Students: Partners in Building Schools

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This Issue:
The last month has been dominated for me by attendance at major peak SRC conferences in two states - Victoria and New South Wales. I was fortunate to be the keynote speaker at the latter State SRC Conference, where students were seriously looking at the role and practice of Student Councils.

And so, under the heading: *Representation ... Participation ... Are You Serious??*, I was able to continue the challenge to the students about being serious in their roles as partners in school decision-making. When I got to the Conference from Adelaide (see below) the students had already been discussing and debating their SRCs’ effectiveness in groups looking at: ‘what do SRCs spend their time doing?’; ‘who do SRCs represent?’; ‘how do SRCs connect to school decision-making?’; ‘how are SRCs recognised within schools?’ and ‘how efficient and effective are SRCs?’.

So we started by hearing reports from these discussion groups, and then I built on that, with ideas drawn from the practices of other schools around Australia - where students are on School Councils and Boards, with voting rights; where students take part in teacher selection panels; where student initiate curriculum discussions and workshops with teachers and parents; where SRC activities and learning is recognised as part of the school curriculum.

The same ideas then wove through the VicSRC Annual Congress a few days later. Students worked in inter-school teams to discuss aspects of what their ideal schools might be like, and then built models of such schools to inspire their action planning for the next year (see the photo on the front cover).

The same ideas also resonated with a workshop earlier in the week in Adelaide, where I worked with a group of experienced teachers to explore implications of the ‘General Capabilities’ within the Australian Curriculum. This area may have received less attention than the subject designs but, we agreed, these capabilities should be at the centre, the core, of the Australian Curriculum – not marginal to it. These capabilities inherit directions from Values Education and from Civics and Citizenship Education; they underpin the whole curriculum: ‘intercultural understanding’, ‘ethical behaviour’, ‘personal and social capability’, ‘critical and creative thinking’, as well as ‘ICT capability’, ‘literacy’ and ‘numercy’. And they all encompass the aim of developing a ‘successful learner, confident and creative individual and active and informed citizens’.

So we focused on the overwhelming relevance and importance of active, participatory approaches for students within schools and within classrooms to these objectives. I suspect that this area will become even more important in the next few years.

At the state SRC conferences and in the reports from individual schools (the ones in this issue are drawn from applications by students for the Victorian SRC Recognition Awards), we see both great hopes for developing active and informed citizens, but also the challenges in stimulating and enabling authentic practice.

Roger Holdsworth

Next Issue: #197: October 2012
Deadline for material: end of September, 2012
What it means to have a voice …

SRC in the SDS

In 2009, when asked to choose a position of responsibility to take over upon commencing a teaching job at a new school, I put my hand up to co-ordinate the school’s Student Representative Council. As a new staff member teaching in the junior section of the school, I naïvely thought it would help me build better relationships with students across the school and consequently (... it embarrasses me to say it ...) make my twice weekly yard duty in the senior playground easier to manage! Little did I know it would become the most enjoyable and engaging aspect of my teaching career, and spur a future life-long investigation into what it really means to have a voice.

You see, it wasn’t just any run of the mill SRC – this was the SRC for students with a mild intellectual disability who attended Croxton Special School.

As I hadn’t been at the school previously, I had no expectations and no guidelines about what my role should entail, so I set about making it up, using what I knew from therapy (music therapy to be exact) and about building relationships with students and developing their self-esteem and voice at the background of my work. It was a year of trial and error, and many, many successes. Luckily for me, the culture of the SRC was deeply embedded at Croxton and, to the other staff there, there was nothing strange at all about bringing a group of students into the conference room once a week to meet. I learnt many valuable lessons during this year, and the speech made by one of the student leaders at the end of year presentation night summed up why this is such a worthwhile role.

In 2010 I decided to return to study my Masters in Education, and for this reason took up a part-time job at an old place of employment: Broadmeadows Special Developmental School (SDS). Although it was going to be a busy year, with the support of my bosses, I decided to implement an SRC at Broadmeadows SDS.

It was one thing to envisage running a meeting with students from a special school, but those at an SDS all have a moderate to profound intellectual disability, all have some form of communication impairment, and many are non-verbal. Yet it was, and is, my belief that all have a voice: it’s just that it can be tricky at times to hear it.

Carrington and Robinson (2006) specify ‘four guiding principles to support the development of a more inclusive school community’ (p 326). In addition to teachers developing learning communities, engaging in continual professional development, and effectively collaborating with parents, they suggest that schools need to engage students as citizens in school review and development’ (Carrington & Robinson 2006: 326). Furthermore, contemporary

SRC 2012: Getting their badges at assembly
educational research suggests that developing student voice should be an integral part of the curriculum (Manefield et al, 2007). I have been privileged to explore these concepts further and what it means to my teaching practice through my involvement in Student Representative Councils, or SRCs.

While staff were initially confused about what the point of the SRC was and is, and some wondered why I wanted to have a cross-section of the school represented (“but she can’t talk” or “but his behaviour is so challenging”) I always felt supported by school management, and now, half way into the third year of Broadmeadows SDS’ SRC, it has become a strong and steady part of the school culture.

So how has this process come about?

Structure of meetings, and developing relationships within the team

From the outset my bosses released me from one yard duty so I could have a weekly SRC meeting during one recess to save timetabling dilemmas. While in the first year of the SRC’s inception, I spent half of recess running around the yard grabbing students for their meeting, some students now line up eagerly outside my classroom on Thursday at recess time without reminder, and are able and willing to go and find other students who aren’t able to remember the day or time.

Students enter the classroom and know their role – whether it be getting the chairs to put in a circle, getting out cups and spooning in 2 teaspoons of milo to make a hot drink, marking the pictorial roll with a tick or a cross, or helping another less able student find their seat.

We always begin with a hello song in which students are required to say hello to the person sitting next to them, and we always end by standing in a circle, putting one hand in the middle and saying ‘SRC!!!’ on the count of 3 to celebrate our hard work, just like a basketball team.

What comes in between varies but I have a visual schedule showing students the order of proceedings... starting with the hello song and ending with the ‘any other ideas?’ picture in which students can offer a new idea for discussion.

One huge offshoot from SRC meetings has been a greater sense of camaraderie between students across the different sections of the school and with differing abilities, and increased incidences of more able students helping those that need a bit more assistance.

One day in a meeting we had run out of things to organise so I started a discussion about what each of us would wear to an upcoming SRC-initiated casual clothes day. Students were suggesting ‘dress’, ‘nice shirt’ and the like, but as I was unprepared and hadn’t made any resources or visuals to support the discussion, when it came to a non-verbal student’s turn to express his ideas, he had no way of contributing. I was just about to speak for him and say something like: ‘Josh will probably wear a cool shirt too’ when another SRC member shot up his hand and said: ‘Josh can’t talk; wait, I’ll get my book!’

The clever SRC rep ran next door, grabbed his PODD book full of picture symbols, and opened it to the clothes page quick as a flash, restating the question to his peer who was now able to point to the symbol that said: “jeans”.

This sense of belonging has extended to the playground too and has lasted longer than each school year, with many of the student leaders past and present relishing the chance to help their peers by doing special jobs like putting away the bikes, or including other less able students in their games.

Building in opportunities to strengthen voice and opinions

In addition to their communication difficulties, many students with an intellectual disability have a tendency towards learned helplessness, in which they leave it up to an adult to make decisions for them as they have learnt over time that this is easier.

The process of teaching students in the Broadmeadows SDS SRC to not only have an opinion, but to express it has been an extremely challenging but enriching process.

Three years ago, student meetings were very much facilitated by myself as the students didn’t know what the process was about, or how to have an idea, yet this is becoming less and less the case.
One example of the way in which I have encouraged students to develop their ability to initiate ideas began when school leadership suggested I encourage the students to organise a whole school disco one night to welcome new families to the school community.

I proposed it to the students by saying: “Susi and Megan (the Principal and Assistant Principal) were wondering if you wanted to organise a school disco at night – what do you think?” When they gave a resounding “yes”, I then encouraged students to help me come up with the logistical plans in the following manner.

I started by asking questions like: “Where could we have it?”, knowing full well that the only appropriate space was the school multipurpose PE hall.

When a student came up with an idea: “I know – Room 4” (her own classroom) I validated the response while putting it back to the group to think about: “Great idea! But do you guys think it will be big enough for everyone to dance in?”

When another student said: “I know – outside in the big yard!” I answered “Fantastic idea, that’s really big! But do you think it will be light enough or too dark at night guys?”

A third hand shot up: “What about the PE hall?” and I was able to respond: “What do you all think? Is it big enough? Will it be too dark? Do you think we should have it there? Yes?! OK, that’s a sensational idea, we will have it in the PE hall. Awesome brainstorming everyone!”

In this way every little bit of the disco was organised by the students (down to designing the tickets, delivering notices to go home, writing a song list, helping set up on the night, making popcorn and cakes to sell and more) while the students began to learn how to have an idea or a valid opinion.

It has been delightful to watch a few students over the years really get the concept and propose their own ideas to the meeting, including running a school master chef competition, collecting mobile phones to save gorillas (after a class excursion to the zoo) and fundraising to buy toys for their own playground.

One particularly poignant idea was proposed by a student last year who wanted to raise some money to buy a toy for the ‘sick kids’ in the Royal Children’s Hospital – somewhere the majority of Broadmeadows SDS students have spent a lot of time.

