



# Student Voice & the Education State

A resource for Victorian schools

## Ministerial foreword

The Victorian Government has committed to making Victoria the Education State—a state where everyone has the same opportunities for a great education regardless of their background, location or personal circumstances. A key part of the Education State vision is that students have a say and a legitimate voice in how the education system works for them.

Students have unique expertise and perspectives on learning, teaching, and schooling, and should have the opportunity to actively shape their own education. Student voice involves students actively participating in their schools, communities and the education system, contributing to decision making processes and collectively influencing outcomes by putting forward their views, concerns and ideas. Student voice not only allows students to engage and participate meaningfully in their own learning, it contributes to building leadership, confidence and other skills that ensure student wellbeing.

Victorian schools can support student voice and participation through activities such as student representative councils, student input into curriculum design, student representation on school council, and student-led activities, such as cross-age mentoring programs or the VicSRC's Teach the Teacher program.

Organisations such as the VicSRC are critical to promoting student voice in Victorian schools and I commend the VicSRC Student Executive and members who contributed to the development of the Student Voice & the Education State resource.

The Framework for Improving Student Outcomes is a key part of the Education State in Schools agenda and, through its 'Empowering students and building school pride' initiative, encourages schools to make student voice a priority for full and active participation in school life. The VicSRC's Student Voice & the Education State resource has practical ideas for principals, teachers and students about how to implement student voice activities in schools.

I encourage schools to use the ideas and actions in this resource to ensure greater student voice in all aspects of school life.



*James Merlino*

The Hon James Merlino MP  
Deputy Premier  
Minister for Education

## Student foreword

With the launch of The Education State, the Department of Education and Training (DET) has developed the new Framework for Improving Student Outcomes. This includes six initiatives to help schools lift student achievement, wellbeing and engagement:

- 1. Building Practice Excellence**
- 2. Curriculum Planning and Assessment**
- 3. Building Leadership Teams**
- 4. Empowering Students and Building School Pride**
- 5. Setting Expectation and Promoting Inclusion**
- 6. Building Communities**

The Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC) is the peak body representing school aged students in Victoria; we exist to empower all students' voices to be valued in education. Our vision is of a world where all children and young people have access to education that is student-led, student-driven and student-focused. We welcome the strong commitment to student voice within the Framework for Improving Student Outcomes and particularly in the 'Empowering Students and Building School Pride' initiative.

Student voice and participation is integral to school improvement. Practices that encourage student voice and the active participation of students are essential to all six framework areas. Whatever your school's priority area, we encourage you to develop practices that put students at the front and centre of any school improvement strategy.

Please use this resource as a guide and consider ways in which student voice can be amplified in all initiatives within the Framework for Improving Student Outcomes. When used alongside support from the VicSRC, this resource is a powerful tool to strengthen student voice in your school.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Marine'.

Marine Chu  
VicSRC Student Executive 2015-2016



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Krista'.

Krista Seddon  
VicSRC Manager

# The Education State

## Student voice ideas & action resources for schools

*Written by Roger Holdsworth in consultation with the VicSRC*

### **What is Student Voice?**

Students have unique perspectives on learning, teaching and schooling, and should have the opportunity to actively shape their own education. Student voice includes students contributing to decision making processes and collectively influencing outcomes by putting forward their views, concerns and ideas, and actively participating in their schools, communities and the education system. Student voice allows students to engage, participate, lead and learn.

### **What is a student organisation or Student Representative Council (SRC)?**

Most schools in Victoria have some sort of student organisation to represent and work on behalf of students. They operate under many different names, including SRCs, student forums, student councils, student leadership councils, [and] student voice. In each case, they are made up of a group of students who represent student views within the school. They enable students to meet to discuss, debate and decide on their collective views on education.

### **What is the Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC)?**

The Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC) is the peak body representing students in Victoria. The VicSRC's vision is of a world where all children and young people have access to education that is student-led, student-driven and student-focussed. The organisation exists to empower all student voices to be valued in every aspect of education. The VicSRC is auspiced by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, and funded through the Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET) and Catholic Education Melbourne. The VicSRC website provides resources, events, teacher professional development, and support relevant to principals, teachers and students.

[www.vicsrc.org.au](http://www.vicsrc.org.au)

## What is Teach the Teacher?

Written by students, the Teach the Teacher program is a student-led professional learning program for teachers. Teach the Teacher provides a space for students, teachers and principals to connect, explore and share ideas in a constructive and judgement free environment. By giving students a greater say in their education, Teach the Teacher aims to create a positive community for all. [www.teachtheteacher.org.au](http://www.teachtheteacher.org.au)

## What is the Framework for Improving Student Outcomes?

Find out more about the Framework for Improving Student Outcomes here:  
[www.education.vic.gov.au/about/educationstate/pages/outcomes](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/educationstate/pages/outcomes)  
[www.educationstate.education.vic.gov.au](http://www.educationstate.education.vic.gov.au)



Here are some practical ideas that you could investigate and implement with your students.



## 1. Building practice excellence

*Teachers, principals and schools will work together to exchange knowledge and ideas, develop and strengthen teaching and assessment approaches, build a culture of collaboration, master the use of learning interventions and student data, and enhance feedback to students and staff.*

Ideas to amplify student voice and participation:

- Engage your SRC in discussion about the school's criteria for practice excellence, of learning teaching approaches and of assessment
- Implement a Teach the Teacher approach to provide a student-led space for discussions between students and teachers about how the school can build practice excellence
- Support a team of students to formally evaluate specific practices as a curricular or co-curricular initiative
- Formally adopt a regular program of eliciting student feedback on curriculum content, processes, pedagogy and assessment
- Conduct a program of collaborative classroom/learning observations by students and teachers, feeding in to discussions
- Engage students as technology leaders within the school
- Initiate a form of peer- or cross-age tutoring within the school.



