**Victorian Students’ Parliamentary Program**

**Primary School Convention**

**Classroom Activities for Pre-Convention Use**

During the recent COVID-19 pandemic schools were closed. Where possible students completed their studies at home. Throughout Australia schools closed. In States and Territories schools closed and re-opened at different times. This highlighted the power that State and Territory governments have in relation to school education.

Should the State government or the Federal government have control over school education?

**VOTE TRACKER**

Keep track of your position on the Convention topic at three different stages to see whether your position shifts prior to the final vote.

1. *NOW*

What is your initial position before you commence completing the pre-convention material?

Should the State or the Federal government have control over school education?

Yes

No

2. *AFTER*

What is your position on the topic after you have completed the pre-convention materials, and before you attend the Convention?

Should the State or the Federal government have control over school education?

Yes

No

3. *VOTE*

What was your position when you voted at the end of the Convention?

Should the State or the Federal government have control over school education?

Yes

No

**PRE-CONVENTION ACTIVITIES**

Australia has three levels of government:

* Federal (Commonwealth) government
* State governments
* Local governments.

Each level of government has different responsibilities, although sometimes these responsibilities are shared. State and Territory governments are responsible for school education within each State and Territory. The Federal government does not run any schools. However, the Federal government has a role in education funding and policy.

1. Carefully read the following. Working in small groups, discuss the reasons why schools play a vital role in society. Which reason do you consider to be most important? Why?

The coronavirus crisis has reminded Australians of the vital role schools play in society. They are essential to the economy, not just because they allow parents to work, but because they educate the workers of the future. They are a safe place for our most vulnerable kids, and they bring the community together. When schools shut, everything shuts, which is why Prime Minister Scott Morrison has fought so hard to keep them open. But he came up against an insurmountable hurdle; the Australian Constitution.

States run schools, not the Commonwealth.

(SOURCE: extract taken from the article, ‘How COVID-19 exposed fault lines in Australian education.’ By [Jordan Baker](https://www.smh.com.au/by/jordan-baker-h0zh4a) May 16, 2020 — 12.00am <https://www.smh.com.au/national/how-covid-19-exposed-the-fault-lines-in-australian-education-20200514-p54t5v.html> )

1. Levels of government
2. Watch the following YouTube on the levels of government in Australia at <https://getparliament.peo.gov.au/three-levels-of-law-making>.
3. Working in pairs, complete the worksheet on the three levels of government. [<https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/Education/Primary_and_secondary_workbooks_and_worksheets/Primary_-_Three_levels_of_government.pdf>

Share your answers to the worksheet with the class.

If you are not sure which level of government is responsible for each of these areas, use the following information from the Parliament of Victoria’s website as a guide:

‘In Australia we have three levels of Government: federal, state and local. The power is shared between these three levels.

The **Federal Parliament** has only certain, limited powers given to it by the Australian Constitution. These powers include:

* Defence
* Trade
* Foreign affairs
* Immigration
* Postal, telephone and other communication services
* Lighthouses
* Quarantine
* Currency
* Bankruptcy
* Copyright
* Marriage and divorce
* Invalid and old-age pensions.

The Federal Parliament has exclusive jurisdiction in a small number of areas. Most powers, however, are shared and both the Federal and State Parliaments are able to make laws for these matters.  If there is conflicting law, the federal law takes precedence.

In Victoria, the **State Parliament**, is responsible for:

* Law and order
* Schools
* Hospitals
* Water
* Transport
* Agriculture
* Forests.

The *Local Government Act 1989* defines the powers of **Local government** in Victoria. Local governments look after local issues such as building regulations, waste management, parks and gardens and dog control.

Power is often shared between all three levels of government. Some examples where governance is shared are roads, environmental management and public health.’

(Source: <https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/about/the-parliamentary-system/three-level-of-government> )

1. Check your understanding of the division of power between the three levels of government. Use your knowledge of the division of powers to play the game at <https://peo.gov.au/sub-site/three-levels-of-government-game/index.html>
2. The Federal government can grant money to State and Territory governments

The Federal government has a role in education funding. The Constitution allows the Federal Parliament to ‘grant financial assistance to any State and Territory on such terms and conditions as Parliament thinks fit'.

The Federal government can make grants of money to State and Territory governments and tell the State and Territory governments how to spend the money. This means that the Federal government can influence the way things are done in areas such as schools. State and Territory and Federal governments can work together in making decisions about education.

The extract in Question One says that ‘States and Territories run schools, not the Commonwealth’. How can the Federal government work with States and Territories to make decisions about school education?

1. Diverse views – For this activity you will need to work in groups of 3 – 4. You will need:

A copy of the Question Four Activity sheet

A pair of scissors

A glue stick

Cut out each of the statements in the Question Four Activity Sheet. Each of these statements either supports the State and Territory governments having control of school education or the Federal government having control school education.

1. Carefully read each statement. Working as a group decide if the statement either supports the State and Territory governments having control of school education or the Federal government having control of school education.

If you think that the statement supports the idea that the State and Territory governments should have control over school education, paste it in the column with the State and Territory government as a heading.

