



10th Annual VicSRC Congress 2015 Report



The VicSRC believes that all Victorian Schools should endeavour to reduce the negative factors that contribute to the environmental issues in schools and primary a more sustainable step forward for the students of tomorrow. This can be placed in a better picture by an aware and educating school community, with the support of the government, this learning can be tested using a ranking system.

CONGRESS
2015 • ORMOND COLLEGE

10 YEARS OF VICSRC AND CONGRESS

VicSRC Executive 2014–15 team

We proudly acknowledge the tireless work of the outgoing VicSRC Executive for 2014–15.

Tess Shacklock, Templestowe College; **Qais Sadat**, Minaret College; **Marine Chu**, The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School; **Danai Harawa**, Frankston High School; **Sabrina Bassal**, Minaret College; **Samantha Chapman**, Casey Grammar School; **Spencer Davis**, Footscray City College; **Natalie Elizabeth**, Northern College of the Arts and Technology; **Ron Garcia**, Lalor Secondary College; **Sam Ilobuchi**, Frankston High School; **Demi Irwin**, Rochester Secondary College; **Lucas Muehleisen**, John Monash Science School; **Kristen Sellings**, Yarram Secondary College; **Margaret Tran**, The Mac.Roberston Girls' High School; **Trinity Duffield–Pugsley**, Firbank Grammar School, **Jordyn Kruger**, Mooroolbark College.



We are the roar of student voices

Three days, two nights, 170 students, 38 volunteers, five staff, incredible depth of discussion and powerful pledges to action: Congress 2015 was an explosion of student voice.

2015 marks 10 years of VicSRC and Congress, with the roar of student voices building over a decade of student-led advocacy and action. Delegates came to Ormond College, The University of Melbourne, from years 7–12 across regional and metropolitan Victoria; from private, government, independent, special and Catholic secondary schools. They came with passion, drive and determination to work hard, have fun and make real change.

"Congress is an extravaganza of student voice. You see 170 great people who wouldn't have met otherwise becoming great friends and bringing great solutions and having a ball. We work hard and we play hard."

Spencer Davis, Footscray City College, 15, re-elected VicSRC Executive member for 2015–2016.

Congress 2015 was the culmination of 12 months of hard work put in by the 15 students that lead VicSRC—the VicSRC Executive team. Our commitment to empowering student voices to be valued in every aspect of education underpins everything we do.

We've come so far in ten years, and we're so driven by how far we can go. When we challenge expectations of what 'students can and can't do', the possibilities are limitless. We hope you enjoy the journey as much as we have!

VicSRC Executive team, 2014–15



What is the VicSRC?

The Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC) is the peak body representing students in Victoria.

Our vision is a world where all children and young people have access to education that is student-led, student-driven and student-focused.

We exist to empower all student voices to be valued in every aspect of education.

VicSRC is auspiced by the Youth Affairs Council Victoria, and funded through the Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET), Newsboys Foundation and Catholic Education Office Melbourne.

Our values

Student-Centred We are representative, student-run and initiated.

Inclusive We are inclusive and respectful of different points of view and support diversity.

Innovative We are forward looking, yet reflective, to encourage creative solutions.

Independent We are not party political; the best interests of students is at the core of our advocacy.

Ongoing We are not for profit.

Goal 1: Advocacy To advocate for Student Voice and promote priority areas identified by students.

Goal 2: Action To empower, facilitate and co-ordinate action by students.

Goal 3: Engagement To increase and strengthen engagement with the VicSRC and SRCs in schools.

Goal 4: Recognition To be recognised as the democratic, participatory and leading organisation of student participation in Victoria.

Goal 5: Sustainability To build a sustainable organisation that will continue to work on behalf of school students now and in the future.

A look back at 2014-15

As the peak body representing students in Victoria, we are thrilled to wrap up this last 12 months celebrating students, SRCs, and schools that are leading the way in student voice.

Advocacy

"We can't call ourselves the education state if we aren't looking after the education and wellbeing of our students."

Student (15), The Mac.Robertson Girls High School

VicSRC contributes to the provision of policy advice and analysis to government that is student-centred and informed by the VicSRC Executive team and extensive consultations with students. We aim to build a greater public profile of student voice, provide advice and feedback on policy, initiatives and programs relating to students and education.

In 2014-15, VicSRC contributed consultation, policy input and practical assistance to the following Department of Education and Training policies and consultations:

- strengthening regional relationships and support
- engaging families in learning
- consultation on tech schools
- consultation and advice on the Education State
- state budget briefing
- student transition consultation and report submission
- the literacy strategy
- Greater Schools Network consultation forum

In addition, VicSRC has provided support and advice to other projects, departments and officials:

- Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority
- Victorian Institute of Teaching
- Office for Youth
- Adobe Youth Voices project
- Sam Hibbins, Member for Prahran

Action

VicSRC Regional Conferences

"We not only brainstormed and shared ideas, but we worked on solutions to the problems we face."

