

Guidelines for Student Participation Policy

1. Rationale

This policy is concerned with enabling students to be involved in the decision making processes in schools on matters which concern them. All students at each level of schooling can be involved in contributing to the decisions made:

- about their own learning - for example in negotiating with teachers about the content of units of work or work-required assessment
- about classroom management and organisation - through student forums at a class level
- through school-based decision making groups including student bodies, the school council and sub-committees
- in advisory groups at other levels within the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

To participate effectively in the decision-making process, students need to develop appropriate skills and knowledge. The abilities to analyse information, plan, negotiate, communicate and create solutions to problems in collaboration with others, are some of the essential pre-requisites of effective participation.

Confidence will be enhanced in situations where students' views are respected and they are able to listen. Participating in decision-making in partnership with others will enable students to understand the views of others and to develop skills in resolving conflict.

Students need to feel that what they are learning is important. They want the opportunity to express the concerns they have about their world and their future. Students are more likely to develop a strong commitment to the community and its future if they are able and permitted to take part in determining its direction. Participation in decision making at the school level is a means through which students are able to develop responsibility and experience the democratic process.

In planning for student participation, each school community needs to ensure that its practice is inclusive of the unique and special characteristics of its student population. Strategies enabling students to learn and apply decision-making and leadership skills will take into account each student's age, gender, social and cultural background, capabilities, challenges or disability.

An atmosphere encouraging fair treatment of each member through a respect of differences will enhance the relationship between students, staff and parents.

2. Policy Statement

It is expected that <name> School / College will acknowledge the rights of students to be involved in decision making that influences their future. <Name> School / College will ensure that appropriate procedures are established to enable participation of all students in making decisions that affect their schooling. In helping students to acquire the skills needed to participate effectively in the decision-making process, <name> School / College will take the following steps:

- Examine school policies and practices to ensure that all students have the opportunity to participate in decision-making about matters that relate to their schooling
- Develop an environment that fosters and supports the participation of all students
- Develop skills and knowledge appropriate to age, gender, social and cultural background, capability or disability, required by students in order to participate effectively in decision-making
- Provide opportunities for students to practise skills, participate in decision making and take on leadership roles
- Monitor and review programs promoting student participation to ensure an increase in levels of participation by all students
- Acknowledge and model effective democratic decision making processes
- Value the contributions made by students.

3. Implementation

The responsibilities of the principal

The school principal will:

- Consider student participation in the school strategic planning process
- Support the development of policies and programs to ensure all students have information and opportunities to develop knowledge and skills to participate effectively
- Ensure that decision making structures provide genuine opportunities for students to participate
- Provide appropriate support for students who participate on school committees
- Provide training and development opportunities for teachers to foster student participation at classroom and school level.

The responsibilities of teachers

Teachers will:

- Structure learning experiences to enable students to develop the skills and knowledge to participate in decision-making about their learning, behaviour management and other issues of concern
- Critically examine appropriate practices which support student participation in decision-making in the curriculum through negotiation about:
 - the establishment of learning goals
 - pace
 - learning style
 - forms of assessment
 - group work
- Encourage the involvement of student advocates, if appropriate, for students with disabilities
- Ensure a learning environment that is supportive and free from harassment so that all students can participate
- Support opportunities for students to participate in student forums and to work on curriculum committees
- Provide opportunities for all parents to take an active part in their child's learning and to gain an understanding and acceptance of the rationale supporting student participation.

Increased participation in decision-making by all members of the school community benefits educational outcomes for students.

Responsibilities of students

Students need to recognise the responsibility they share when working in cooperation with others in matters of mutual interest or concern and to act on the decisions agreed upon.

The participation of parents

Parents can assist by encouraging their children to participate in the opportunities offered to them for representation and involvement.

The role of the school council

Through its support for student participation in appropriate school decision-making forums, the school council can assist students to gain essential experiences. The views of the school community will be more accurately reflected by the school council if students are acknowledged as members of the education partnership.

4. Evaluation and review

This policy will be reviewed bi-annually by the education and policy sub-committee for endorsement by school council.

5. References

Adapted from the South Australian Department for Education and Children's Services,
Student Participation Policy, Date of Issue: 12 April, 1996.

Endorsed by <name> School Council: <insert date>