

Front of Mind

**2025 Active Citizenship Convention
Summary and analysis**

Our Voice

Our Impact

**Our Voice.
Our Impact.**

Safeguarding

Democracy



**Government
of South Australia**
Department for Education



Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the traditional owners throughout South Australia, and we pay respect to the custodians of the land on which we live and learn. We respect their spiritual relationship with Country and acknowledge that their cultural and heritage beliefs are still important to those living today.

We acknowledge that the land on which the Active Citizenship Convention was held is the traditional land of the Kurna people. We acknowledge the Kurna people as the custodians of the Adelaide region and that their cultural and heritage beliefs are still important to Kurna people alive today.

We also pay respect to the cultural authority of Aboriginal peoples who attended the convention from other areas of South Australia and Australia.

The artwork by Ngarrindjeri artist Jordan Lovegrove shows our reconciliation journey. The Department for Education is represented by the large central meeting place. The 5 surrounding meeting places represent the 5 dimensions of reconciliation: • Unity • Equality and equity • Race relations • Institutional integrity • Historical acceptance. Our reconciliation journey will take us across workplaces, classrooms, partnerships and communities. These meeting places are all connected by a pathway which shows our reconciliation journey. The smaller meeting places throughout the artwork are the different families and communities supported by the department, our educators and our schools.

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Artwork based on feedback from learners
— Tuesday 19 August

Context

The Active Citizenship Convention

was announced by the Premier, the Hon. Peter Malinauskus MP, in August 2024 as part of South Australia's nation-leading reforms in civics and citizenship education.

From 18 to 20 August 2025, 873 year 10 learners came together from 122 schools across South Australia for the inaugural Active Citizenship Convention at Adelaide Oval.

The purpose of the convention is to develop young peoples' capacity to engage meaningfully with democracy. By increasing their understanding of democratic processes and developing the skills required to become active and informed citizens, the convention aims to build young people's trust and confidence in our democratic systems.

Year 10 learners were encouraged to use their voice and consider ways to make a positive impact, in line with the event's theme, Our Voice. Our Impact.

As part of an interactive activity, young people used 'learner voice cards' (pictured right) to reflect on an issue that matters to them and to provide advice for other young people on how to be an active citizen. This report provides a summary to stakeholders of the 2025 Active Citizenship Convention and its impact on learners. It includes insights into issues that matter to learners and their advice on being active citizens.



An issue, topic or challenge that matters to me is...
An issue that really matters to me is bullying and mistreatment of others.



My biggest tip on how to be an active citizen is...
Take any opportunity you can.
Don't regret mistakes you have made but learn from them.
Care about the way our political stances affect the future. "

Learner voice cards supported learning and presented a unique opportunity to hear from young people across South Australia and find out what matters to them.

They also provided a way to better understand what active citizenship means and looks like for young South Australians today.

Attendance

Learners by sector

The event was attended by year 10 learners from Government, Catholic and Independent education sector schools.

Day	Government	Catholic	Independent	Total number of students
Monday 18 August	221	0	19	240
Tuesday 19 August	241	50	51	342
Wednesday 20 August	223	45	23	291
Combined	685	95	93	873

Schools by region

All South Australian regions were represented across the 3 days of the convention.

There was a regional focus on Monday 18 August with over 30 schools attending from regional South Australia. The following 2 days, Tuesday 19 and Wednesday 20 August, primarily comprised schools from Greater Metropolitan Adelaide, with some regional schools also represented.

Day	Metropolitan	Regional	Total number of schools
Monday 18 August	7	31	38
Tuesday 19 August	39	8	47
Wednesday 20 August	32	6	38
Combined	78*	45	123

77 different metropolitan schools attended the convention across the 3 days. One school attended on 2 separate days, bringing the combined total to 78 metropolitan schools.

Summary

In total, 873 learners from 77 metropolitan schools and 45 regional schools participated in the 2025 Active Citizenship Convention.

This included learners from Metropolitan Adelaide, the Adelaide Hills/Mount Lofty Ranges, Barossa Valley, Clare Valley, Yorke Peninsula, Eyre Peninsula, Kangaroo Island, Fleurieu Peninsula, Limestone Coast, Murraylands, Riverland, the Flinders Ranges and Outback South Australia.

We recognise and thank all schools who participated in the 2025 Active Citizenship Convention.

A list of participating schools is included in the [Appendix](#) on page 26.