These students are marginalised in so many ways due to their disability and their socioeconomic status, and yet they all have the ability to make meaningful change and contribution to not just their school community but the community at large.

It has been wonderful to be a part of helping them find the confidence to have a voice.

**Take it outside meetings into school assemblies, special events**

While other staff members were initially understandably confused about what having an SRC actually meant, I am proud to say that the SRC now has a strong and steady place in the whole school culture. Individual name badges are presented in front of the whole school community at a special assembly, and student leaders help out on the microphone and by giving out awards at whole school events and concerts.

This year we have a male and a female school captain for the first time, and these students have the important role of being spokespeople for the student body when required.

Most of the SRC members have a goal in their individualised education plan about their role on the SRC written by their classroom teacher, and this year the school speech pathologist even emailed teachers at the start of the year imploring them to remember to remind students to bring their communication devices/PODD books with them to help them express their opinions within meetings.

Not only has running the SRC changed my own teaching practice, but I am pleased to say that it has contributed to the development of a change in school-wide culture around the importance of teaching students to express a genuine opinion or idea, and this is evident in the ways in which more and more teachers and therapists conduct votes, teach students to express likes and dislikes, encouraging students to set their own goals, and undertake self-evaluations for their end of semester reports.

In closing I’d like to encourage readers not to see the Broadmeadows SDS students’ participation in their SRC as tokenistic – as it’s not. Their involvement is genuine, and their voices are valuable.

While the SRC does an amazing job, they don’t need a pat on the back any more than other student leaders in other mainstream settings. All they need is the opportunity to have their say, and the skills to say it!

I encourage staff members from other schools to contact me if they would like to further discuss setting up or facilitating an SRC with students who have an intellectual disability, or how to ensure that the SRC is representative of students across their school. Please contact me at Broadmeadows SDS on 03 9302 1244 or email: steele.megan.e@edumail.vic.gov.au

Meg Steele
Teacher, Broadmeadows Special Developmental School

**References:**


All about Student Action Teams, including some hyper-linked mini-case studies, at:

www.asprinworld.com/student_action_teams
What Makes Learning Stimulating?
Surveying Student Views

SRC/Student Perspective

Surveys make up a very important part of Balwyn High School’s student wellbeing system. The responses collected from students can be used by teachers, school administrators and SRC members to have a better overview of what students in this school need, what aspects of the school they want improved, and what they expect from the school and its teachers. SRC members can study and utilise these survey results in their discussions at weekly meetings so that we can decide upon what actions to take ourselves and what actions to recommend to teachers.

Every year, students in Balwyn High School are required to take a survey called the Attitudes to School Survey, which is administered in all Victorian government schools. This survey aims to gather information from students about their general attitude towards their school. As a student, I have to complete a survey containing statements like ‘I feel happy in school’, ‘I feel depressed’, ‘I have been bullied recently’, ‘Some of my classmates are very disruptive so I cannot concentrate well in class’ etc. All I need to do is to rate those statements from 1 to 5 based on what I genuinely feel about those things. The data is returned to the school, presented in graphs for students and staff to analyse. It is at this point that the process in most schools stops – but we chose to investigate why we were getting these results, especially the low results in the category of ‘Stimulating Learning’.

Last year, BHS SRC, with the help of Mr Jonathan Heard, the Head of Pedagogy in this school, created a survey called the Stimulating Learning Survey. The aim was for us to know better about what students expect to have in class, what they think is stimulating – not just fun and interesting, but also effective and helpful for learning. From this, further actions could be taken to implement suggestions. In this survey, many different class scenarios were made such as ‘group discussion’, ‘watching a video’, ‘excursion’, ‘learning from the text book by ourselves’, ‘carrying out an experiment’ and so on. The results of this subsequent survey provided us with more specific feedback about what could be done to classes to make them more stimulating.

From the survey results, the SRC recommended changes to teacher practice, which have been implemented in professional development sessions from the beginning of 2012.

Carl Wu
Year 12 SRC Executive
Balwyn High School

Teacher Perspective

Each year, students in Victorian public schools participate in the Attitudes to School Survey. This survey measures students’ perception of their experiences of – and satisfaction with – their school. One facet of the survey measures the extent to which students feel that they experience ‘stimulating learning’. According to the four questions in the Attitudes to School Survey, stimulating learning is teaching and learning that is ‘interesting’, ‘inspiring’ and ‘enjoyable’.

While our students have consistently ranked the learning they undertake at Balwyn High School as highly stimulating, an unexpectedly low result for this criterion in the 2011 survey prompted the school to want to know more. When our students indicate in this survey that the teaching and learning they experience either is – or is not – stimulating, what do the students actually think ‘stimulating learning’ is? What are the types of learning experiences and teaching strategies that students think of when they think of learning that is ‘interesting’, ‘inspiring’ and ‘enjoyable’? Balwyn High School prides itself on seeking out student voice, and so finding out what types of learning students find stimulating seemed a vitally important question to ask them. This task was taken to the SRC and, working together, we sought additional survey data on stimulating learning to help us better understand our students and to improve teaching practice.

The process of developing the stimulating learning survey was not straightforward, but it certainly returned interesting results. It involved first consulting with the SRC to enlist their support in helping to design the survey and to develop a strategy to ‘roll it out’ to students. The SRC sub-group – Samantha, Carl, Saara and Lauren – was outstanding in this regard and their belief in the survey helped to carry it through.

The survey first provided students with a definition of ‘stimulating learning’ that tried to make a clear distinction between ‘stimulating’ and ‘fun’. We felt that stimulating learning meant something more than ‘fun’ learning, and we wanted this to be absolutely clear from the outset. It then asked students to nominate the most stimulating learning activity, task or lesson they can remember undertaking at Balwyn High School, and to describe it by year level, subject area and content. The next phase of the survey then took students through examples of no less than 45 different types of teaching and learning strategies teachers typically employ – from copying notes from the whiteboard, to excursions, to collaborative group work, to inquiry research, to tests, to creative thinking tasks, to comprehension questions, to class discussions, and everything in between (that we could think of!). Students identified which of these strategies they experienced in their most stimulating...
lesson or task, then finished the survey by providing a ‘wish list’ or ‘top ten’ of these same listed strategies for how they would most like to learn in the future.

Through careful planning and exceptional organisation on behalf of the student sub-committee, the entire SRC undertook the role of facilitating the survey. A representative sample of students from each home group in Years 7 to 10 were escorted by an SRC representative student to a computer room where the selected students were talked through the survey and assisted to answer it. Year 11 and 12 students were emailed the link. In all, we had 434 students complete the survey, evenly distributed across the school.

The results of the survey were quite interesting. For a strongly academically-focussed school, the main forms of teaching and learning the students found the most stimulating were not the traditional forms of didactic teaching or passive consumption of information. They instead included hands-on activities and small group work, active learning, creative thinking and producing, class discussions and student questioning, self-directed learning and passionate teachers who act as guides rather than dictators of student learning.

These results were shared with the other members of the school’s leadership team, the faculty heads and teaching staff and of course the SRC. Many faculties used the survey results as the starting point for a discussion and review of existing curriculum. Others used the results to ‘audit’ common assessment tasks to find possible ways to make our major assessments more stimulating.

In reality, the survey has only been the initial ‘conversation’ in what we hope to be an ongoing dialogue with the students about how students learn best. It has not replaced the considerable professional knowledge, experience and training of teachers, nor has making learning stimulating taken precedence over ensuring we teach what is important for students to be able to know and do to progress successfully through their schooling. However, it has prompted a discussion about how we might continuously search to find ways to better engage students in this process, and importantly, it has given us concrete examples of the ways we might achieve this.

Any school can harness the energy and enthusiasm of its student leaders and student representative bodies in ways similar to this, to seek further information about the views students express in the Attitudes to School Survey. In so doing, schools send a message to students that their education is not being done to them but – hopefully – is being done with them, and with their needs and wants in mind.

If the Attitudes to School Survey measures the effect of a school’s culture and conduct on the satisfaction of its students, then further investigation and analysis – with the help of the student leadership – will go a long way towards increasing student satisfaction in the future and increasing the positive ways we impact on student learning.

Jonathan Heard
Director of Pedagogy
Balwyn High School
IMPACT is the Forest Hill College Student Representative Council. We believe we have really made a positive impact on our school environment.

The IMPACT leaders surveyed the student body and discovered that, whilst students felt connected to their fellow students and teachers, they did not feel connected to their school environment. We immediately set about improving this by brainstorming a range of ideas and options. In consultation with students and staff across the school, we recognised that the centre of our school, where the canteen and library are situated, was of particular concern to our school community, as it was quite unappealing and uninviting. This area became the focus of a massive 525 square metre student mural as the centrepiece of our school!

Our completed painted mural spans all four exterior walls of our canteen and can be viewed from all surrounding classrooms, study center and library. Each wall is dedicated to a variation of one of the house colours: blue, green, red and yellow, and has been completely designed and created by the IMPACT student leaders, House Captains and volunteer staff and students.

All students and teachers had the opportunity to contribute to this phenomenal student-driven project by providing suggestions for the mural content and design, or by physically drawing and painting it.

In order to execute this project, student leaders wrote proposals to the Principals to approve this large-scale project, which resulted in a positive response, but a requirement that we self-fund the project. We therefore overcame this issue by fundraising for the required materials through bake-sales. We also wrote countless letters to local companies requesting donations. Our letters received an overwhelming response and we were therefore able to obtain all materials including sign-board, paint and hanging hardware free of charge.

