVE MEETING PROCEDURES FOR SCHOOL COUNCILS

Supporting student members to meaningfully participate in school councils, or any adult-dominated meeting space, takes purposeful work. The below procedures can help make meetings more inclusive and effective for everyone involved.

## BEFORE THE MEETING

- Meeting preparation, particularly supporting student members, should be seen as part of council members' commitments as this is integral to students being able to meaningfully participate as school council members.
- Meetings should be held at a time when student members are able to attend.
- Send out detailed and plain English agendas early.
- Agendas should include a clear statement about the style of each item of business – identifying brainstorming or discussion items, or formal motion-moving or decision-making items.
- Support student members to meet before the meeting to go through the agenda and ask any clarifying questions. Students could meet with each other, with a mentor and/or with another school council member.

## AT THE MEETING

- At the end of each item of business, the chairperson should summarise the key points of discussion and the decisions on action to be taken, and who is responsible for each action.
- Before decisions are made, allow time for members, particularly student members, to talk with each other to make sure they understand the issues.
- Motions should be written out in plain English and be available for all members to read before making a decision.
- Avoid using jargon and never assume knowledge:
  - Explain all acronyms and initials.
  - Any other groups, committees or individual roles that are referenced should be explained fully.
  - Unpack "common" pedagogical and education policy language.
- All members should be encouraged and empowered to ask questions about the use of a name, word or phrase and be answered seriously.

## AFTER THE MEETING

- Meetings should finish with a summary of the major decisions made and actions to be taken by who and by when.
- Support student members to meet after the meeting to debrief and discuss what happened. Regular check ins with student members will help improve meeting processes and procedures to be as inclusive and meaningful as possible.

# TOP TIPS FOR ADULTS SUPPORTING STUDENTS ON SCHOOL COUNCIL

## SUPPORT STUDENT MEMBERS TO LEARN ABOUT THEIR ROLE

Governance will be new to student members. Support students by making sure they have access to any training and assist them in finding a mentor (an adult school council member, a teacher or a past student member) to help them review agendas, explain processes and understand any jargon and acronyms.

## CHECK IN REGULARLY

Informal check ins between meetings can be helpful to find out how the student members are going and what is and isn't working for them on school council.

## RECOGNISE THE IMPORTANT WORK OF STUDENT MEMBERS

Students should not be disadvantaged by their participation in school council. Your school might support student members by allowing them some class time to prepare for school council activities, or by giving them flexibility for some assessments. Financial support is also important – consider how you can cover travel costs incurred by student members, and if other school council members are paid for certain commitments, then students should also be fully compensated.

## ENCOURAGE BROADER STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN SUBCOMMITTEES

School council subcommittees are generally open to members outside the school council. Give students the opportunity to be on subcommittees so they gain experience before they might run to be student members and to include more students in decision making.

# TOP TIPS FOR STUDENTS ON SCHOOL COUNCIL

## ASK ABOUT TRAINING

There is free school council training available for school council members – both online modules and facilitated sessions. Ask about accessing this and what else your school council might use.

## FIND A MENTOR

School council meetings can be full of jargon and acronyms, and any new member can find this confusing. Approach another school council member or a teacher and ask them to be your mentor. Together you can review agendas and meeting papers and figure out how things work.

## BE ACTIVE IN SUBCOMMITTEES

Your school council probably has subcommittees which advise the school council on key decisions. You might get involved in a subcommittee on finance, student wellbeing or facilities in order to have more input into decision making. Subcommittees are generally open to other members of the school community and are a great option to get more students involved – ask if you can promote membership of the subcommittees to the rest of your student body!

## TALK TO YOUR TEACHERS ABOUT YOUR COMMITMENTS

Your teachers should support you to use some class time to prepare for or attend meetings and may also be able to give you some flexibility around deadlines for assessments and exams. Your teachers may also allow you to use some of your school council work for assessment tasks for different subjects – being a part of a school council is a great example of civics and citizenship in action.