Student, Metro North conference

12 conferences, three months, 1,724kms on the road, seven sell-outs and almost 1,000 students standing up and speaking out on the issues that matter most. From Bendigo to Malvern, Pascoe Vale to Hamilton, Footscray to Stawell, Corio to Churchill, we travelled far and wide to work with students who care passionately about their education at the VicSRC Regional Conferences 2015.

"It helped me open up and taught me more about the importance and power of SRC."

Student, Gippsland conference

VicSRC Regional Conferences allow students to network across schools, gain new skills, work together on common issues and define the top issues that matter to Victorian students. In depth discussions allowed students to find connections and common ground across schools on a range of key issues including school funding, governance, wellbeing and welfare, school culture, facilities, technology and the curriculum.



Teach the Teacher

“The program bridges the communication gap between teachers and students and will be used as a complementary aid for our teachers, where teachers do not feel intimidated or threatened by constructive criticism, but rather empowered with the support and feedback from their own students.”

Madu Balashanmugan and Tim Li Huang, Year 11 and 12 Leadership Team, Mount Waverley Secondary College

Teach the Teacher is a student-led professional development program for teachers. It brings students and teachers together to talk about learning and teaching, and the school environment.

The program starts with conversations, and provides a space to make positive changes together. It involves a commitment to listening to the voices of students, to taking their concerns seriously, and to building student-teacher partnerships for school improvement.

In 2014–15, we launched a new website to support schools deliver the program – www.teachtheteacher.org.au – and provided resources, training and support to 20 new schools.



Engagement

Communications

As an organisation, our communications approach is all about telling our story and putting students front and centre.

Our media profile has grown with 18 media mentions across print, radio, tv and online publications through 2014–15, with students commenting on issues that affect their education and schooling.

The VicSRC monthly e-Newsletter is distributed monthly to communicate with 1000 students and teachers across Victoria, with an above-industry open rate average of 24%.

VicSRC has grown across social media, increasing our reach and impact across Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. As at 30 June 2015, our Facebook likes have risen from 673 to 1,012. Likewise, Twitter followers have increased from 244 to 533, and Instagram increased to 211 followers.

The positive impact on social media is evident in the reach and statistics from Congress 2015: over 30,000 people interacted with VicSRC during the event!

See the infographic on page 8–9 for Congress at a glance.

Recognition

VicSRC Recognition Awards

“Some days, the world is either for you or against you. When it’s against you, be patient. When it’s for you, be humble.”

Sophie Williams, Student Leader of the Year

The VicSRC Recognition Awards are about celebrating the achievements of SRCs and presenting examples of best practice in student voice, student led action and student participation. 2014 marked the first year that VicSRC has presented the VicSRC Recognition Awards as a stand-alone event.

Attended by the Minister for Education, our event saw over 50 applications from 28 schools across the state. They showcased stories of student-led action by SRCs and other student groups, of schools challenging restricted understandings of the importance of student voice, and of SRCs working hard to ensure the authenticity of shared decision-making between students and teachers.

Our finalists blew us away with their dedication, humour and profound commitment to authentic student voice.

Sustainability

The VicSRC Executive

The VicSRC Student Executive continues to lead the organisation forward, driving strategy and decision making at all levels. The Executive meets monthly at the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, to provide leadership over the direction of the VicSRC and work on resolutions passed at Congress.

We have spoken on panels, been MCs at events, and have participated in a number of stakeholder forums to provide feedback and advice to the Department of Education and Training. In 2014–15 we attended two camps, held a strategic planning day in January and planned extensively for Congress 2015.

The VicSRC Executive team led campaigns and action on across five key areas:

1. Interschool collaboration
2. Student wellbeing counsellors
3. Green initiatives
4. Extracurricular activities
5. Campaigning for the Education Maintenance Allowance

We continue to grow, and over the past 12 months VicSRC received an increase in funding from the Department of Education and Training for 2014–17. We are also grateful for the support of Newsboys Foundation and Catholic Education Office Melbourne which enables us to continue to enhance the impact of student voice across Victoria.



170

students

38 volunteers

55 schools

5 staff

3 days

2 nights

5 scholarship recipients

Sold out in 2 weeks.....