All other issues we encountered, such as timetabling constraints and mural subject choices, were solved through liaising with teachers and the student body.

What has been the IMPACT?

Students and staff have responded extremely positively to our completed project and have shown an increase in connection to our school environment, which was our original aim. This can be seen in the way students now choose to congregate around the mural for socialisation, teachers proudly discuss the student efforts, and visitors marvel at the impressive display.

The final product showcases a collaborative design featuring elements of pop culture, student creativity and, most importantly, demonstrates the power of an effective Student Representative Council.

Natalie Pantou
IMPACT Representative
Junior College Captain
Forest Hill College
SRC Strategic Planning: Education Week

Why did the Warracknabeal Secondary College SRC take a lead in organising Education Week at our school? Where does this fit into the SRC’s strategic planning?

Newly elected school leaders and SRC representatives participated in a training camp late in 2011. This helped the new SRC members and leaders to discuss the role of the SRC, priorities for their SRC year, and how they could put their ideas into action.

One of the agreed priorities was to promote what our school does in the community. We do not have an Open Day and the SRC members felt that little was known in the community about our school and what students do. So they saw a need that wasn’t being fulfilled. Different ways of promotion were discussed: media, an open day, tours ... these were all considered.

Part of the planning included having more articles in the local newspaper and a dedicated section in the regular school newsletter. This was started late in term 4, 2011 and continued into 2012.

This was a one-way process. The next step was to involve the community - make it two-way. Education week was to be celebrated in May, 2012, but we have not had anything like an Open Day for six years, and never any program that was planned, organised and presented by students. An SRC sub-committee was formed, with Year 12 student Ashlee Schultz as its leader. Committee members were both boys and girls, from Year 7 to 12. This was a perfect opportunity to promote our school.

There were two parts to the promotions strategy.

First, we realised that, as our school is on the outer edge of town, it is not readily accessed by the public. So, instead of an Open Day at the school, the committee planned to ‘take the school to the public.’ We would rent a shopfront in the local shopping centre for the week, and this would showcase the amazing range of work, extra-curricular activities and achievements of the school.

The idea was introduced to fellow students at a General School Assembly.

The whole project was then organised by students: finding a suitable shop, securing funds for the rent, deciding what should be in the display, contacting all staff and students to gather work samples, photographing school features to include in a powerpoint presentation, encouraging interactive activities for visitors to the shop, producing a roster of students and staff to be in the shop during lunch hours and after school, advertising the display in the local paper, school newsletter and many other shop fronts, and finally the packing up. Everything was organised by this enthusiastic committee. They coopted other students to help them and thought of a campaign slogan:

We’re Proud So Say It Loud!

The second event was a series of tours of the school to be run by the school captains and vice captains. Invitation letters were written and sent to over a dozen local organisations, and several individuals who have donated awards to the school over the years. In the first year of these tours, it was felt that the focus could be on those organisations that are strong supporters of the school. A strong presentation from local government, health services, RSL, service clubs, local media and individual donors came for the tours. The leaders met and decided which classes would reflect the diversity and depth of the curriculum, and organised these visits.

All reports were glowing. The leaders spoke with enthusiasm, pride and knowledge about their school. Visitors were most impressed with both their presentations and the programs and students of the school. Students organised an informal morning tea after the tours, where the leading staff member welcomed the visitors ... the first input from a staff member. Visitors left with a copy of the latest school newsletter and SRC supplement... to encourage ongoing connection.

Both the shop front display and the tours were celebrated in the local newspaper. Much community goodwill has followed from this week, setting the stage for strengthening ties with the local community.

The Acting Principal who spoke to the first group as they complete their tour, fielded questions but commented that the student tour leader spoke with such passion about the school and its programs that he left her to do the bulk of the answering. That evening, at a community meeting, several of the tour participants sought him out to comment on how much they had learned about the school and its programs. One was so impressed that he offered a traineeship to the school and this...
Integrated & Supported

At Frankston High School, our Student Leadership Committee (SLC) has a strong history of being actively involved in the decision-making processes of our large dual-campus school.

Each year, four staff members and 60 members of the SLC embark on a three-day camp to Phillip Island where we develop our plans and goals for the year, and continue building our leadership skills. While several sessions are facilitated by our teachers, many are run by our senior students and all have interactive student involvement. We work in cross-age interest groups such as Environment, Social Justice and Publicity.

This year we all undertook the Student Leadership Practice Inventory survey, which gave us all a better understanding of the types of leaders we are and where we would like to improve. This model uses five leadership domains: ‘encourage the heart’, ‘challenge the process’, ‘model the way’, ‘inspire a shared vision’ and ‘enable others to act’. This model will allow us to monitor our own leadership skills throughout the year.

Every year we also run a session called ‘weights and balloons’ where we discuss the strengths and limitations of Frankston High School. When we return to school, the school captains feed this information to Year Level Coordinators and Principals, who are usually receptive to our ideas. Some changes that this has brought about include changes to uniform, yard duty, the use of our radio station and student extra-curricular activities.

Each month, the School Captains are invited to speak at the official School Council meetings, explaining what has happened during the month. There is always plenty to report on, such as the delamping of fluoro lights around the school, the newly discovered species of grass that is unique to Frankston High School and what the committee is planning to do to protect and propagate it, and also the making of reminder signs to reduce energy use. We also speak proudly of recent highlights, including the ‘Harmony Day’ celebration that brought together local and international students, the successful fundraising to support our Chaplains, as well as a Cambodian orphanage that the school has links with, and an amazing concert performance by past and current students (not to mention the staff versus students netball match that was sadly won by our teacher). We also explained all about hosting the VicSRC regional Conference recently.

Frankston High School values the work of the SLC and this year introduced a select entry elective subject called LEAD (Leadership Education and Development) and aims to develop leadership skills and potential of our students. The development of this subject at the Year 9 level (which is open to all students) demonstrates that at FHS not only academics, sport and music are valued, but also the significant contribution of students as leaders amongst their peers and in the community.

The SLC is also charged with the responsibility of MCing and running two assemblies per term, which showcase the activity within the school - this is no easy task, given we have over 1600 students! Doing so fosters our public speaking, time management and organisational skills. We are also actively involved in the ‘High resolves Initiative’ program where we lead groups of Year 8 students through days that are focused on social justice issues. While it is challenging working with large groups of Year 8s, it is also very rewarding!

Last year, as Year 11 students, we successfully ran a midyear FHS Leadership Conference. We got all our student leaders in the school, including sport and music leaders, and our SLC leaders ran many workshops focusing on school improvement and the issue of leadership badges. We also started planning our successful Youth Week where we organised a week of student activities at lunchtime.

Also, last year, our Principal asked us (the Year 11 Captains) to organise and run focus groups asking our junior students questions about classroom engagement. While it was...
scary, we then presented our finding to all teachers at a staff meeting. We got a great response from our teachers.

We have many plans for the remainder of this year, including being involved and trained through the VCE Supportive Friends program, running Primary School workshops about environmental issues, promoting not only the 40-hour famine but also the level of poverty that so many people in the world live in, facilitating our first VicSRC model ‘Teach the Teacher’ program and also raising awareness for several charitable organisations. Students are currently being selected to attend the VicSRC Congress and, if successful, many of our current Year 8 members will apply to be part of the 2012 FHS School for Student Leadership team.

We are very proud of our Student Leadership Council at Frankston High School, as we really feel valued and important by the school. But most importantly, we have a great time, learn about ourselves and make great friends!

Teacher Support

We have many teachers who help with our SLC activities, such as camps, workshops, fund-raising and awareness raising initiatives and more. We would like to acknowledge the massive amount of work that our SLC coordinator puts into making the FHS SLC such an outstanding model of student leadership. She has recently gone on maternity leave, but worked tirelessly right up until she left to make sure that we were set up and ready to go for the rest of the year, and will be back in December to gear us up for 2013.

She has set up an ongoing training program to develop our leadership skills: communication, facilitating meetings, taking minutes, public speaking and team work. She coordinates the work of the SLC, meeting with all students regularly and organises the amazing annual SLC camp. She oversees the Council’s administration and fundraising and liaises seamlessly between the Council, school administration and staff and student body. She ensures that the School Captains and Deputy Captains have significant roles in student representation, have their proposals and ideas discussed thoroughly and spends countless hours further developing their leadership skills.

She trains student leaders to perform the roles of MC and public speakers at all our school assemblies and runs award assemblies at the end of the year to acknowledge outstanding student contributions and work. She organises students to represent Frankston High School at leadership forums within the community and the state, and always knows about new opportunities as they pop up. She spends ages making sure that all of our events get great coverage and introduced a publicity crew to help with this - last year, we had more pages in our school magazine than ever before and our school newsletter was always up to date.

Last year, our SLC coordinator and another teacher developed the new elective subject LEAD, which aims to develop leadership skills and potential of our students. She had to lobby hard to have the select entry subject run as a four period a week elective class, but with her enthusiasm and passion, the school could see that it was a worthwhile addition to our program (and something that very few schools offer), especially if she was teaching it.

She has been a great teacher in her role as the SLC coordinator. She is dedicated to her role, devoting hours each week to help the SLC representatives. She always replies to our constant e-mails and messages within seconds, even outside school hours! She is our biggest supporter and is always pushing to make sure we do our best and get our voices heard. She is the backbone of the amazing Student Leadership program at FHS.

