

Student voice and participation in Victorian government schools 2014



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Students have unique perspectives on learning, teaching, and schooling, and should have the opportunity to actively shape their own education. Student voice is students actively participating in their schools, communities and the education system, contributing to decision making processes and collectively influencing outcomes by putting forward their views, concerns and ideas. Student voice allows students to engage, participate, lead and learn.

School-based activities

In 2014 Victorian government schools reported on their student voice and participation activities through the August supplementary school census.

Department-led activities

In addition, the Department of Education and Training (the Department) commissioned a number of activities to:

- promote active citizenship, student representation and youth leadership
- provide students with opportunities to explore contemporary political and social issues
- promote student understanding of the Australian system of government and how the Australian Constitution provides the framework for our democracy
- encourage students to take an active interest in the traditions, processes and practices of government.

This report provides a picture of student participation across government schools in Victoria in 2014, based on schools' completion of the supplementary census and reports on the activities conducted by the Department.



Executive summary

In the 2014 August supplementary census schools reported how they encouraged or supported student participation and involvement in key decision making within the school or broader community. Figure 1 provides the percentage of government schools that indicated they included each of the nine nominated activities.

Across all schools the most common types of student voice activities are:

- student led activities
- Student Representative Council or similar
- student input into pedagogy
- student suggestion box or survey.

81.9% (1,248) of all schools have a Student Representative Council (SRC) or similar student representative meetings.

73.6% (175) of secondary schools and 8.6% (97) of primary schools have student representatives on the school council.

All secondary, primary/secondary combined and English language schools indicate that student voice and participation contribute in some way to decision making.

Only 4 primary and 10 special schools indicated they do not include any of the nominated activities to recognise or promote student voice.

There are minimal differences between regional and metropolitan school support for and participation in student voice activities.

Schools with larger enrolments were more likely to report having undertaken student voice activities.

There is no significant difference between the four Victorian regions.

Participation from the government, Catholic and independent school sectors in Department-run student voice activities was as follows:

- 92 students from 30 schools participated in the Schools' State Constitutional Convention
- 638 students from 35 schools participated in Regional Constitutional Conventions
- 125 students from 63 schools participated in a Junior School Council Congress
- 127 students from 27 schools participated in an International Student Forum
- 108 students from 19 schools participated in a Model United Nations in French.

Conclusion

The results of the 2014 August school census reflect positively on student voice and participation in Victorian government schools.

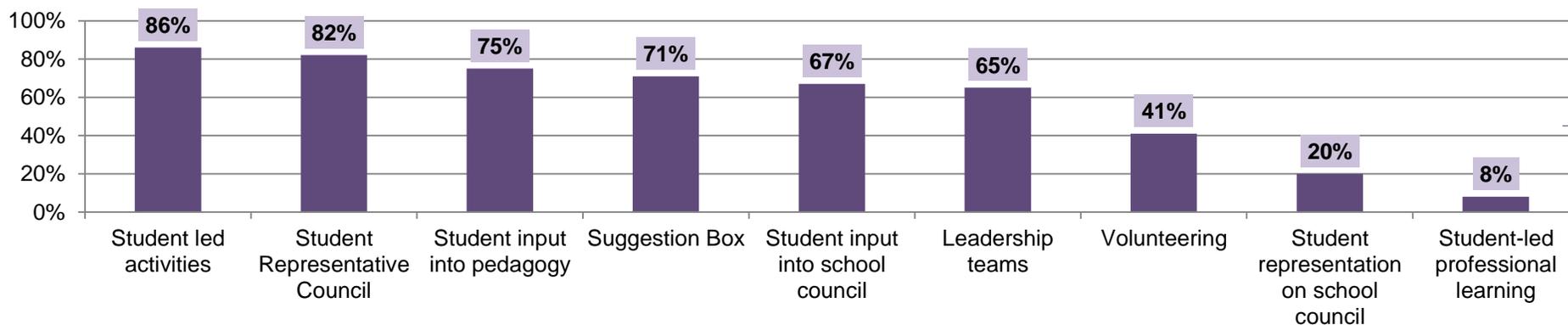


Figure 1: All government schools, 2014 student voice activities

School-based activities

The 2014 August supplementary school census included a question to determine the level of student voice and participation by students in their school communities and to inform the Department's work in supporting student leadership, student voice and quality civics, citizenship and multicultural education.

