NSW Department of Education

Student voice and agency for excellence

Understanding the importance of student voice and agency

Student voice and agency is a powerful lever for improving student outcomes. When students believe that their school listens to them, cares about their opinions and acts on their feedback, they are more likely to feel that they belong. This, in turn, supports stronger motivation and engagement, leading to sustained learning outcomes. Student voice and agency also supports wellbeing and leadership outcomes, and democratic citizenship.

Defining student voice and agency

Student voice is the meaningful opportunity for all students to share their ideas and perspectives, and to be genuinely heard, so that their knowledge and experience are considered and acted on in decisions affecting their learning and school life.

Student agency is the capacity and opportunity for students to make choices, take initiative and share responsibility for their experience and outcomes in classrooms, schools, the education system, and their broader communities.

Student voice and agency falls into two broad categories:

- Personal voice and agency, when a student is speaking or acting on their own behalf.
- Representative voice and agency, when a student is speaking or acting on behalf of others.



Space | voice | audience | influence

Where does student voice and agency play a role?

Personal and representative student voice and agency can play a powerful role in delivering improved engagement and outcomes across all levels of the system, including but not limited to:



Individual

Individual student planning

Attendance planning

Differentiated goal-setting



Classroom

Daily teaching and learning, including explicit teaching practices such as giving and receiving feedback



Whole school

Wellbeing programs, SRCs, ambassador programs

School planning processes



Community

Junior AECGs

Student-developed content in newsletters and social media platforms



Network, directorate and system

System-level surveys

Directorate-level councils and Minister's Student Council

Many student voice and agency opportunities exist across multiple levels, including in HPGE, inclusive education practices, and behaviour and wellbeing programs.

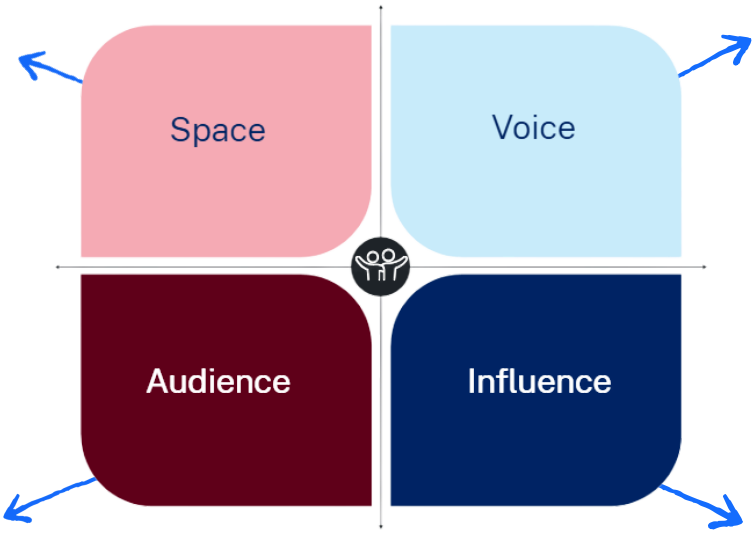


Enabling effective student voice and agency

The Lundy model of child participation specifies 4 essential elements for meaningful voice and agency.

Provide students with safe, inclusive opportunities to express their views or take appropriate action.

Support students with the information and skills they need to express their views and take action.

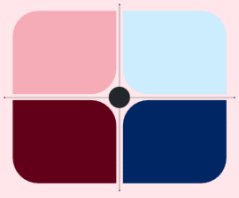


Ensure students are heard by decision-makers, and their views are taken seriously.

Enable students to participate only when they can genuinely influence the outcome. Act on their views as appropriate.

Remember, always close the feedback loop. Tell students how you have applied their ideas, and if not, why not. This step is essential so that students know their voice is genuinely heard.





Space | voice | audience | influence

A continuum of student voice and agency

Using the Lundy model of child participation as a guide, there are many ways to facilitate student voice and agency in our work. Our continuum captures the key forms, from data and evidence and by proxy when indirect engagement is necessary, through to consultation, collaboration and student-led initiatives. It's up to us to choose the most appropriate form/s to suit our students and our purpose.

Student voice ⟶ Student agency

Indirect engagement		Direct engagement		
Data and evidence	By Proxy	Consult	Collaborate	Student-led
Eg. NAPLAN, HSC, attendance, enrolment, behaviour, retention and post-school destination data.	Eg. Direct consultation with teachers, parents, SLSOs, counsellors and support workers	Eg. Surveys including NSW Public Schools Survey and My Say My Way, interviews, focus groups, discussions, yarning.	Eg. Co-designing with individual students or student representative groups, yarning.	Eg. Student-led idea generation and decision-making as appropriate, yarning.

Use indirect engagement only if:
- an issue is sensitive
- requires immediate insights
- direct engagement can't meaningfully influence the outcomes
- student insights have already been captured
- students aren't able or willing to provide insights.



All forms of student voice and agency can be valuable, although direct engagement is preferred whenever possible.

Student voice and agency in practice

Use the following prompts to guide you in supporting student participation in all your work.

1. Clarify what you are trying to achieve
2. Determine who should have a seat at the table
3. Use our model and continuum to choose and facilitate the most appropriate form of voice and agency
4. Close the feedback loop