Tim Eric
School Vice-Captain
All Students Have Much to Say

It is one thing to know that everyone has a voice and something to contribute; it is another to get them to speak. At Nossal High School, we have found that, if given the chance, all students have so much to say. They have their opinions and just want to be heard like the rest of us.

Our SRC has stemmed from the strong belief that every student across our three year levels should be given an equal chance to bring forward their issues. In each of the eight tutorial groups at each of the three levels, a boy and a girl are elected by their peers in order to represent them and to bring forward their questions, concerns and issues. With three year levels and 16 leaders coming from each, we have designed our SRC in such a way that it allows all members to have the opportunity to be heard without affecting the core values and structure of it.

We have done this by splitting up our SRC into three tiers, based on our three year levels. In these separate SRCs we, with the help of teachers, discuss the year-level specific problems that may have arisen. If something were to be common throughout all year levels and needed to be discussed, or needed to be put forward to the whole group to vote on, then we do so at a joined SRC meeting, which occurs roughly once a fortnight.

This new design has allowed us to preserve the essence of the SRC in that all students are truly given an adequate voice, and it has not subtracted from the integrity of the group, as we still do not put forward any motion without the knowledge of all members.

Once motions are passed by the entire group, then are taken by us, the school captains, to the School Council. This is made up of our Principal, other staff, parents and community members, plus the two school captains who have full voting rights. Here we can discuss and get feedback on what can or cannot happen and why. We can then take this information back to our SRC members, who can take it to their respective tutorial groups.

We have students participating on selection panels for teachers (after completing annual Merit and Equity Training), and students always MC assemblies and special events such as information nights, open nights, school tours, our Annual Music/Choral night as well as Speech Night.

In ensuring that all students have an equal say, it has opened up many different pathways by which they can take initiative to make changes that they wish to see in our school. By bringing forward community issues such as domestic violence, Nossal High’s SRC helped organise the White Ribbon Day Festival, which was a great success in the community, as those in surrounding areas attended to show their support in the fight against domestic violence. The committee organising this event was composed of students, charged with the duties of arranging guest speakers, musical acts and more.

This level of student involvement has been present in our school community since it began. Other initiatives brought about through the SRC and student leadership have been the 2010 Year 10 ‘Secret Garden’ social event, run in December as a wonderful way to wrap up a wonderful year. The whole idea and theme was arranged by students as well as much of the organising and advertising, much like the Year 11 Winter Masquerade Ball.

Formulated as an alternative to a Debutante Ball, the idea of the Winter Masquerade Ball was not only conceived by students, but also brought about by them. With the help of the SRC, the idea was put to the School Council, which approved it quickly. Students arranged everything from the theme to the venue to the dance instructor. Through the help of the SRC and the opportunities given to voice our opinions, the students of Nossal High School have created their own unique traditions that will last for years to come.

Nossalians, as we have come to call ourselves, have demonstrated time and time again, that we are not only concerned with the inner workings of our great school, but also with problems in our community and our world. Many of the issues that are brought to the SRC actually have to do with raising money for various charities. Our SRC is passionate about making a difference in our community, and all members quickly jump on board with helping in our fundraising efforts.

These large sums quantify the change we have made in our community. Despite this, we still seek direct affirmation that a difference has truly been made. Through the collaboration and the immersion of various ideas and possibilities, we came to an agreement to start a volunteer program within the school. We thought it was a timely opportunity that we weren’t required at school after 1.20 pm every Wednesday, and decided that, during those two hours before normal school ended, we would put our plan into action. The SRC decided to travel around Casey, visiting Aged Care Homes, primary school and after-school education programs, to lend a much needed helping hand. Though we have not yet put this plan into action, the idea has been approved by both the SRC and the School Council to proceed with, which leaves us in promising circumstances.

The ambitious and near impossible feat we lay ahead for ourselves as an SRC made us realise that perhaps it was the smallest acts that made the greatest difference. We collectively began to make the change we wanted to see in the world, in our school community and the wider community. As our school environment changes, our SRC will adapt to ensure that all students have their say. We all want to be heard; we all want our opinions to be valued. Nossal’s SRC will continue to be one of the many things that contribute to the overall school culture and truly set it apart from other schools.

Levi Barker, Hasini Ilangaratne
Nossal High School Captains
At Narre Warren South P-12 College, we believe that we have a truly democratic and fully representative student organisation: Student Voice.

What does it mean to be democratic?
For us, it means that everyone has the opportunity to voice their opinions. After students were selected to different positions, we began having meetings. These meetings involved deciding on key activities that we wanted to do and which organisations we wanted to fundraise for, and key issues that were important for us and our year levels that we wanted to raise with the Principal and the Assistant Principals at the school.

The next step is that everyone has an equal opportunity to voice their opinions. After students were selected to different positions, we began having meetings. These meetings involved deciding on key activities that we wanted to run, fundraisers we wanted to do and which organisations we wanted to fundraise for, and key issues that were important for us and our year levels that we wanted to raise with the Principal and the Assistant Principals at the school.

The initial meeting involved the Captains and Vice Captains from Grade 5 through to Year 12. Students did a whole lot of activities to help everyone get to know each other and then we worked in year level groupings to talk about key issues impacting on our year levels and what we also wanted to see across the whole school. We then shared as a whole group. Lots of ideas were put up on the whiteboard and we had to try to break these down. We decided to focus on the following activities for the whole school:

- Free dress days: to raise money for different charities (the charities we would support would become a discussion at another meeting);
- Narre’s Got Talent: for the secondary and primary students;
- Multicultural Day;
- Being involved in the 10th Anniversary celebrations of our school.

We then started having meetings in smaller groups and these groups varied in focus and purpose:

At these different meetings, everyone had the opportunity to put things on the agenda and then be involved in discussions. We often try to come to a consensus on key issues, but when time is running short and the lunchtime bell is nearly ready to ring, we often have to go to a vote.

To make sure that the Year Level Captains and Vice Captains are representative of the whole school body, we also try to include all students by:

- creating noticeboards to let students know what is happening;
- going round classes and telling students what is going on and asking for feedback;
- having a Student Voice page in the School Newsletter;
- having a ‘suggestion box’ at each reception area in the school;
- leading focus groups including groups that were responding to the Attitude to School survey, and discussing issues specific to each year level in the school.

democratic. It involved a discussion about the different issues at the Student Voice meeting. We then brainstormed what we wanted included in the document. This was then written up and again we had a chance to offer feedback before we were happy with the final draft.

As a student body, we continue to have many challenges ahead of us, but always aims to ensure that all students are heard in our decision-making processes.

School Captains 2012: Justine Jaramillo, Phillip Kareroa, Shafiqah Shariff, Lyndele Smith, Candice Thomys

Student Voice Team
Narre Warren South P-12 College

Year 7-8 Year Level Captains and Vice Captains

Year 7-8: ALL members of committee and Year Level Captains and Vice Captains

Year 5 to 12 Year Level Captains and Vice Captains

Year 5-6: ALL members of committee including Grade 3, 4, 5 and 6 members

Year 9-12: ALL members of committee and Year Level Captains and Vice Captains

Narre’s Got Talent: Secondary School
Year 7-12 Captains and committee members

Free Dress Days eg work with students in the school who have cerebral palsy to prepare for Cerebral Palsy Week

Meetings with the School Council, Principal or Assistant Principal

Year 5-6 Captains and Vice Captains

Year 9-12 Year Level Captains and Vice Captains

Connect 196:
Shaping Our School Community

Lowther Hall’s Student Representative Council prides itself on ensuring that all members of the student body feel they have the ability to shape their school community.

The SRC does so by acting as an outlet for student feedback on current issues and improvements to be made. The 25 of us work to ensure that this feedback is acted upon as we meet on a weekly basis (every Wednesday lunchtime) to discuss methods of action in response to students’ requests and ideas.

As head of the SRC this year, my main goal within the SRC body itself was to nurture solution-oriented thinking, which would allow members of the Council (student representatives) to act upon student feedback about issues within our community, and think about improvements for the future. We have succeeded in making students feel that their ideas, thoughts and feedback on current issues are being recognised by the SRC and integrated into the school’s decision-making processes.

My focus has been on improving the Council to be a ‘response to needs’ committee that strongly represents the student body. Each class (homeroom) is represented by one or two student-elected representatives who are then members of the SRC. These representatives from Years 7 to 12 not only relay information about the topics of discussion that are held within the Council and encourage student feedback on these issues, but also represent the current voice of the student body in terms of thoughts about current issues, feedback about systems in place, and hopes for future improvements.

I have aimed to achieve this by establishing a catch-phrase attributed to the 2012 Council: “Let’s take a (cross-out stand) hand for change”. Whenever an idea is passed on from student to student representative, and student representative to head of SRC, then to higher authorities, a high-five is initiated. This physical contact acts as a symbol for student feedback being taken into account, acted on and represented in decision-making processes of the SRC and higher authorities. This has been part of our newly initiated campaigning program this year. The SRC introduced and promoted themselves in the first of our regular SRC assemblies, and posters which display our logo containing this catchphrase continue to be displayed around the school. High-fives are still initiated, which encourage reciprocal communication about SRC activities in response to student feedback, as by this means it is done in a fun way.

The campaigning continues to remind students that their voices are always heard and responded to by the SRC. A committee that dedicates time and effort to the sole purpose of representing the student body’s wants, needs and hopes for the future within the community, through decisions and action. This campaigning has resulted in positive responses from higher authorities and students, so that the SRC is regarded as a reliable and representative committee.