Responses

1524 schools responded to the census:

- 1126 primary
- 77 primary/secondary combined
- 238 secondary
- 79 special
- 4 English Language Schools.

Three schools did not respond.

The census question

How does your school encourage or support students' participation and involvement in key decision making within the school or broader community?
(Select all that apply)

1. School council seeks and considers students' views
2. Student representatives sit on school council
3. Junior School Council, Student Representative Council or student representative meetings
4. Student action or leadership teams
5. Student-led school-based activities for students
6. Student input into learning programs, student self-assessment and/or students establishing their own learning goals
7. Student surveys or suggestion box
8. Student-led teacher professional learning
9. Student volunteering programs

Responses from primary, secondary, primary/secondary combined, special and English Language Schools were analysed to determine if there was any significant difference in the level of activity by region, school size and location. Responses from primary, secondary and primary/secondary combined were analysed to determine if there was any significant difference in the level of activity by school type. Responses from English Language Schools and specialist schools were not analysed as separate categories.

Does student voice differ across school types?

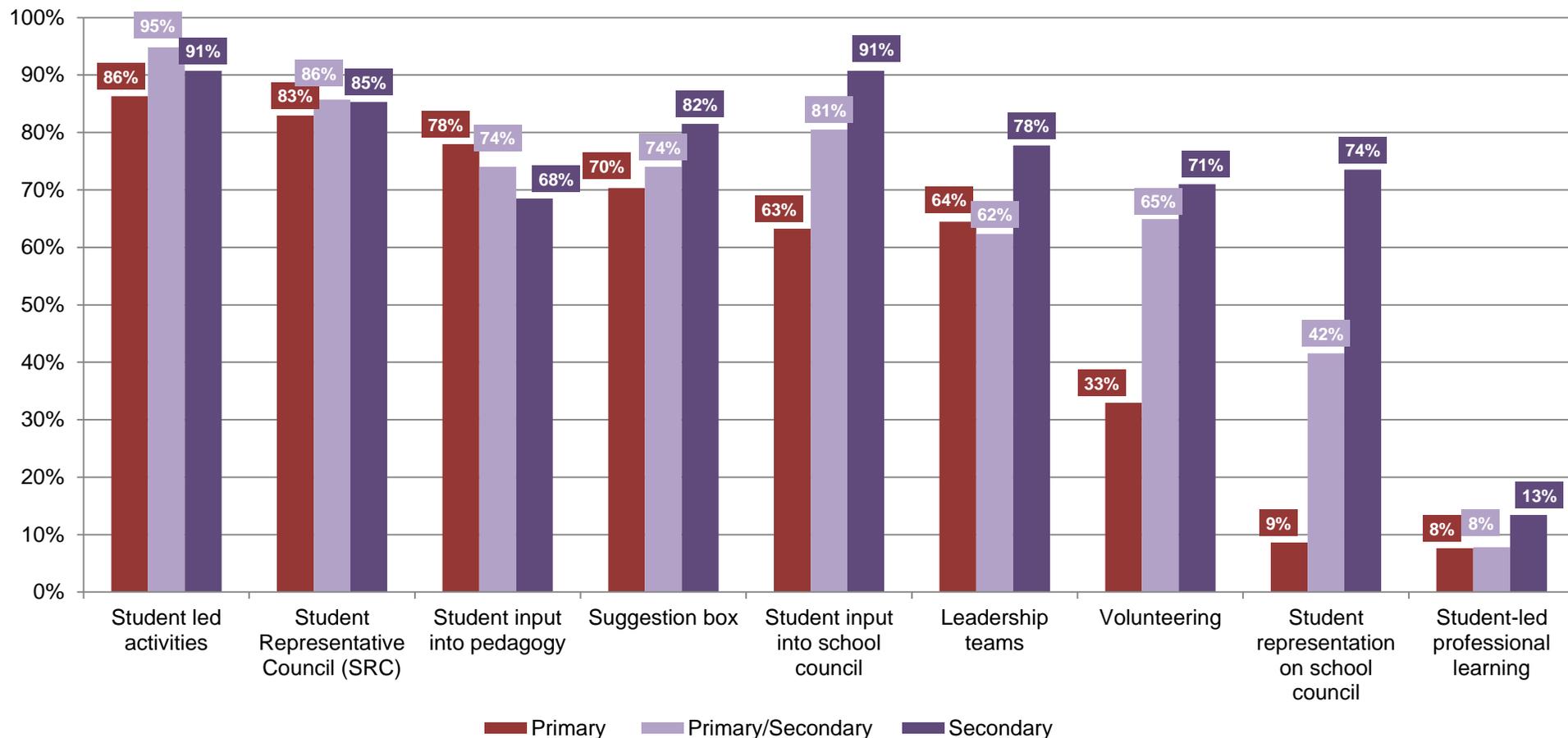


Figure 2: Student voice activities by school type

Secondary schools reported the highest level of student voice activity with the largest difference between school types being in student representation on school councils.

Does student voice differ according to school size?