Impact of the convention

Learning intentions

Throughout the 2025 Active Citizenship Convention, young people engaged in learning to:

- increase trust, hope and active participation in democracy
- build confidence to navigate disinformation and misinformation
- develop a deeper understanding of democratic processes.

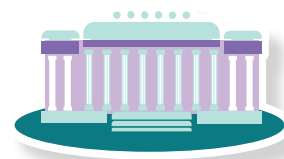
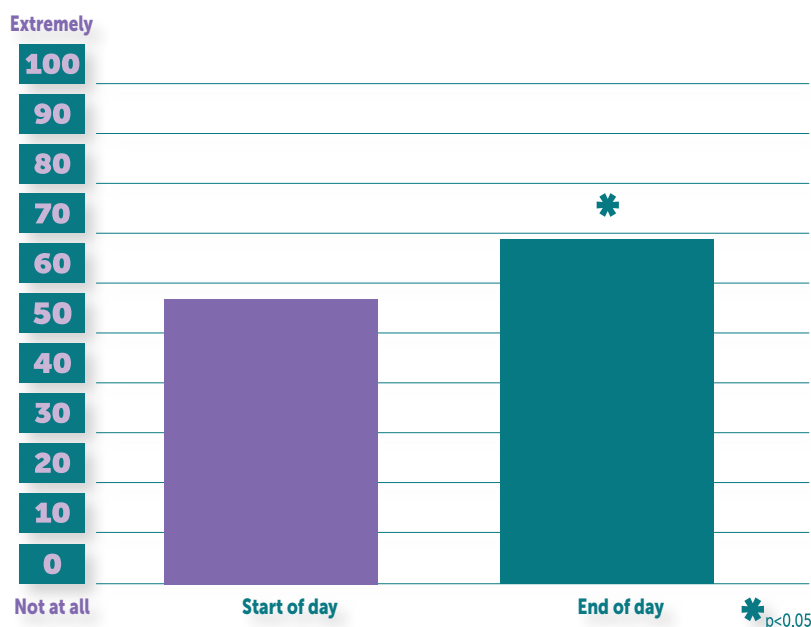
To measure the impact of the convention against the learning intentions, learners responded to 3 prompts using a 100-point scale:

- I feel like I can play an active role in our democracy.
- I am confident I can tell if media content is real or fake.
- I am hopeful about the future of our democracy.

Of the 873 students who attended the convention, 477 responded to the above prompts at the start of the day, and 375 at the end of the day.

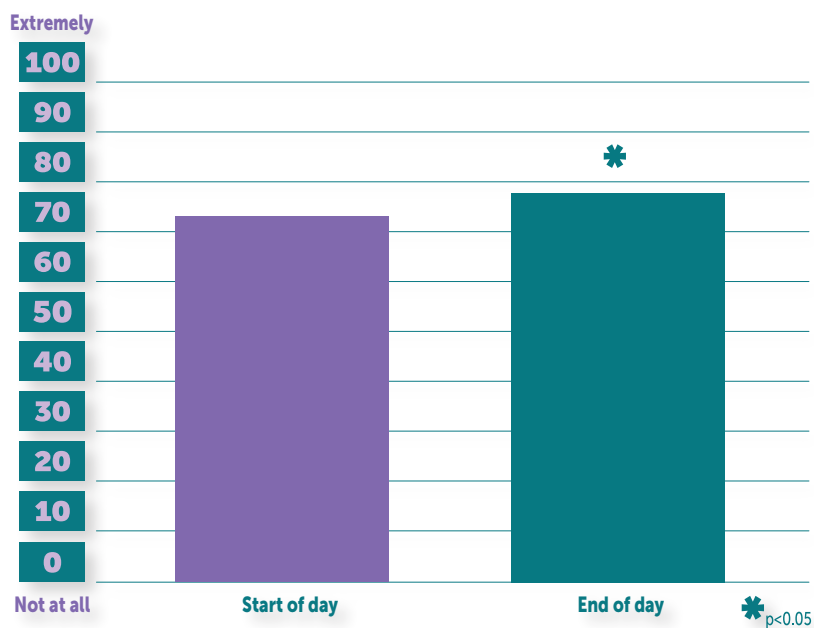
Shift in perceptions

I feel like I can play an active role in our democracy.