Furthermore, we are constantly relied upon to integrate the students’ voices into the decision-making processes of higher authorities within the school community. For example, in April we were asked for student feedback regarding decisions about future planning. We have met with architects who are designing the interior of the new school building, accommodating classrooms and locker bays mainly for Year 7-9 students. We collected student feedback via a survey completed in a weekly meeting between classes and student representatives of that class. This feedback included the type and colour of furniture and bins most desired by the student body to be located throughout the building, and the colour and style of drinking taps for the school grounds.

For example, students consistently pass on information by adopting the method our SRC outlined this year, by ensuring a problem is coupled with a solution, so students and SRC members can work together through regular communication to take action to combat the issue:

Problem + Solution = Action + Improvement

Student representatives meet weekly with their homerooms so this can take place in a specific time period if it is not done so in between these sessions outside of the classroom. Additionally we use the SRC Representative Feedback Sheet from the VicSRC Represent! handbook when this communication occurs, to ensure every idea is recorded and acknowledged.

The 2012 SRC committee recognises that communication between student representatives and students is integral to taking action. Our decisions and actions are formally reported to the student body through the school’s own newspaper, which is written, edited and published by student: Mansion Messenger. I write an update on the current school improvements being made by the SRC and ask for their on-going feedback on these.

We make small-scale and large-scale changes happen within the school in response to communication from students. We do this by working together with teachers, coordinators and managers. Large-scale action is outlined within proposals written by members of the SRC, and then we take action to ensure that these plans and implemented.
So far this year we have succeeded in creating the following proposals in response to student needs: Sports Uniform Pass proposal; Canteen Lunch order System proposal; Breakfast Club and Sport Uniform Pass Proposal; Grant House Toilets Sanitation Proposal; Implementation of Outdoor Seats, Drink taps and Bins proposal; House Clean-Up Review Proposal; and Printer for Art Rooms Proposal.

We have successfully got agreement to several of these proposals, and this reflects our success in how we take valid action in response to student feedback. Each proposal outlines an aim, rationale, briefing of the current situation, possible solutions, steps of improvement to be taken, people involved in ensuring action has taken place, possible complications and an outcome. Proposals that are not agreed on by the end of the year are passed on to the 2013 newly elected Council so that the student body's voices are not neglected. This is done in the same way we have continued to regularly monitor the 2011 Council’s action by overseeing the Consequence Proposal and the Rugby Jumper Proposal, and have reviewed the House Clean-Up Proposal.

Some smaller changes we have made by committing ourselves to accurately ‘high-fiving’ on student feedback include: displaying more working clocks throughout the school; providing the canteen with student feedback on prices, quality of food and variety when as by the manager; and improving lighting in the toilets. At the moment, our main project is reviewing the current winter uniform by creating a package outlining the current problems. From these surveys we next hope to work with the school’s uniform company to make the desired changes a reality. We initiated this movement in response to mass student feedback on complications with the uniform, and acknowledged this was a pressing issue.

As well as other teacher and authority figures, our Deputy Head Principal is our primary source of support and inspiration. She advises us on the next steps to be taken after proposals are written, ensures staff are made aware of the actions of the SRC, offers us solutions and other alternatives, consistently notifies others of our student feedback on decisions, and ultimately uses her abilities and status to assist us to make sure our desired action is most appropriately taken. We are highly appreciative of her ongoing and passionate support for the role and efforts of the SRC.

We are constantly supported by the enthusiasm of students who reply on the body to ensure their desires for school improvements are not neglected. We act not only as an intermediary to pass on information from student to specific coordinators, but most importantly to use this information to take action to initiate plans of response to be taken according to the students' voices. Students themselves never fail to offer their individual and collective feedback to the SRC and appreciate us upholding democratic values. Ultimately, as a close and committed unit, the 2012 SRC makes relevant contributions to the school community by giving back the support it gives to us.

Lucy Kingsley
Deputy School Captain
Head of SRC
An Effective SRC

How do we know we are effective? And how can we address the barriers to being more effective?

An activity at this year’s VicSRC Congress encouraged participants to examine the effectiveness of their SRC, to look at the barriers to being effective, and to share ideas about practices that worked.

Effectiveness was examined under 10 headings (drawn from the material in the Represent! kit). Students identified which of these was their main area of difficulty, formed a group around this, and brainstormed what was causing the problem. They then swapped groups, choosing the topic area where they felt they had had successes, and wrote notes in response to the identified problems.

In a short time, this is some of what they came up with:

- **The SRC is broadly representative of students in the school**
  - Problems: There is a lack of structure and system for representation. There is a lack of initiative and of understanding of what the SRC is for and what it does.
  - Responses: Every class, 7-12, should have a representative. Start a regular plan for meetings with an agenda, minutes – and clarify things at the end of a meeting.
  - Promote the SRC: explain, enthuse, communicate. Maybe start a Facebook page or speak at assemblies, parent-teacher meetings etc.

- **The SRC is well regarded**
  - Problems: The SRC is stigmatised and stereotyped - it’s considered ‘lame’ or ‘uncool’ or frowned upon.
  - There is not enough information out there about what SRCs do, achieve and improve. People don’t show themselves. People don’t want to give up their free time. Doubts: people don’t believe we can do anything.
  - Responses: Listen to what students are passionate about. Get your message out there through advertisements. Be confident and outgoing.

- **The SRC is connected to the school’s decision-making**
  - Problems: Teachers don’t respect students’ opinions. Why?
  - They don’t believe students are mature enough to make decisions. Why?
  - Teachers and higher powers want to be in charge. Why?
  - Responses: No legitimate body yet exists to represent student opinions in a comprehensive manner. The school has not been able to work together with teachers and students cooperating to solve problems – negotiating and collaborating. Initiative needs to be taken by the students to make the school take them seriously.

- **The SRC relies too much on teachers**
  - Problems: The SRC relies too much on teachers
  - Responses: The SRC needs support from teachers and principal. Without this support to get our voices heard, it is hard for younger students to operate, no matter how enthusiastic they are. Talk to the principal and to teachers about what the SRC is doing.

- **The SRC gets things done**
  - Problems: The SRC doesn’t meet often enough, doesn’t have an action plan around decisions and hence doesn’t follow through.
  - People aren’t motivated or held accountable.
  - The SRC relies too much on teachers.
  - Responses: Meet regularly: every second week in portfolio areas and alternate weeks in general meetings - this is part of being on the SRC.
  - Keep regular plans with aims and goals and decisions made - and action allocated - in a folder as a ‘haunting’ reminder. Have short and long term goals, with a clear structure.
  - Interview the heads of projects and portfolios to ensure they are on track.
  - Establish contracts for people’s commitment. If people don’t turn up to meetings, question them one-to-one; establish three warnings without a valid reason.
  - The SRC is student-run. The teacher helps to guide it and approve projects.

- **The SRC has the resources it needs**
  - Problems: Schools and principals don’t take SRCs seriously. There’s not enough power for SRCs. Schools are financially poor and SRCs don’t have access to resources and teachers.
  - Responses: Schools should provide funding for SRCs in the form of a budget. Ask the School Council for one.
  - Leadership training days for SRC members should be held more regularly.
  - A room should be allocated for SRC meetings.

- **The SRC receives credit and recognition**
  - Problems: The SRC is not recognised for what it is that we do ie beyond sausage sizzles. We are taken for granted. There is a lack of respect from students and teachers.
  - Responses: It is important to have regular meetings to reflect on SRC activities and to have good relationships with the SRC Coordinator.
  - A special room for the SRC recognises its work. Other possibilities are an awards night; SRC pledge, pins or badges; random treats for the SRC celebrating what’s been achieved so far; mentions and congratulations to the SRC in the school newsletter.
  - We need to look at formal recognition for the SRC as a subject or within reports.

Make sure that voting for positions uses a stringent process: nomination, short-list, speech, interviews.

If you have the same numbers per year level, it helps equality - the SRC speaks with one voice.

Meetings must run well: an agenda before each meeting; assigned roles for positions such as president, secretary, treasurer etc; subcommittees in areas such as publicity, wellbeing etc.

Kate Walsh, VicSRC Coordinator

August 2012
What We Think Is Significant ...

At the 2012 VicSRC Annual Congress, Connect again asked student delegates to write about their SRC’s most significant achievements.

These responses were provided by some schools on the first day of Congress ... and it is interesting to note that this is where students started from in their judgement of ‘significance’. Within two days of the Congress, these students were also talking about SRCs being involved in teacher selection panels, ‘teach the teacher’ events, community education forums and so on. Subsequent discussions at Congress about students’ visions for schools challenged, developed and broadened what they saw as ‘significant’.

**Ave Maria College**

As the Year 11 leadership team, we wanted to come up with a creative idea to help raise money and awareness for our year level charity, Australian Catholic Religious against the trafficking of humans. We decided the best way to do this was through a bake sale and promotion of the charity in homerooms.

This allowed us to educate our school on the issue of human trafficking and its presence in Australian society. We were able to make people aware of the fact that this is happening in Australia, not just in Third World countries, as many people believe. It was also significant because we were able to raise over $1000 for our charity that works with people who have been trafficked to Australia to help them build a better life.

The most important reason for our success was the initiative taken by the leadership team to build unity in our year level and promote a cause we are highly passionate about. It also showed us that students have the capability to do things on our own with minimal assistance from teachers.