If you think that the statement supports the idea that the Federal government should have control over school education, paste the statement in the column with the Federal government as a heading.

1. Are there any other points that you want to add to your chart?

Share your answers with the class.

1. Making a decision. For this activity you will need a copy of the Question Five Activity Sheet.

Form into groups. For this activity each group should have two people who were not members of the group for the last activity. Use the Question Five Activity Sheet to make a summary of the arguments.

1. What do you consider to be the three most important reason for the State and Territory governments having control of school education? What makes you say that? – write an explanation of your answer in the second column.
2. What do you consider to be the three most important reason for the Federal government having control of school education? What makes you say that? – write an explanation of your answer in the second column.
3. Using the worksheet as a guide, write a statement that addresses the question: Should the State government or the Federal government have control over school education? Your written statement should include:
   * 1. A clear response to the question
     2. An explanation of the issue
     3. Present arguments either for the State government having control over school education or for the Federal government having control over school education.

Each group should present their statement to the class. Working as a class, make a decision about the question and the arguments to support that decision. (List the key points agreed to by the class on the board. Every student should have a copy of these points.)

Remember to keep a copy of all your work. If you are attending the Convention to represent your class, you will need to have an opening statement that reflects the views of your class. You may also want to refer to these materials during the discussions.

General teacher resources

<https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/first-students-back-to-school-on-may-26-premier-announces-20200512-p54s0q.html>

<https://www.dese.gov.au/covid-19/schools>

Levels of government and federalism

<https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/House_of_Representatives/Powers_practice_and_procedure/Practice6/Practice6HTML?file=Chapter1&section=05&fullscreen=1>

<https://www.ceda.com.au/CEDA/media/ResearchCatalogueDocuments/PDFs/24389-CEDAAFederationforthe21stCentury_withlinks.pdf>

<https://www.caf.gov.au/Documents/AustraliasFederalFuture.pdf>

Federal government funding of schools

<http://www5.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/IntJlLawEdu/2012/9.pdf>

<https://www.education.gov.au/how-are-schools-funded-australia>

<https://theconversation.com/is-education-better-off-in-state-or-federal-hands-27369>

<https://theconversation.com/three-things-australias-next-education-minister-must-prioritise-to-improve-schools-115223>

<https://www.education.gov.au/schooling-0>

QUESTION FOUR - ACTIVITY SHEET

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| During the recent COVID-19 pandemic schools in different States and Territories closed and re-opened at different times. Different States and Territories have different approaches to educational issues. There have been calls for a national approach to making decisions about school education. If the Federal government had control over school education there would be more consistency throughout Australia. | If the Federal government had control over school education there may be more competition between the States and Territories. States and Territories may compete to get the best resources for their schools at the expense of other States and Territories. This could lead to inequality and important school education issues being neglected. |
| The Federal government should have control over school education. ‘While States and Territories are responsible under the Australian Constitution for school education, the Federal government plays an important role in providing national leadership across important policy areas. These areas include providing quality teaching, boosting literacy and numeracy outcomes, and parental engagement. [based on <https://www.education.gov.au/schooling-0> ] | The size of Australia means school education needs to be a State and Territories responsibility. It would not be possible to have one central education department making decisions for all schools across Australia. The system would not be able to respond to the needs of all the different regions in Australia. |
| If the Federal government had control over school education it may be more difficult for individuals to express their concerns about issues. Decisions about school education would be made for all of Australia. It may be difficult for individuals to express concerns about school education in their own area. | Allowing States and Territories to have control over school education means that what happens in schools stays close to the people. State and Territory governments are more aware of the daily needs and wishes of the people in their States and Territories. |
| Each State and Territory in Australia is different. Letting States and Territories have control over school education means what happens in schools can reflect those differences. The States and Territories can adapt their schools to local needs and conditions. If the Federal government made all decisions about school education this would be difficult. | Allowing States and Territories to have control over school education is not a good use of resources. It can lead to duplication and inconsistent decisions in different parts of the country. For instance, each State and Territory has its own education department. Whereas, the Department of Education, Skills and Employment is run by the Federal government. Although there is a National Curriculum, Victoria has the Victorian Curriculum. |
| The current system works well. The Federal government, by providing some grants to the States and Territories, can influence the decisions that State and Territory governments make about school education. Having the Federal government involved in making decisions about school education has made the system more uniform. This means that it is easier for families to move from State to State without interrupting their children’s education. | Arguably, in a federation where education is the responsibility of States and Territories, policy at the national level should be minimalist when it comes to the operation of schools. The proper and sole role of the Federal government, which does not operate any schools or employ any teachers … is to create the conditions and incentives for schools to flourish, not to impede or engineer their activities.  (Source: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-07-30/buckingham---education/4853236> ) |

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OTHER POINTS?

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QUESTION FIVE – ACTIVITY SHEET

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| Three most important reasons for the State government having control of school education. | What makes you say that? |
| Reason One: |  |
| Reason Two: |  |
| Reason Three: |  |

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| Three most important reasons for the Federal government having control of school education. | What makes you say that? |
| Reason One: |  |
| Reason Two: |  |
| Reason Three: |  |