

Victorian Student Representative Council



Developing Student Participation,
Engagement & Leadership

A Guide for Principals

Prepared by

The Victorian Student Representative Council &
the Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals

VicSRC

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Department of Education and
Early Childhood Development



VASSP

Victorian Association of
State Secondary Principals

Student Participation, Engagement & Leadership

A broadly representative SRC provides large numbers of students with opportunities for active participation, engagement, leadership and learning. It allows the student voice to be heard and student's interests and concerns to be considered. There are many reasons to support your SRC becoming active and effective.

Rights

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that "...in all actions the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration; and that the child has the right to express their views in all matters that affect them".

Effective learning

Increased engagement with school leads to improved student learning, and this should be based on a school-wide culture.

In England, research has demonstrated that schools with high levels of pupil participation, where everyone feels involved and valued, produced better General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) results across the board when compared to schools in similar situations, especially for the less academic pupils.

Effective decision-making

When students are actively involved in decisions that affect them, those decisions are more likely to be fully embraced and successfully implemented. Importantly, students are able to provide information and advice that no-one else can offer.

An inclusive school culture embeds listening and consultation in all its structures and processes. Student views on issues such as bullying, the environment - including the school environment - and the use of technology (all discussed at the 2009 VicSRC Congress) are vital for good decision-making.

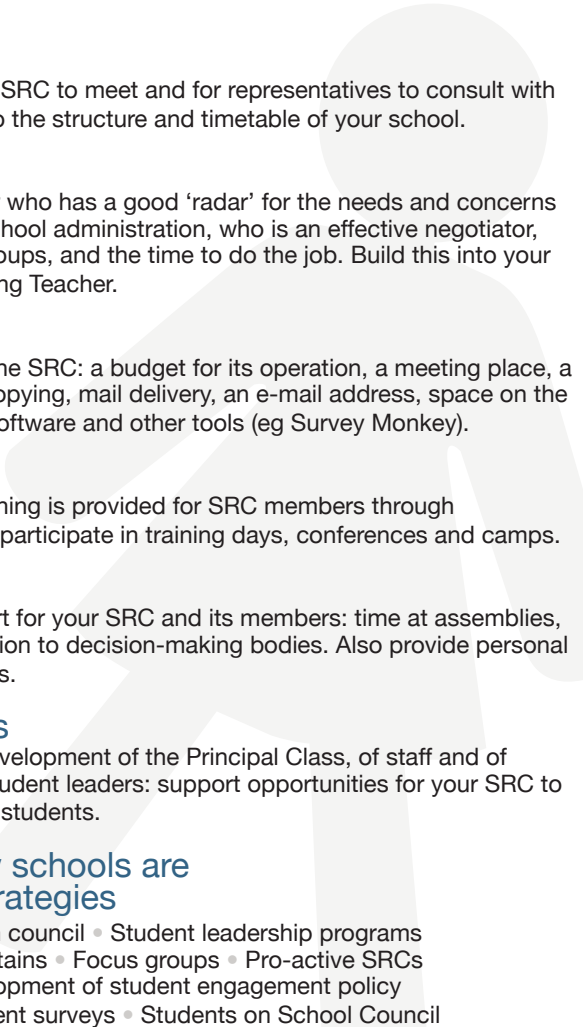
In the United Kingdom, the Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study (Kerr, et.al. 2003) reported that whilst 95% of heads were satisfied that the whole school was involved in discussion and decision making about school matters only 57% of teachers and 27% of students agreed.

Is it time to review the way your SRC works?

Can you hear the student voice in your school?

Support for your SRC

What you can do to build a broadly representative and effective SRC within your school's decision-making and curriculum

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- The work of the SRC**

Ensure that the SRC has real and important work to do (eg reviewing/developing school policies and processes, curriculum planning, facilities development).
Ask the SRC for student views on important issues within the school.
 - The decision-making process**

Make time to receive information and advice from the SRC. Link the SRC to meaningful consultations and ongoing discussions with your School Council or Board and its committees.
 - Meeting time**

Provide time and space for the SRC to meet and for representatives to consult with the student body. Build this into the structure and timetable of your school.
 - Support teacher**

Allocate time to a staff member who has a good 'radar' for the needs and concerns of both the students and the school administration, who is an effective negotiator, who has the respect of both groups, and the time to do the job. Build this into your staffing structure eg as a Leading Teacher.
 - Resources**

Allocate resources to support the SRC: a budget for its operation, a meeting place, a noticeboard, access to photocopying, mail delivery, an e-mail address, space on the school web pages, access to software and other tools (eg Survey Monkey).
 - Training**

Make sure that appropriate training is provided for SRC members through opportunities and resources to participate in training days, conferences and camps.
 - Public recognition**

Provide recognition and support for your SRC and its members: time at assemblies, space in newsletters, presentation to decision-making bodies. Also provide personal support for SRC representatives.
 - Network opportunities**

Networking is crucial for the development of the Principal Class, of staff and of parents. The same is true for student leaders: support opportunities for your SRC to liaise with and learn from other students.
 - DEECD surveys show schools are using the following strategies**
 - Student focus groups • Youth council • Student leadership programs
 - Student forums • School captains • Focus groups • Pro-active SRCs
 - Student involvement in development of student engagement policy
 - Senior mentor groups • Student surveys • Students on School Council

About VicSRC

The Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC) is a state-wide network of, and run by, secondary school students from all sectors.

The VicSRC is auspiced by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria and funded through the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD).

Our Vision

We want an education system where learning is enjoyable, practical and meaningful and where SRCs are valued and supported to contribute to making this an ongoing reality. We want a VicSRC that fosters connections between SRCs and is recognised as the peak body for secondary students in Victoria.

Our Aims

- Strengthen SRCs;
- Be a representative body for Victorian secondary school students;
- Facilitate and co-ordinate action by secondary students at all levels;
- Be democratic and participatory.

The next steps in developing your school's SRC

- Talk with staff and students about the importance of student participation and leadership.
- Schedule issues of student participation and leadership in your staff development sessions: download our PowerPoint presentation to use to begin reviewing how your school would like your SRC to operate.
- Put student participation and leadership on your network agenda.
- Find out more about what the VicSRC can offer to support and develop your students' participation and leadership by visiting the VicSRC website: www.vicsrc.org.au
- Encourage your SRC to become a member of the VicSRC. The application form is on the website.

DEECD research, 2009 (Victorian government secondary schools)

Does your school have an SRC?	Does your school council seek and consider students' views in key decision making?	Does your school have other means including specific policies/practices of encouraging or supporting students' views?
Yes – 95%	Yes – 98%	Yes – 89%

The VicSRC is auspiced by