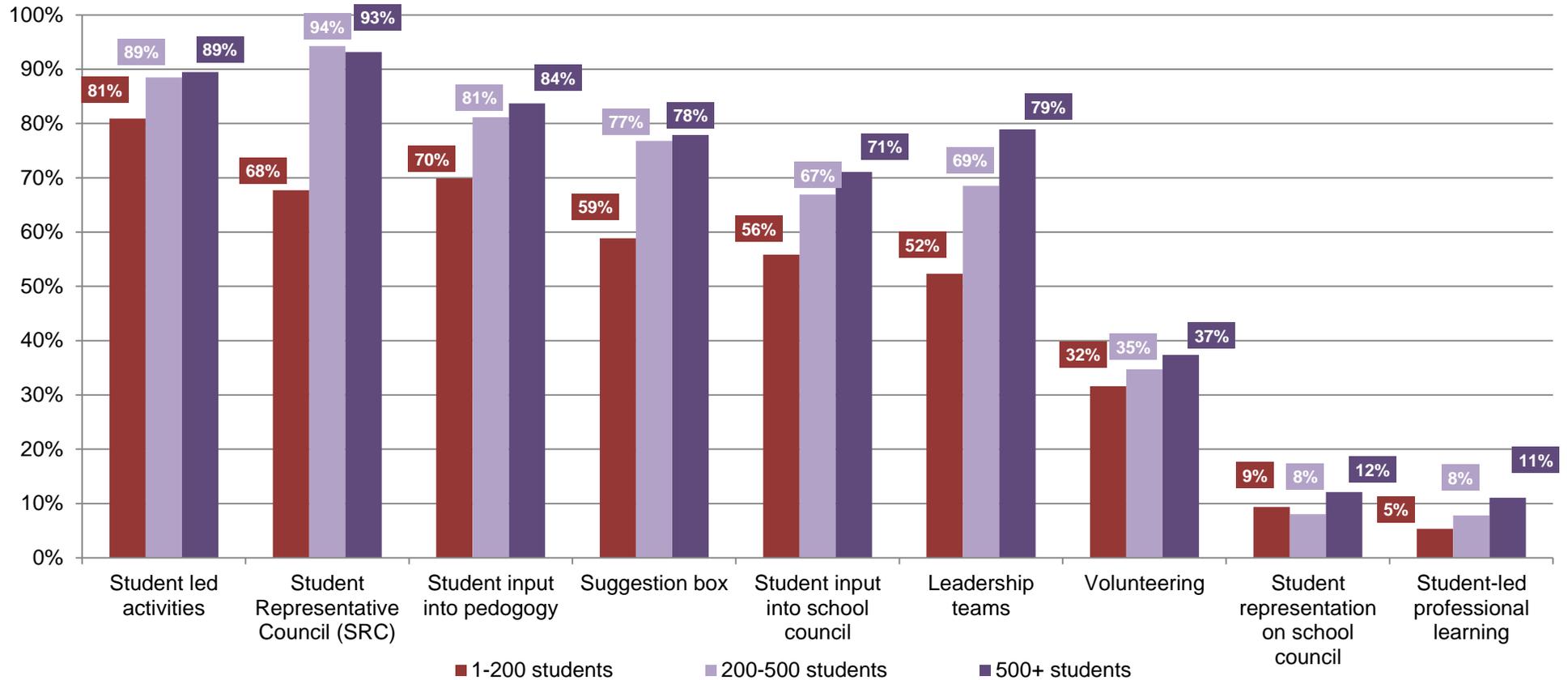


Figure 3: Student voice activities by school enrolment numbers

Schools with larger enrolments were more likely to report having undertaken student voice activities.

Does student voice differ by school region?