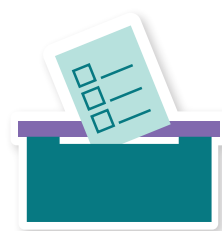
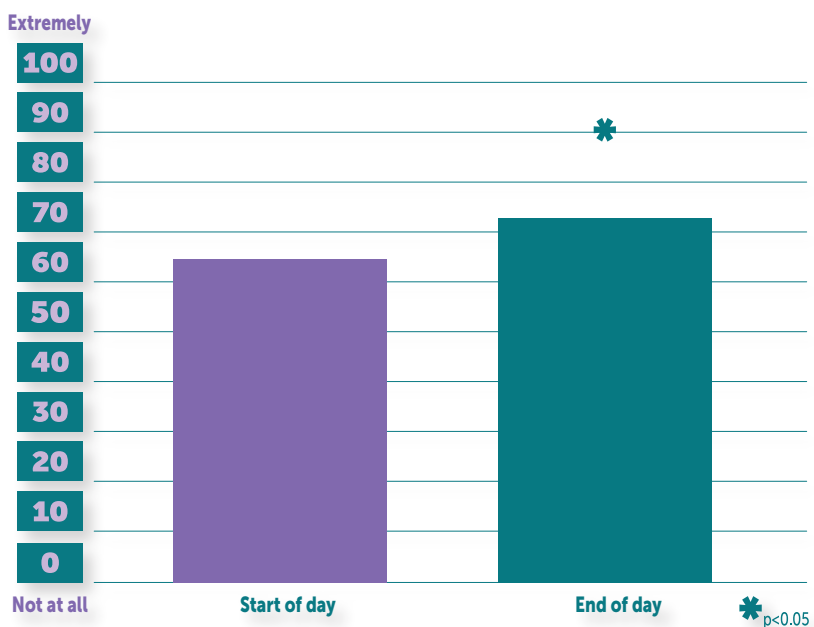
By the end of the day, the responses indicated a significant increase in their belief that they could play an active role in democracy, compared to the start of the day.

I am confident I can tell if media is real or fake.



The responses showed a significant increase in their confidence to identify real and fake media content from the start to the end of the day.

I am hopeful about the future of our democracy.



By the end of the day, learners were significantly more hopeful about the future of democracy than they were at the start of the day.

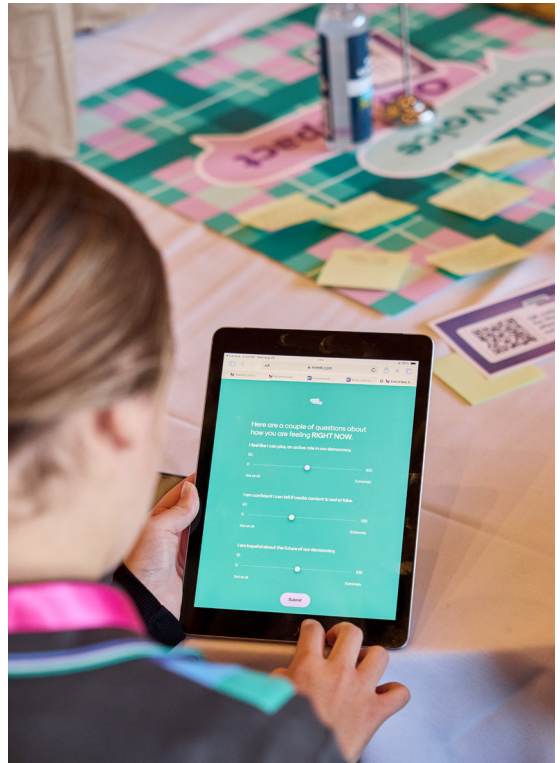
A healthy democracy

Young people also provided a text-based answer to the following prompt:

To me a healthy democracy looks and feels like ...

Year 10 learners most often described a healthy democracy as one where everyone has a voice and can participate freely. That is, one that is supported by equality and fairness, rights and freedoms and a respectful, inclusive civic culture that listens, discusses and compromises for the common good. In their responses, young people emphasised youth involvement, informed decision making through education and representatives who are accountable to voters.

The overall tone was constructive and oriented towards the future. Young people envisioned healthy democracies as collaborative communities that make sound decisions for current and future generations to ensure all people feel safe, respected, heard and included.



The top 8 themes that emerged from learners:

- 1 Diversity and inclusion**
- 2 Educated and informed citizenry**
- 3 Citizens working towards a common good**
- 4 Voice and active participation**
- 5 Equality and fairness**
- 6 Youth empowerment**
- 7 Compromise and collaboration**
- 8 Listening and dialogue**

Learner responses in relation to these themes included:



Issues that matter to year 10 learners

The following insights were generated by year 10 learners in response to the prompt:

An issue, topic or challenge that matters to me is ...