93%

of students felt they could actively start to create change in their school environments by taking action post-Congress

#VicSRCpledge campaign

23 pledge posts of Facebook, Twitter and Instagram

Congress at a glance

// VicSRC has really helped other students and myself open our eyes on how doing something even so little can turn into something massive. Congress was absolutely fantastic, what an amazing opportunity to come up with great ideas, have fun and make new friends! //

Dante, July 2015 (Facebook)



10 years
of student-led
advocacy and
action



Ministers

2



100

new likes



33,930

post reach

7,564

video views

35 mentions

63 favourites



84 retweets

Congress Report

This year we celebrated ten years of student action in style at the 10th annual VicSRC Congress! Congress took place over three days in the July school holidays at the beautiful Ormond College in Melbourne CBD. We had students come from far and wide across Victoria attend the camp, some traveling great lengths to join in on the roar of student voices. Our aim for Congress this year was to hear what secondary students think is most important to tackle in 2015–16 both on the state level and locally in delegates' individual communities.

On day one, we welcomed delegates and outlined what the three days would hold. There was a quick report back from the 2014–15 Executive on the projects they'd been working on since last year's Congress. Then we were off! The delegates split into their Issues Groups to get to know each other and begin workshopping their issues.

After lunch we were visited by the Minister for Education, James Merlino, who gave a speech in support of VicSRC's work and the changes all students are making to education. A Q&A session gave delegates the chance to ask some hard hitting questions of the Minister and his plans for education in the future. The afternoon was made up of two rotating skills workshops where the delegates got to choose sessions that they were interested in. We ended the day in style with the long-awaited Harry Potter-themed gala dinner. Dressed in costumes and with tables decorated in the spirit of Hogwarts, we ate, we laughed, we listened to motivating speeches and we danced to music by FLYBZ, an inspirational African–Australian rap duo.

On day two the Congress debate began. Delegates deliberated on issues ranging from bullying and school curriculum to student governance and environmental issues. After intense debate, eight Belief Statements were passed through Congress. (See page 12–13 for the full list.) Day two was big, but it wasn't done yet! Students finalised their action pitches for a big



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idea they'd like the VicSRC Exec to implement in 2015–16. Presentations ranging from dramatic chants to acting out situations were prioritised for action in the coming year. The worthy winning pitch came from the 'School Leadership and Governance' Issues Group (find out more on page 14–15!).

In the evening, the election speeches were presented and delegates had the opportunity to vote for the 2015–16 Executive team. This was always going to be a hotly contested election with 50 delegates putting their hat in the ring to represent their peers on the Exec.

On the third day the action kicked off straight away with a fantastic 'Taking Action' workshop. Representatives from Oxfam Australia, Oaktree Foundation and One Girl shared their experiences in leading independent organisations and the challenges they faced along the way. Inspired, delegates dispersed into their regional groups to map out their plans within their communities to action their #VicSRCPledge. As they came back together, the Minister for Youth Affairs, Jenny Mikakos, greeted us with a speech highlighting the power of student voice. After much anticipation, the Minister announced the Executive Team for 2015–16, elected to implement the actions decided by this Congress (see page 17).

It is safe to say that this year's Congress was a huge success bringing together the ideas of students from across Victoria to once again raise student voice to the fore. Being Congress coordinator in my final year on the Executive has been an amazing learning experience for me, and I look forward to using these skills in my future ventures. On behalf of the VicSRC I would like to thank our amazing staff members, Krista Seddon, Fiona Campbell, Emma Myers and Sophie 'Pinchy' Breheny whose hard work behind the scenes made everything possible.

Congratulations not only to the newly elected Exec. but to all our incredible Congress delegates. Together we are powerful!

Tess Shacklock, 17, Templestowe College

Congress Coordinator and VicSRC Executive 2014–15



Belief Statements 2015-16

VicSRC has committed to eight Belief Statements passed by delegates:

Facilities

The VicSRC believes that all schools should meet required standards that ensure equipment and facilities are professional, safe, modern and well maintained. All teachers, students and classrooms must have their needs catered. Schools should be provided with adequate and equitable funding through communication with the school community, areas which require improvements may be discovered and clarified.

Student-Teacher Relationships

The VicSRC believes that the foundations of the relationship between a teacher and a student must be built upon mutual trust, respect and unwavering support. Each party must be able to communicate effectively to ensure a healthy environment for learning.

School Leadership and Governance

The VicSRC believes that there should be mandatory student involvement in decision making processes by partaking in high level policy meetings including, by not limited to, school council meetings.

Student Wellbeing and Welfare

The VicSRC believes that all students must be able to feel safe in the school environment. Students should readily have access to support including counsellors and teachers. This establishes an environment that promotes student wellbeing and welfare to reduce the incidences of negative experiences.



School Funding

The VicSRC believes that the distribution of funds should be measured and monitored fairly through a needs basis and to the standard of the VicSRC.

School Clusters

The VicSRC believes in an educational community that works together, sharing good practice and supporting each other in their work. Colleges should be supported by programs and initiatives that use clustering.

Environmental Issues

The VicSRC believes that all Victorian Schools should endeavour to reduce the negative factors that contribute to environmental issues in schools and promote a more sustainable step for the students of tomorrow. This can be placed in a bigger picture by raising awareness and educating school communities, with the support of the government, with this learning being tested using a ranking system.