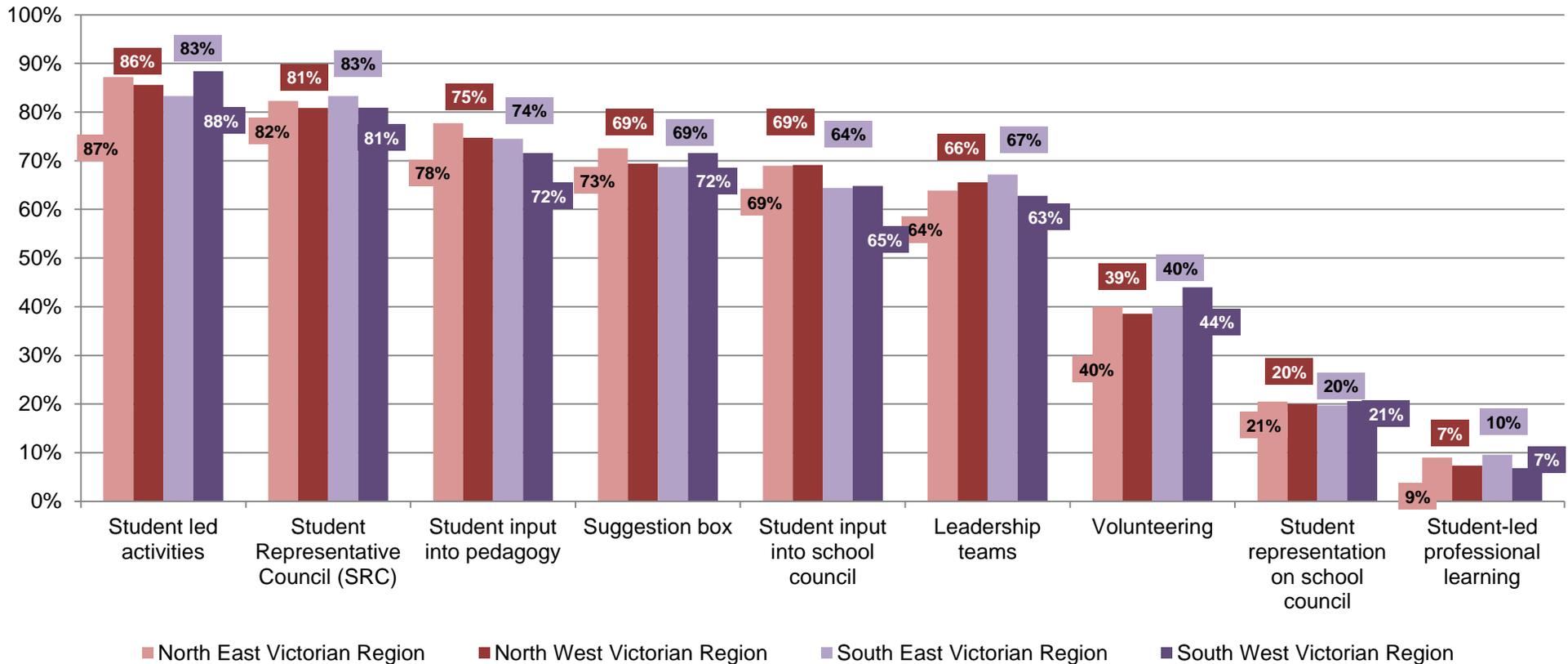


Figure 4: Student voice activities by school region

There was no substantial difference in the levels of student voice activity between the four Victorian regions.

Does student voice differ by school location?

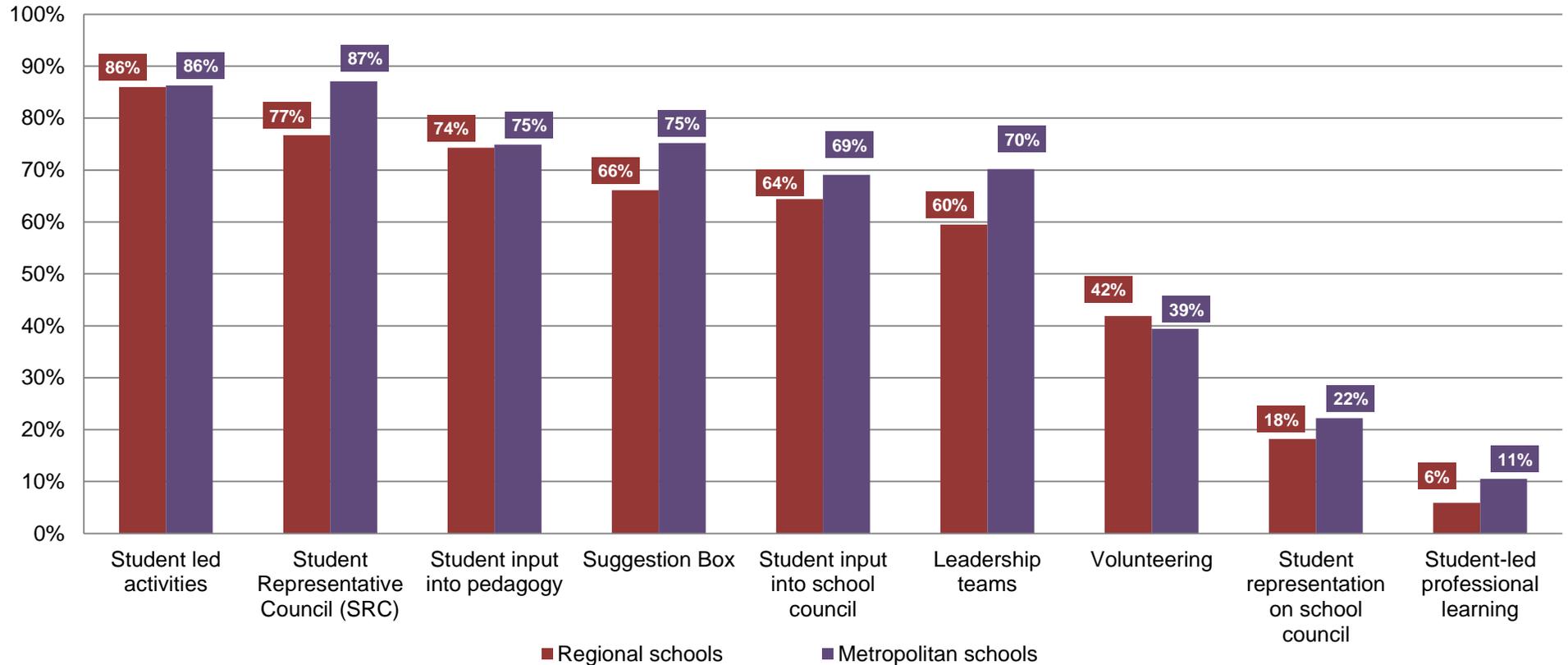


Figure 5: Student voice activities by school location (metropolitan versus regional)

Differences in student voice activities between metropolitan and regional schools were minimal. Metropolitan schools reported marginally higher levels of student voice activity. Volunteering was the only activity where regional schools reported higher levels of activity than metropolitan schools.