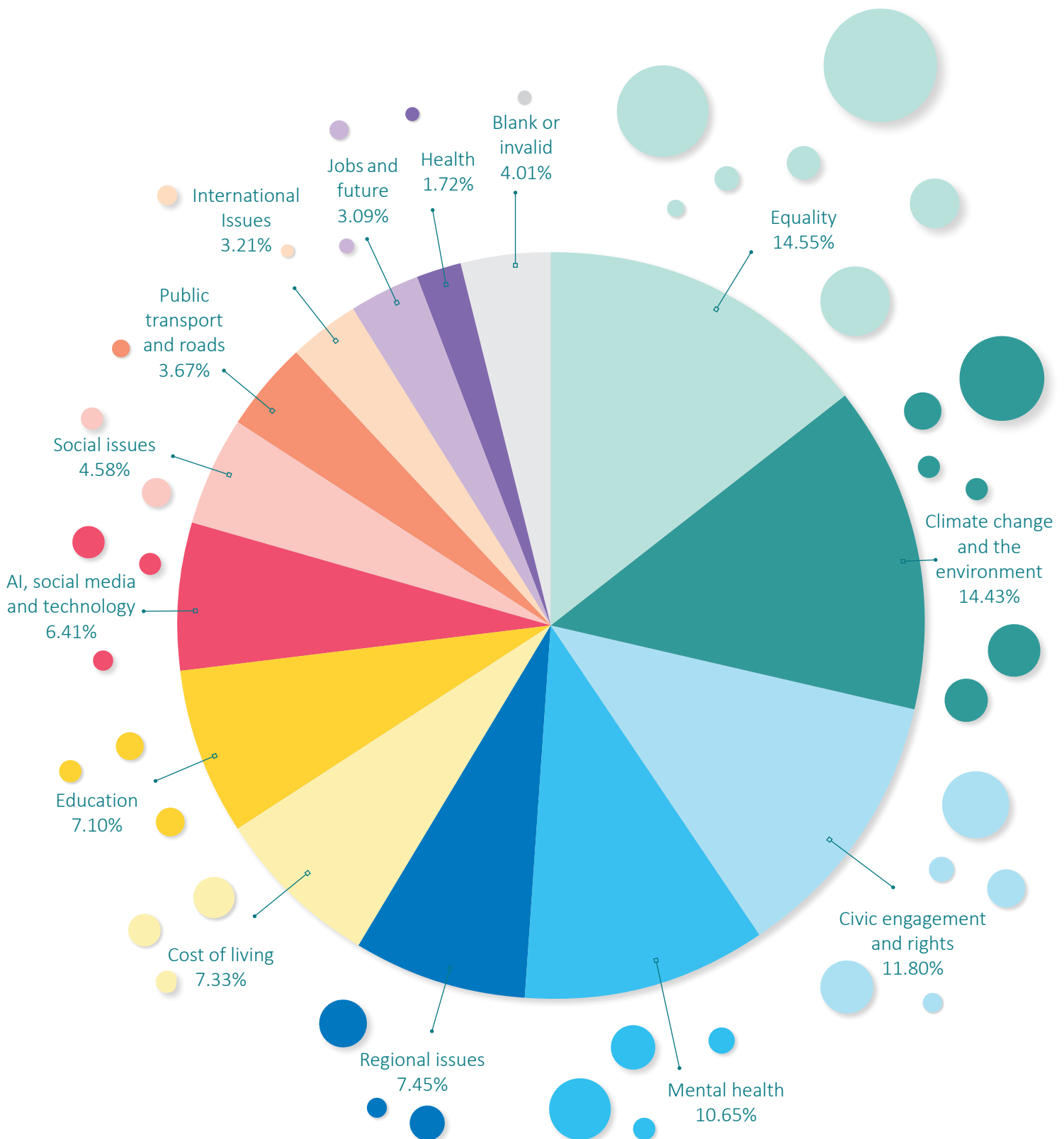
Their responses indicate that young people care about a wide range of issues from mental health to cost of living, and AI to climate change. A theme emerged consistently, irrespective of geography or sector: young people care deeply about social, economic and political issues that affect themselves and others.

