Student Participation: A Quick Reference Guide for Schools
**What is ‘Student Participation’?**

*Meaningful* student participation requires close attention to how students and teachers *interact* (talk, listen, really hear, and develop ideas together) and how they *relate* to one another.

Recent research\(^1\) has now confirmed that meaningful participation is positively associated with student wellbeing.

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**What does meaningful student participation involve?**

Build meaningful participation by offering students:

- **Voice**
- **Influence**
- **Choice**
- **Opportunities to Work Together**

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Student voice does not predict student wellbeing. The other three elements are essential, especially opportunities for *all* students to *work together* with teachers and other students.

In short, student participation is about on-going, intergenerational *dialogue* grounded in respectful relationships between students and teachers.

What opportunities do students have to participate at your school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voice</th>
<th>Influence</th>
<th>Choice</th>
<th>Working Together</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do students have any voice in...?</td>
<td>• Are there opportunities for dialogue with decision-makers (principal, class teacher, SRC representatives)?</td>
<td>What kind of choices do students have about...?</td>
<td>What opportunities are there for teachers and students to work together in...?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Establishing class rules</td>
<td>• Does anyone follow-up with students to provide feedback about their ideas?</td>
<td>• Assessment types / approaches</td>
<td>• Planning lesson or unit activities</td>
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<td>• Addressing challenging behaviours</td>
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<td>• Where they sit</td>
<td>• Solving problems as they arise</td>
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<td>• Developing assessment criteria</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Electives</td>
<td>• Improving the school environment</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Break times</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\) Graham et al. (2018). *Improving Approaches to Wellbeing through Student Participation at School*. Lismore: Southern Cross University.
How to strengthen student participation?

1. Commit
   - Make sure all members of the school community understand what student participation means and how it might be progressed in your school
   - Provide professional learning for teachers that helps them examine their assumptions, attitudes and practices around student participation, and provide the time to explore changes at school
   - Involve students right from the start!

2. Establish Firm Foundations
   - Focus on the quality of relationships between students and staff across all areas of school life
   - Collaboratively map what is already happening in relation to providing students with opportunities for voice, influence, choice and working together across school life
   - Identify and affirm the positive things already happening that build participation

3. Build Student Participation
   - Work together with students to identify initiatives that might further opportunities for participation across different areas of school life
   - Prioritise possible new initiatives and plan collaboratively with students to implement these

4. Monitor, Evaluate and Progress
   - Collaborate with students to find ways to regularly monitor and evaluate new initiatives
   - Share the results, affirm the positive changes, and keep exploring further possibilities

Where does meaningful student participation take place?

Participation at school is not just about having a SRC! Meaningful student participation should be evident across all areas of school life.

In which areas of school life do students at your school experience voice, influence, choice and working together?
BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This guide has been developed from a large-scale Australian Research Council Linkage project [Grant No: LP140100540], led by the Centre for Children and Young People at Southern Cross University in partnership with the NSW Department of Education, the Catholic Schools Office (Diocese of Lismore), and the Office of the NSW Advocate for Children and Young People.

Several additional resources have been developed from this research to provide guidance on introducing, strengthening and monitoring student participation at school. These include:

- A comprehensive **Good Practice Guide** for supporting student participation at school
- The **Student Participation Survey** (and accompanying information pack) which is a validated tool to measure and monitor student participation at school
- **Video vignettes** on participation at school
- A series of **professional learning workshops** for school staff

Other research outputs include:

- Full reports for each phase of the study
- Short summaries of the findings from each phase

**The above resources and documents are available at:**

www.bit.ly/ParticipationStudy

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