Department-led activities

Schools' Constitutional Conventions Program

The Schools' Constitutional Conventions program started as an initiative of the Constitutional Centenary Foundation in 1995. Its aim is to increase young Australians' knowledge of the Australian Constitution and the role it plays in our democracy. Designed for senior secondary (Years 9-12) students, the program consists of a series of regional conventions hosted by government and non-government schools, a State Convention held at Parliament House in Melbourne and a National Convention held in Canberra in March of the following year.



Regional Constitutional Conventions

Seven schools hosted Regional Constitutional Conventions, attended by 638 students from 35 schools, 15 government, 9 Catholic and 11 independent.

Students discussed the topics:

- Is Australia's human rights policy adequate?
- Australia's constitution should be fully amended to reflect our status as good global citizens
- Do we need three levels of Government, and if so, should they all be protected by the Constitution?
- Should rights, especially those of marginalised groups, be protected under the Australian Constitution? If so, how?
- Is Australia fulfilling its international obligations to asylum seekers?
- Are the disadvantaged being left behind by Australia's political and economic policies?
- The issue of refugees and Australia's treatment of them is becoming an international embarrassment.

Schools' State Constitutional Convention

The Department commissioned the Schools' State Constitutional Convention, in cooperation with Parliamentary Services Victoria, the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria and Independent Schools Victoria.

The Convention was held at Parliament House on 20 October 2014. 92 students from 30 schools (19 government, 7 independent and 4 Catholic) attended the convention and discussed the topic 'Australia is in a 'budget crisis' and all Australians must share the burden – directly and indirectly'.

Twenty-five students who attended the Schools' State Constitutional Convention were selected to represent Victoria in a delegation to the 2015 National Schools' Constitutional Convention in Canberra.

Case study: Blackburn English Language School



The school

Blackburn English Language School (BELS) is a government primary and secondary co-educational school that caters for newly arrived students who are from language backgrounds other than English.

Students attend BELS for an intensive English language program, usually for 6 months, prior to enrolment in a mainstream school. Intensive English language programs equip students with the language and learning skills to successfully meet the educational demands of schooling and to prepare them for participation in the wider school community.

Student Voice

The *Student Voice* program at Blackburn English Language School is run through a leadership group consisting of elected and nominated student representatives from the primary and secondary sectors in the school. Over a six month period, the representatives meet once a week at lunchtime with the Student Wellbeing Coordinator who facilitates the program. Student leaders develop leadership skills by participating in a range of activities, including presenting information to classes about homework clubs, study skills, Kids Helpline and other resources, community activities, services and agencies which support young people.

The student leaders survey students in the school to identify ways of improving the school. The principal is invited to meet with them to discuss some of the students' suggestions for improving the school. Some of the students' ideas which have been implemented over the past three years include new basketball courts, reopening of the school canteen with a new menu as suggested by students, new soccer goal posts, additional outdoor tables and seats, additional lunchtime activities and new sports equipment.

Student leaders present speeches at their final assembly before they leave the language school for a mainstream school.



The students have a chance to share their own opinions and the leadership groups are like a bridge to link students and the teachers or principal.
Nancy, Year 10

Through this group we can learn how to work with others and build up our confidence by being a leader.
Anton, Year 10

We asked our classmates how to improve the school. The ideas were from all students not only the student leaders.
Yolanda, Year 9

We learnt how to get help if we had problems and how to cooperate and communicate with others.
Alice, Year 7

I learnt how we could help others and how to talk to the class.
Yixin, Year 7

We learnt how to introduce a new program or activity.
Yvonne, Year 7

I have learnt how to ask and think about other's opinions and how to share my own.
Flora, Year 7