## 2. Curriculum planning and assessment

*Schools will embed a culture of curriculum planning and assessing the impact of learning programs, and adjusting them to suit individual student needs so that students can reach their potential. Schools will strengthen their use of student assessment data and feedback to evaluate students' progress, monitor the impact of teaching and adjust learning programs and interventions.*

Ideas to amplify student voice and participation:

- Engage your SRC in discussion about criteria for curriculum planning and assessment, ways of collecting feedback and other data, and meaning of results
- Implement a Teach the Teacher approach to provide a student-led space for discussions between students and teachers about how the school plans curriculum and assessment, and/or about processes of feedback to teachers and students
- Establish a Student Action Team to investigate responses to data collected eg meaning and implications of Student Survey data
- Seek and include student views and priorities in curriculum planning and assessment
- Provide formal representation of students on curriculum review structures and processes
- Formally adopt a regular program of eliciting student feedback on curriculum content, processes, pedagogy and assessment
- Support a team of students to formally evaluate specific practices as a curricula or co-curricular initiative.



### 3. Building leadership teams

*Schools will strengthen their succession planning, develop the capabilities of their leadership teams in using evidence and proven coaching and feedback methods, build a culture of trust that is focused on improvement, and strengthen the induction of new teachers into the professional learning culture of their school.*

Ideas to amplify student voice and participation:

- Recognise the SRC as part of the school's leadership team, and include them in leadership discussions
- Engage your SRC and student leaders in discussion about the school's leadership approaches
- Challenge the participation of your SRC by regularly asking it to consider and recommend on a broad range of important issues facing the school
- Support Teach the Teacher approaches that focus on building trust, respect and relationships
- Build the competent and effective role of student leaders at each level of school, including allocation of resources for training and succession planning amongst student representatives
- Appoint specific positions of support for student voice and participation
- Include distributed support for student voice and participation in a range of job descriptions throughout the school
- Involve students in selection processes for new teachers.



## 4. Empowering students and building school pride

*Schools will develop approaches that give students a greater say in the decisions that affect their learning and their lives at school. The whole school community will engage with students so they have a voice in the learning process, and fully and proudly participate in school life.*

Ideas to amplify student voice and participation:

- Link your student organisation or Student Representative Councils (SRC) to overall school decision making through election of students to School Council and appointment to other committees and bodies
- Engage your SRC in discussion about the role students can and should have within the school, and how this can happen
- Support Teach the Teacher approaches through which students define and highlight aspects of the school that engender pride, and aspects that need improving
- Challenge your student organisation as to its own practices of inclusion and representation—and build its competence
- Involve students in producing student-led media (including social media representation) about the school
- Support a group of students to produce the school newsletter on behalf of the school
- Build the competent and effective role of student leaders at each level of school, including allocation of resources for training and succession planning amongst student representatives
- Appoint specific positions of support for student voice and participation
- Include distributed support for student voice and participation in a range of job descriptions throughout the school.



## 5. Setting expectations and promoting inclusion

*Schools will work across their communities to implement a shared approach to supporting the health, wellbeing, inclusion and engagement of all students, including setting behaviour expectations, building teachers' understandings of positive classroom behaviour and engagement practices and ensuring students have the tools and skills to develop positive and self-regulating behaviours.*

Ideas to amplify student voice and participation:

- Engage your SRC in discussion about expectations, behaviour, mutual respect—and their roles in this area
- Conduct student-led student forums around topics of expectations, including reasons for behaviour, respect etc.
- Allocate time and resources to train and support student representatives to intervene around issues of positive behaviour
- Support Teach the Teacher initiatives that examine the setting of expectations and behaviour guidelines
- Establish Student Action Teams to investigate issues of inclusion and exclusion, and of expectations
- Explicitly challenge and invite students not otherwise engaged to lead roles of investigation and recommendation.



## 6. Building communities

*Schools will strengthen their capacity to build relationships with the broader community by partnering with the community sector and providers (for example, through the GPs in Schools initiative), make strategic use of existing community resources and capabilities, and increase the services delivered 'inside the school gate'. Schools will realise the value of harnessing the full capacity of the community and parents to collectively encourage students' learning and enhance student outcomes.*

Ideas to amplify student voice and participation:

- Engage your SRC in discussion about relationships with community, parents, local business and services
- Create Student Action Teams around issues of interest and concern to both students and the wider community
- Build partnerships with local organisations such as Aged Care, Men's Shed, Neighbourhood House—where students can undertake collaborative projects
- Implement forms of peer support and/or peer mediation
- Support students to write articles for the local/community newspapers, to present programs on local community radio, and to produce programs about issues of community concern for community television
- Support students to produce community resources and materials and conduct community-based research as part of their curriculum.

# VicSRC Victorian Student Representative Council

The Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC) is the peak body representing school aged students in Victoria. We exist to empower all student voices to be valued in every aspect of education.

Victorian Student Representative Council  
Level 2, 180 Flinders St Melbourne Victoria 3000  
Phone: 03 9267 3744 | 0411 679 050  
**[info@vicsrc.org.au](mailto:info@vicsrc.org.au) | [www.vicsrc.org.au](http://www.vicsrc.org.au)**

© VicSRC 2016