Curriculum

The VicSRC believes that students should have the opportunity to pursue a wide range of interests in specialised curriculum. Schools should be accommodating to the needs of the students and should be more flexible towards individuals providing the opportunity to participate in a wider range of subjects from a younger age.





Action Pitch²⁰¹⁵⁻¹⁶

“Congress this year was not merely a discussion without any real power, but the place for students to start achieving change.”

Working within Issues Groups, delegates were tasked with developing bold and innovative solutions around key issues affecting students today. Creative ideas flowed around bullying, student–teacher relationships, leadership and governance through to curriculum and school culture. In groups, students pitched ten ideas and delegates voted on the pitches that they wanted the VicSRC Executive to action in 2015–16.

The successful action pitch this year was from the ‘School Governance and Leadership’ Issues Group. The group explored how schools are governed and how students can be part of that process. Beginning with the Congress chant, “WE WANT A CHOICE, GIVE US A VOICE!” the action pitch called for a renewed focus on students making higher level decisions in school. It called for mandatory students on school councils, to give students a real voice in decision making. More than that, it was a call for students to be treated as respected partners in the journey of education.

“We believe that there should be mandatory student involvement in decision making processes by partaking in key policy meetings including, but not limited to, school council meetings.”

“We need to run a campaign, hire professionals, or recruit volunteers and provide training to schools to get our student voices heard. We want a choice, give us a voice! It’s our education!”

While schools value student input, how many schools actively involve students in the decision making process for high level decisions? This is what we want to change.

This action pitch holds great possibilities: it truly resonated with the students’ desire to transform their education system for the better. Our Executive team relish the opportunity to develop and implement this campaign in the next 12 months. One of the direct lines from the action pitch went:

“We believe that there should be mandatory student involvement in decision making processes by partaking in key policy meetings including, but not limited to, school council meetings.”

The fact that this action pitch was voted by students as their first priority shows how true this statement rings to students from all across Victoria.

**Lucas Muehleisen, 18, John Monash Science School,
VicSRC Executive member 2014–15**



VicSRC and Congress are made possible thanks to generous support of the VicSRC Exec, staff, volunteers, stakeholders and sponsors!

VicSRC Executive 2014–15 team

Tess Shacklock, Qais Sadat, Marine Chu, Danai Harawa, Sabrina Bassal, Samantha Chapman, Spencer Davis, Natalie Elizabeth, Ron Garcia, Sam Illobuchi, Demi Irwin, Lucas Muehleisen, Kristen Sellings, Margaret Tran, Trinity Duffield–Pugsley, Jordyn Kruger.

Congress Crew volunteers, supporters and staff

Roger Holdsworth, Dave Mould, Ashley Wah, Sarah Bibby, Jane Cantwell, Jordyn Kruger, Emma Clark, Sophie Williams, Sarah Boland, Mehak Sheikh, Claire Runci, Tyler Kenopic, Lachlan Hugo, Dave Rose, Justine Jaramillo, Scott Duncan, Anna Seddon, Christine Carder–Rice, Julie Nethercote, Freya Fogliani, Sarah Barkley, Liz Kalas, Mandy Duong, Michelle Tan, Lavie Vo, Arsalan Shahid, Tim Eric, Doug Flakemore, Lynda Den Elzen, Maree Garden, Mayra Jamall, Georgia Russell, Sophie ‘Pinchy’ Breheny, Fiona Campbell, Emma Myers and Krista Seddon.

Department of Education and Training

The Hon. James Merlino MP, Minister for Education

Office for Youth

The Hon. Jenny Mikakos MLC, Minister for Youth Affairs

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Incoming VicSRC Executive 2015–16

We are delighted to introduce the newly elected VicSRC Executive for 2015–16. As state representatives, these students advocate on behalf of school students across Victoria and drive the work of VicSRC for the next 12 months.

We've come so far in ten years, and we're driven by how far we can go.

Marine Chu, The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School; **Danai Harawa**, Frankston High School; **Spencer Davis**, Footscray City College; **Sam Ilobuchi**, Frankston High School; **Demi Irwin**, Rochester Secondary College; **Kristen Sellings**, Yarram Secondary College; **Margaret Tran**, The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School; **Matthew Sievers**, Bendigo Senior Secondary College; **Dave Serpell**, Northern College of the Arts and Technology; **Victoria Vassallo**, Catholic Regional College Melton; **Liz Chiem**, Mount Waverley Secondary College; **Simana Latu**, Copperfield College; **Thomas Velican**, Nossal High School; **Shania Hallyburton**, Brauer College; **William Hornstra**, Trafalgar High School.





Join the roar of
student voices.

VicSRC Victorian Student
Representative Council

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