- **Kendra and Isabella**

**Bendigo South East Secondary College**

Our SRC got together and ran ‘Shave for a Cure’, getting students involved in fundraising. This was driven by four participating students, but it brought students together round a worthwhile cause. We ran an efficient and organised event, with many attending and raised a large donation.

- **Shoshanna-Lee Evans-Yarrick**

**Brauer College**

We organised a fair without teachers’ help. We contacted catering, party hire and rides for hire, and started and ran the entire event. It took a long time to organise and a lot of hard work, but we succeeded because we stuck to what we wanted and were dedicated.

- **Brady Price**

**Croydon Maroondah College**

Our school is merging with another school next year, so our SRC has had a lot of say with out new uniform and other decisions. We have also raised money for different charities, run a Reader Olympics that encourages students to read, and been a part of the Reporter Academy.

This has showed others that we can have a say if we want to, and also had practical results: we encouraged young kids to read, and gave students an opportunity to learn media skills.

We succeeded because we had team work and commitment. No-one did anything without a 100% effort. We also had to learn to get along and to have initiative.

- **Jasmine Schumacher and Hannah Steane**

**Fairhills High School**

Our school has raised money for our World Vision child. It meant that we were contributing to making someone’s life better. We succeeded because we were well organised. We planned how we’d get the message out, carefully chose the type of event and date, and watched as our plans came to fruition. I learnt that planning is essential to success: fail to plan and you plan to fail!

- **Brittney McGrath**

**Forest Hill College**

Our Council is called IMPACT. Its most significant achievement this year so far would be the formation of our Performing Arts Carnival (PAC). This is a performing arts competition between our school tribes where we compete in dance, drama and music items to earn tribe points. It used to be an after school event where there was minimal involvement, but it is now promoted to a full school involvement event, which is run during the school day. The event is successful because it promotes the arts throughout our school and encourages people to participate and get involved in art activities.

- **Emma Ward, April Russo, Alanna Ho**

**Frankston High School**

Creating a healthy school environment and giving students the power to make a difference is the purpose of our Student Leadership Council. Frankston is a very student-driven school. Our involvement has changed the way our school works and has given voice to the student body. We have been motivated to make a difference.

- **Casey and Zoe Crouch**
John Fawkner College

Our SRC ran a 'Why Be Active' Festival. Different activities, like soccer, football, netball etc., ran for one day. We each had responsibility for running one bit of it. For many students who don’t normally play sports or tend to be active, this Festival gave them a chance to play a range of sports and get involved in activities. Students now understand how to play these different sports. They also enjoyed the day so much that many have joined local sports clubs. Most importantly, it gave our students a chance to be more active.

Samuel, Frank, Meryem

Keysborough Secondary College – Banksia Campus

Our significant achievement was running a fundraiser for the Australian Cancer Council. We baked 261 cupcakes and 17 chocolate puddings after school until 6 pm. The selling happened the next day during lunchtime and we raised $240. In this way we are helping those in need and furthering research into cancer. We succeeded because we had student leaders helping, teachers supervising and encouragement from our school. Without that help, none of this would happen.

Mei Mei Bun

Organising events to get students involved in problem-solving and thinking critically about issues such as their career, enables us to produce leaders or students with leader-like qualities, and people who can think for themselves. This prepares them for any future challenges and benefits humanity as a whole.

Awareness needs to be raised. People need to stop being mindless sheep and really think for themselves. Everyone should develop an opinion and present it, so governments can realise what must be done. Even if we managed to convince one person to start thinking for themselves, I believe we have succeeded. We definitely got more than one person to start thinking for themselves!

Leon Song

Mentone Girls’ Grammar School

Our Senate worked in collaboration with the Principal to introduce a program known as our ‘Social Inclusion Program’. In this we cover the costs of a few Sudanese girls’ education at our school. These girls are often from troubled backgrounds in war-torn Sudan. We also have a special alliance with the local Sudanese community whereby we provide them with Christmas gifts and involve them in school activities.

This initiative has given some girls the chance to be educated so they can introduce skills to their community and inspire others to pursue education. In doing so, they will be able to achieve their goals and dreams. It has also resulted in a smooth transition of students to the school as well as a beneficial learning experience for both the Sudanese girls and our school as a whole.

Tamara Palfrey and Madeleine Lewis

Minaret College

Minaret College has sponsored orphans for over five years. This year we raised over $13,000 from two weeks of fundraising. Some of the fundraisers include a teacher’s buffet, a sausage sizzle and a donut stall (20 boxes sold out in 10 minutes) and many other events. The orphans that we sponsor come from Kosovo, Lebanon, Iraq, Bosnia, Sudan, Palestine, Bangladesh and Somalia.

Our school felt proud that we are paying for their education and giving the orphans a normal childhood and a better chance to have a bright future. Everyone took part, everyone gave a little and brought enormous success.

Khyber Alam, Rais Rashdan, Suhail Alamer, Ajaz Taghar

Moroolbark College

Free dress days have been banned at our school for many years. The students were getting really angry about how they couldn’t wear what they wanted. One day the SRC thought it was time we changed this. Some representatives went to the Principal and persuaded him to change the rule - and we raised $1400 on a Thursday. This was our first free dress day in seven years and everyone loved it.

Becky Murphy

Toorak College

We held an SRC Carnival Day, organised and run by the SRC. It’s an extended lunch consisting of rides, games, prizes and food stores. One of the best games was the ‘Drench Teachers’ game: you paid to throw sponges or buckets of water at volunteer teachers. There were clowns walking around and jumping castles and more. It’s to give back to our students and generates a lot of money for us. This was our own idea to bring the whole school together as a reward. It takes organisation, communication, enthusiasm and dedication.

Jordyn Kruger

Somerville Secondary College

Our school has looked at more hands-on programs such as an upcoming new project: The Wetlands Project. We have worked towards implementing this idea and hope that our wetlands will be neater and cleaner and our animals will be healthier.

Courtney Burd

Toorak College

Our Toorak College SRC has been excelling in our fundraising program. This year, one of our many aims was to get the school a lot more involved in fundraising. We have been asking the students what type of fundraising causes they would like to support. Another one of our aims was to listen to the voice of our peers. In doing this we found that the students really wanted to get rid of our school hats, and after a long period of meetings with the school board and the uniform committee we were able to get rid of them.

We are trying to make a difference. It was important to make students aware that they can make a change through simply donating money to good causes. We succeeded because we have done a much larger number of fundraisers and we have been able to raise a lot of money for some great causes and we were able to listen to the students and act on what they wanted and in the end we got some great results.

Whitney Elliott
The VicSRC Recognition Awards celebrate the success of SRCs, inspire bigger and better projects and give student representatives the credit they deserve.

In 2012, the Award winners were, in the following categories:

The Connect Award for Integration (recognising SRCs that are strongly connected to the school’s decision-making processes, that are strongly responsive to student needs and voices, and that are linked strongly with the School Council/Board and its committees):
- Lowther Hall Anglican Grammar School
- Frankston High School

The Second Strike Award for Enterprise (recognising SRCs that, through use of strategic planning and strong leadership structure, have completed a highly successful school or community project):
- Forest Hill Secondary College
- Broadmeadows Special Developmental School
- Warracknabeal Secondary College

The VASSP Award for Informed Representation (recognising SRCs that are truly democratic and fully representative of students):
- Narre Warren South P-12 College
- Nossal High School

The VISTA Award for Outstanding Teacher Adviser (that seeks to recognise and highlight the support that teachers provide to SRCs):
- Frankston High School

The new VicSRC Executive was elected by students at the Congress. For 2012-13, the following students have responsibility for managing the organisation and implementing the agreed resolutions:
- Rachel Cerar (Year 10, Braybrook College)
- Sammy Chapman (Year 9, Casey Grammar)
- Tiffany Chapman (Year 11, Toorak College)
- Casey Crouch (Year 9, Frankston High School)
- Zoe Crouch (Year 9, Frankston High School)
- Marlee-Alice Gorman (Year 10, Princes Hill Secondary College)
- Lachlan Hugo (Year 11, Blackburn High School)
- Jake Kears (Year 8, Maffra Secondary College)
- Tao Hing Lim (Year 11, Templestowe College)
- Sali Miftari (Year 10, Balwyn High School)
- Rosie Mountjoy (Year 9, Koonung Secondary College)
- Braidan Pace (Year 10, Brauer College)
- Edison Ponari (Year 11, Bundoora Secondary College)
- Rais Rashdan (Year 10, Minaret College)
- Michael Swift (Year 10, Padua College)
During the three day weekend camp that was the 7th Annual VicSRC Congress, students stood up and spoke up about issues that concerned their school community. It was great to see students coming together to express their initiative and openly debate ideas.

The VicSRC worked towards this Congress for a whole year. I was lucky enough to be the 2012 Congress Coordinator and take the lead in organising an event where students can have their voices heard. From my perspective, everyone had a great time! They were able to network with other students from across Victoria. They were able to work with their teams and have fun. And they were able to learn from Congress about ways to strengthen their SRCs. On behalf of the VicSRC, we wish great success and further development to all SRCs especially those who had representatives at Congress 2012.

At the formal Congress sessions, 12 proposals were carried. These ranged from ‘create a resource kit for students by students to tackle the issue of bullying’ to ‘more information about VCE and VCAL’. This year, speakers at Congress were able to appear at The Age newspaper! When students gather at conferences such as Congress, students can get the attention of the world! (see: www.theage.com.au/victoria/student-council-debate-fires-up-20120805-23nyk.html)

During Congress, the 2012-2013 Executive body was also formed and the torch passed on to them by the previous Executive. I can see that the future of the VicSRC is in good hands.

