

**Policy**

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# **STUDENT PARTICIPATION**

## FOREWORD

This policy provides a challenge to school communities to equip students with the personal skills and positive attitudes necessary to shape their own futures and to meet the emerging demands of the 21st century.

It was developed in collaboration with the Parents and Students in Schools Committee, and the State Council of Students.

The policy acknowledges and supports the work of the many schools which already have participatory practices evident in student government and through the negotiation of learning expectations. It offers guidance to school communities on ways in which student participation can be supported and encouraged.

It outlines our responsibilities to provide opportunities for development and a caring environment for students in which they feel both free and willing to participate.

Student participation in decision-making is a fundamental principle underpinning any modern approach to education. I believe our students will be well served by this approach, if fostered through the care, dedication and guidance of our teachers.

Ken Boston  
Director General of Education

## **RATIONALE**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **POLICY STATEMENT**

It is expected that schools will acknowledge the rights of students to be involved in decision-making that influences their future. Schools will ensure that appropriate procedures are established to enable participation of all students in making decisions that affect their schooling. In helping students to acquire the skills needed

to participate effectively in the decision-making process, schools should take the following steps:

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

The Education Department will, at all levels, promote opportunities for students, where appropriate, to participate in decision-making about matters which concern them.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **The responsibilities of the directors.**

The Director-General of Education will ensure the implementation of the Student Participation Policy through the directors who will:

- Ensure the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of curriculum initiatives and special programs to support the development of student participation in decision-making.
- Ensure that there are sufficient support staff to assist school-based policy and program development.
- Monitor and review school development plans in relation to policy development, programs, resources and personnel.
- Ensure the establishment of structures to enable students who are representative of the cultural and social diversity of their community to participate in decision-making on appropriate area/state groups.
- Ensure the provision of resources to enable students to participate effectively in district, area and state forums.

### **The responsibilities of principals.**

School principals will:

- Address student participation in the school development plan within a timeline consistent with that proposed by the Education Department in its Three Year Plan.
- Support the development of policies and programs to ensure all students have information and opportunities to develop knowledge and skills to participate effectively.
- Ensure that decision-making structures provide genuine opportunities for students to participate.
- Provide appropriate support for students who participate on school committees.
- Provide training and development opportunities for teachers to foster student participation at classroom and school level.
- Acknowledge the value of the development of skills and knowledge in decision-making and leadership at a school, district, area or state level by accrediting student participation.

### **The responsibilities of teachers**

Teachers will:

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

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

### **Responsibilities of students**

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

### **The participation of parents**

Parents who participate in a partnership with their child and the school will be able to make more informed decisions about the educational progress of their child. Parents can bring to this partnership an understanding of their own child and a knowledge of the social and cultural context in which students learn.

### **The role of the school council**

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