Thanks to the Minister for Education, The Hon Martin Dixon, for coming to Congress 2012 and listening to the voice of Victorian students. Thanks to the 2011-2012 Executive for helping run Congress 2012. Thanks to the crew present at Congress 2012 for ensuring that everything happened. Thanks to Kate Walsh for helping to organise Congress 2012. And thanks to the students who attended Congress 2012; without them there is no purpose to hold this event.

I am glad that everything turned out the way it did. I hope that the attendees all gained enormously from it.

Justine Jaramillo
2012 Congress Coordinator
2011-2012 Executive Member, VicSRC

Resolutions Passed

The following resolutions were passed by the 2012 VicSRC Congress and, in order of priority, form the directions for the work of the 2012-13 Executive:

1. The VicSRC works with organisations to create a kit by students for students dealing with the issues of bullying and wellbeing in the school community.
2. The VicSRC lobby relevant bodies to give credit for extra-curricular activities in school reports.
3. The VicSRC look into reasons why VCE and VCAL aren’t offered alongside each other in all Government schools and encourage the government to continue and increase funding for vocational studies through VCAL and VET, to ensure the future of these programs.
4. The VicSRC provide and explain information to secondary students and parents about the benefits of VCE and VCAL and the similarities and differences between them.
5. The VicSRC work with organisations who support GLBTIQ teenagers to set up a statewide day to promote acceptance in the school community.
6. The VicSRC supports SRCs to hold school-based forums that bring together parents, teachers and students in order to build relationships and communication between the three.
7. The VicSRC strongly advocates to the DEECD that there be mandatory student representation in all government school councils.
8. The VicSRC increase connection between schools and community organisations by supporting SRCs to develop links with external organisations through social networking and resources. This enables students to gain experiences which cannot be physically taught in classroom environments.
9. The VicSRC establishes a forum/conference that will bring together teachers, students, parents and government representatives to share innovative ideas in using educational technologies to aid learning.
10. The VicSRC develop a pilot program around peer group tutoring with the aim of creating a guide for students/school councils.
11. The VicSRC lobby the government to give a formal recommendation for all schools to outline the importance of having an SRC and a set of outlines in regards to its functioning.
12. The VicSRC invite the Victorian Minister for Education to all future VicSRC Congresses.

The VicSRC receives funding support from the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and is auspiced by and based at the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic). It can be reached there on 03 9267 3744 or, for the cost of a local call from outside Melbourne on 1300 727 176; or by email: coordinator@vicsrc.org.au

August 2012
Turning Ideas Into Action

The Process of Project Planning

“Why don’t we...?” “How about we...?” “Could we...?”

How many times are these phrases used at SRC Meetings? But just how many of these ideas develop into actions? In this article, we’ll offer some tips and a framework for developing the thoughts of the SRC further and how they can take ideas and transform them into action.

BIG PICTURE THINKING:

Establishing the projects and developing the ‘big picture’ of what the SRC wants to achieve is a useful activity to undertake at the beginning of the year as it helps set the direction for the SRC for the remainder of the year. Utilising a fair amount of time at your SRC Training Day will assist you with this.

When developing your plans, it is important to consider how SRC events will fit within the context of other school activities. Will your event or project clash with other school events such as excursions, exams or sporting activities? How many activities can your SRC realistically undertake? Having worked with primary students, I find that we can achieve one major event and one minor event each term, but this will vary based on the size, age and experience levels within your student council.

In a previous edition of Connect, we discussed the idea of shifting students’ thinking away from “Let’s raise money for [insert organisation here]” or “Let’s have a [insert theme here] day”. Rather we need to think: “How has your Student Council contributed to school policy?” We also offered a potential solution for helping to shortlist ideas.

WHERE TO NEXT?

As the SRC Teacher Advisor, it is useful to have an Action Planning Template to help students channel and to direct the students’ thinking.

The purpose of having a documented plan helps the SRC when seeking permission from the higher powers (eg: principal, school leadership team, consultative committee, School Council etc...), ensures that all key areas have been considered and helps to keep people on track and aware of when certain tasks need to be achieved by.

Elements that feature within my action planning template include:

- **PROJECT DETAILS:** Name of event/proposal, project leader, team members, date the plan was developed, proposed date
- **KEY OBJECTIVES AND GOALS:** Why are you doing this? What’s the point? Who will benefit? What will be the outcome?
- **WRAPPER UP:** After running a successful event or successfully implementing something, it is easy to overlook the tasks that need doing after the event like cleaning up, thanking those who helped and doing an evaluation of your project. Be sure to include these as part of your action steps when developing your plan.
- **POSSIBLE BARRIERS AND POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS:** What will stop your project from being approved? Have you considered possible solutions or compromises to ensure its approval?
- **GAINING PERMISSION:** Who do you need to ask before you go ahead with your event?
- **RESOURCES AND BUDGET:** What materials and/or people do you need to help implement your idea or event? Do you have these already or will you need to buy them? How much will they cost? Where is the money coming from to buy this?
- **ACTION STEPS:** What needs to be done? When does it need to be done by? Who will be responsible for doing it?
- **PROJECT EVALUATION:** How will you know if you have achieved your key goals and objectives?

GAINING PERMISSION:

With your plan now developed, it may be necessary to pitch your idea to gain approval. In the past, our school captains have invited the school principal to an SRC meeting where the SRC members will provide a presentation about their proposal. As the SRC Teacher Advisor, you can play an important role in helping students practise their pitch and posing likely questions they could possibly be presented with. It’s also important here to be the student’s advocate; when they are thrown a tricky question or have trouble explaining an idea or concept, it can be worthwhile to help them articulate their vision clearly.

It is also important for the students to be aware that their project might be knocked back. This can be quite disheartening, especially for younger students who may have spent considerable time developing their action plan. As the SRC Teacher Advisor, it is important to de-brief with these students, reflect on the experience and discuss some of the lessons learnt. It may also be possible to reword their action plan into something more feasible.

STAYING ON TRACK:

Hopefully you got your project approved and can now proceed with your plans. Be sure that all members of your team stay on track. Dedicate time within your SRC meeting agenda to review the steps of your action plan and discuss the status of these. Depending on the size of your project, it may be worthwhile to meet separately as a sub-committee or working party of the SRC.

RESOURCES:

The VISTA website features a range of templates and resources for VISTA members that have been developed by other SRC Teacher Advisers. To access these resources or to find out how you can become a VISTA member, visit us at: srcteachers.ning.com

Episode #4 of “The VISTA PODCAST” also explores the topic of action planning. Download it from iTunes or from: vistapodcast.global2.vic.edu.au

Scott Duncan, VISTA President

VISTA currently receives no additional funding to operate its programs and relies heavily on memberships to support its programs. Visit us at http://srcteachers.ning.com or e-mail us at vista@srcteachers.org.au for details on how to join.

Connect 196:
Representing: 25 Years On

August marked the 25th NSW State Student Representative Council (SRC) Conference. Students used the Conference to reflect on their past work, their current challenges and future possibilities.

Students from across the state - 130 of them - celebrated the 25th year of SRC conferences, participated in leadership skill development workshops, team building activities, motivational presentations and put forward their top BIG IDEAs that will form the basis for action during the term of office of the next State SRC.

The Conference theme, Represent!, encouraged participants to consider the effectiveness of their core business, and to look at critical questions for all SRCs - what, who, how and why.

Big Ideas
The BIG IDEA Session provided an opportunity for the SRC students to plan ways to improve the quality of school life. Each regional SRC team from the ten educational regions put forward their BIG IDEA about ways to enhance school life. The ten BIG IDEAs were then considered by the 130 student participants at the conference and students voted for their top three BIG IDEAs. These TOP BIG IDEAs form the agenda for the 2012 NSW Student Representative Council to consider during its term of office.

These were the ten BIG IDEAs that were put forward at the 2012 State SRC Conference. The 2013 NSW SRC will consider ways to support the TOP 3 BIG IDEAs during its term of office.

1. Northern Sydney: Put your C.A.P. on!
The NSW SRC work to promote Community Action Projects. In a competition titled Put your C.A.P. on!, SRCs will be encouraged to submit reports about successful student-run initiatives in their communities. The best of these entries will be awarded grants, published in a final report, and distributed to schools to encourage the development of Community Action Projects.

2. Sydney: Build Your Own SRC
The NSW SRC implement a standard (or 'base') election procedure for Student Representative Councils across NSW that can be modified to fit specific schools. This process will ensure that all voices are heard without discrimination and will promote a fairer SRC election process.

3. South Western Sydney: Put the Boot into Bullying
The NSW SRC adopt, further develop and promote ‘Put the Boot into Bullying’ – a student-led anti-cyberbullying initiative.

4. Hunter Central Coast: Community Unity
The NSW SRC implement Community Unity – an initiative to create stronger and more positive bonds amongst all students, regardless of individual differences. It’s time to accept everyone’s differences, and to embrace our diversity. This initiative is not focussing specifically on race or sexuality. We’re focussing on accepting each others’ individual personality and who we are!

5. Illawarra South East: AAA – 3 steps towards total acceptance
The NSW SRC implement AAA Day - a day to promote awareness about issues in school such as discrimination. The day aims to promote Awareness, Acceptance, and Anti-discrimination. This day can be tailored to any school, no matter how much money or how many resources the school has.

6. North Coast: Man Up!
The NSW SRC explore whether we have fewer boys in SRCs and how they would like to be involved. Once this issue has been researched, the NSW SRC begin to implement solutions to this imbalance.

7. New England: Make the Choice to Have a Voice
The NSW SRC work towards encouraging student voice and develops a resource package with suggestions on how to run an in-school workshop on finding a voice. The focus of this package will be to improve the relationship between the SRC and the wider student body, provide students with an opportunity to have a say in school decision-making processes, and encourage students to have a voice on issues such as bullying, mental health and wellbeing.

8. Riverina: Project L.T.C. (Let’s Talk Communication)
The NSW SRC create and promote a package for schools to inform them of the roles and responsibilities of an SRC. This information will encourage functional partnerships between students and staff and help SRCs to be effective.

9. Western Sydney: Redefine, Revive and Represent
The NSW SRC create a video for schools to raise awareness about the role of the NSW SRC and the State Conference Action Team. This video will encourage students to get involved by creating a positive image for SRCs and showing the opportunities that student leadership can offer.

10. Western NSW: S-H-I-F-T Initiative (Students Helped In Finding Time)
The NSW SRC produce and promote the S-H-I-F-T initiative – a digital resource package that aims to assist students in time-management.

For more information, contact Noel Grannall: noel.grannall@det.nsw.edu.au
This year - 2012 - has been an exceptionally busy year for the Student Council at The Dukeries College in Ollerton, UK.

Our Student Council is constantly involved in several aspects of College life and projects. Some of these have included: embracing the Olympics for the College; establishing a Sports Council; interviewing candidates for the Vice-Principal position at the College; fundraising for shirts to be worn by the college rugby teams; building better and stronger relationships with both the local community and our College's local primary feeder schools; voicing our opinion and that of students on a new uniform design; fundraising for our two chosen charities; organising College mufti days; modelling the new College uniform proposed and sitting on an anti-bullying committee - in order to ensure that all students at our College are not being bullied and feel safe.

The Council is mainly run by a sub-committee called the 'SSLT'- the 'Senior Student Leadership Team'. This group of students consists of the Student Council's Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary and Treasurer. The purpose of this group is for these particular figureheads within the Council to discuss matters arising, review our budget, and construct the agenda for the next upcoming Council meeting.

Although our Council has two link teachers, our Council is completely student led. The role of the link teachers within our Council is just to oversee that the Council is running efficiently and to report back to the members of staff at our College on our views and progress. In my opinion, this is a very effective way to run a Council with staff involvement like this; students find it easier for their views to be heard and expressed and hence their voice can be forwarded on to the senior staff within the College.

I believe that the key to running a successful Council is attendance; for example, if a Councillor from a particular year group is absent from a meeting, then how is the Council to be informed of the views/opinions of students from that year group? Without 100% attendance from members of the Council, not all students are having the right for their voice to be heard - this is therefore unfair. As a consequence of this, our Council appointed an attendance officer in order to ensure that all Councillors attend our meetings. This has resulted in all of the students' views, from all year groups, being represented.

Without doubt, informing students of what has occurred at our Council meetings is crucial to running a successful Student Council. Our College has a fantastic method in place for this to happen. Each tutor set group has an elected boy and girl representative who attend year meetings. At year meetings, the Student Councillors for that particular year group inform their Year Council of any news or upcoming events to students. Following this, the tutor representatives can inform the students within their tutor set of the information that they have been told. In addition, Year Councils also work well when our Council are researching students' opinions on certain matters.

As a Chair of a Student Council, I like to run things so that everybody can be involved; this is to make things fair. When running a Council, I believe that the roles/responsibilities should be spread out throughout the Council, so that students can feel important, and most importantly, in order to create good team work.

Finally, I would like to emphasise how important the Student Voice is within a College – happier, well informed, and students whose views are listened to, would definitely results in students enjoying College life significantly more and, moreover, a happier working environment for everybody.

Reprinted from Newsletter 35 of School Councils UK: www.schoolcouncils.org
2012 NAB Schools First Student Award winners

The 2012 NAB Schools First Student Award winners have been announced. Congratulations to the following students who have been rewarded for their outstanding school-community partnership ideas:

- Mikaylah Fogarty: Merici College (ACT)
- Bronte Wilson and Sarah Gardiner: Kincoppal-Rose Bay School of the Sacred Heart (NSW)
- James Ryatt and Justin Canning: Clifton State High School (Qld)
- Jack Boughton: John Paul College (Qld)
- Rachel Flint and Madison Wilson: Wynyard High School (Tas)
- Theodore Antoniadis and Ben Henderson: Drysdale Primary School (Vic)
- Paula and Jade Hubben: Mooroolbark College (Vic)
- Michelle Nguyen and Austin Lai: St Albans Heights Primary School (Vic)
- Ayel Akot: Wesley College (Vic)
- Luke Belcher and Connor Garbet: Challis Primary School (WA)

Each school will receive $5,000 to implement the school-community partnership idea, as well as support from the NAB Schools First team. Each winning student will receive an Apple iPad.

Now in its second year, the NAB Schools First Student Award gives a voice to students and recognises and rewards their ideas for school-community partnerships.

NAB Schools First wants to encourage students to work with their peers and teachers on ideas that draw on the expertise of businesses or community groups outside of the school.

Read more about the 2012 Student Award winners at: www.schoolsfirst.edu.au/sf-award-winners/index.php

Scoop.it on Student Voice

Have a look at the site: www.scoop.it/t/student-voice for a dynamic link to a range of resources and up-to-date information:

StuVoice.org

Students are banding together to enhance their voice in policy discussions nationwide. Students everywhere are eager to join the conversation, especially regarding the future of their education system. Now is the time for our voice – the Student Voice – to be heard.

That’s the theory behind the new site and blog project stuvoice.org. A place for students to join their voices as one and let their thoughts be heard.

Join us as we begin our efforts by encouraging Governor Andrew Cuomo of New York State to add students to the New York Education Reform Commission. That’s just a start- we hope to expand the presence of students as far as possible.

StuVoice.org, our blog site, officially launched on July 31, as a place to chronicle all of our work on unleashing the powerful student voice. Student Voice is a movement of students connecting the leaders of tomorrow and giving them a voice today.

Tara S
http://coopcatalyst.wordpress.com/2012/07/23/stuvoice/

‘Student Councils and Beyond’ On-Line!

We’ve almost run out of print copies of the first Connect publication: Student Councils and Beyond (from 2005). And many of the ideas have subsequently been reflected in the Represent! kit from the VicSRC (www.vicsrc.org.au/resources/represent).

So we have made all of Student Councils and Beyond (a compilation of articles and resources from many earlier issues of Connect) available on-line for FREE. It can be downloaded (as one document or in sections) as PDFs from the Connect website. Find it at:

www.asprinworld.com/connect
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26 Connect 196:
ASPRINworld: the Connect website!

www.asprinworld.com/Connect

Connect has a website at ASPRINworld; ASPRIN is the Australian Student Participation Resource and Information Network ("a cure for your student participation headaches") – a still-emerging concept. The Connect section of the website is slowly growing, with information about subscribing, recent back issue contents and summaries of and order information for Student Councils and Beyond, Student Action Teams, Reaching High and Switched On to Learning. There are also links from the indexes of recent issues to their archived PDFs (see below).

Connect is now also archived and available electronically:
research.acer.edu.au/connect

All issues of Connect are being archived through the ACER Research Repository: ACEReSearch. Connect issues from #1 to #180 are available for free download, and recent issues can be searched by key terms. See the ASPRINworld site for index details of recent issues, then link to and download the whole issue you are interested in.

www.informit.com.au

In addition, current and recent issues of Connect are now available on-line to libraries and others who subscribe to RMIT’s Informit site – a site that contains databases of many Australian publications. You can access whole issues of Connect as well as individual articles. Costs apply, either by a library subscription to Informit’s databases, or through individual payments per view for articles.

Friends of Connect

By subscribing at a higher rate, the following have helped keep Connect going. We gratefully acknowledge receipt of the following contribution since the last issue of Connect:

Supporting Subscribers:
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Is Your Connect Subscription Up-to-date?

The number on your Connect label tells you the issue with which your subscription expires. Please renew promptly - renewal notices cost us time and money!
Back issues of Connect from 1979 to mid-2011 (that's 31.5 years!) are now all freely available on-line! Thanks to the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), back issues of Connect have been scanned or up-loaded and are now on the ACER's Research Repository: ACEResearch.

You can find these issues of Connect at:

research.acer.edu.au/connect

The left-hand menu provides a pull-down menu for you to select the issue number ... browse; the front cover of the issue is displayed, and you can simply click on the link in the main body of the page to download a PDF of the issue. Recent issues are also searchable by key words.

Availability

The last 12 months of Connect (ie the last 6 issues) will continue to be available ONLY by subscription until April 2013. Issues will then be progressively added to this site and made freely available after then.

This ensures that Connect maintains its commitment to the sharing of ideas, stories, approaches and resources about active student participation.

Let us know

There may be some gaps or improvements necessary. As you use this resource, let us know what you find. (But note that, if an issue of Connect seems to be missing, check the issues either side, as double issues show up only as one issue number.) If you have any ideas for improving this resource, please let us know.

Most importantly, please USE this resource.

Back copies of Connect are available on-line for free!

research.acer.edu.au/connect/