The top 8 issues that emerged across 873 learner voice cards were:

- 1 Equality**
- 2 Climate change and the environment**
- 3 Civic engagement and rights**
- 4 Mental health**
- 5 Regional issues**
- 6 Cost of living**
- 7 Education**
- 8 AI, social media and technology**

Other issues that came up with less frequency included social issues such as domestic violence, homelessness and alcohol, public transport and roads, international issues such as war and conflict, jobs and the future, and health.

Issues that matter to year 10 learners



Key insights

Young people identified specific issues

One trend observed was that young people cared about specific issues. For example, when expressing a concern about climate change and the environment, young people were more likely to nominate specific concerns such as pollution, food waste and the energy transition. Other current and contextual examples include “the algae [sic] bloom in South Australia” and “drought [because] it affects everyone and everything”.

Another example related to AI and social media. Often, young people referred to specific personal impacts of technology such as their dependency on technology in everyday life, the prevalence of scams on Facebook Marketplace, and the need for strict rules about the use of AI, specifically the use of deepfakes.

This trend was also seen across other categories. The focused and specific nature of young people’s understanding and engagement across all issues highlights the personal and observed impact of these issues. They are not experienced as removed from young people but are instead perceived and experienced every day in the lives of young South Australians.

An issue, topic or challenge that matters to me is...

Our Voice

Our Impact

An issue that matters to me is plastic pollution. While South Australia is mass banning single-use plastics, we need this to happen on a GLOBAL scale, rather than just one state/country.

An issue, topic or challenge that matters to me is...

Our Voice

Our Impact

the idea that young people are being encouraged to consume but not create



Equality was the top issue

Interestingly, equality emerged as the top issue across all 3 days of the convention. Equality broadly captured rights-based issues like women's rights, LGBTIQ+ rights and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights, as well as a range of issues including racism, sexism, homophobia and bullying. While young people expressed this differently or focused on a particular aspect of equality, the underlying value was that everyone is equal and should be treated with respect.

Young people are keenly aware of the inequalities around them and expressed a desire for this to change. As one young person said, "[It's about] giving people the same amount of respect and power no matter their race, gender, beliefs and backgrounds".

Another stated that an issue that mattered to them was, "Stereotypical things that stop people from doing what they want to do because of racist or sexist views."

An issue, topic or challenge that matters to me is... **Our Voice** **Our Impact**

bullying is a massive issue in schools that affects students well being and academic performance
giving 100% 100% 100%

An issue, topic or challenge that matters to me is... **Our Voice** **Our Impact**

→ Discrimination by gender, race or religion.

More than ever, young people want spaces and communities that value and respect all voices and create a sense of belonging.

Issues for young people in the city

Young people in metropolitan Adelaide expressed different concerns to young people from the country. One of the largest variances was on the issue of AI, social media and technology. This issue came up more than twice as often on the second and third day, which had a focus on metropolitan schools, compared with the first day, which had a focus on regional schools.

The issues of future jobs and public transport also appeared more frequently among young people from the city. Their specific concerns around public transport included the availability and affordability of services. Their concerns around future jobs related to societal expectations or pressure to succeed, worries about not being able to get a "good job" despite studying, and the future of creative-focused careers.

An issue, topic or challenge that matters to me is... **Our Voice** **Our Impact**

public transport taking too long and not being as accessible the further away you live to get to and from school

Young people from metropolitan Adelaide expressed concerns about global issues 3 times more often. Their concerns were specific and included things like "the war in palestine [sic] and the killing of innocent children in gaza [sic]", "fast fashion and its impact", "food and water insecurity", the "Congo genocide" and "the plight of the Uyghur [sic] population in China".

Issues for young people in the regions

Young people in regional South Australia demonstrated a deep knowledge of their towns and communities. As a result, their concerns were highly specific, powerful and provoking. They expressed issues that matter to them in a matter-of-fact way. This included highly visible issues like “empty shops”, “not having footy goals at our school”, “financial relief for farmers” and “limited access to higher education and health care”. They were able to identify and articulate improvements for their towns and communities.

It was evident that young people from regional South Australia understand and experience tangible regional disadvantage. Their concerns were wide and included access to specialist medical care, funding for rural schools and the barriers that come with travel, such as the poor quality of roads.

Two striking questions posed by learners spoke to the heart of this disadvantage:

- “Does being more country mean having less opportunity?”
- “How is there nothing in our community for kids and teens?”

An issue, topic or challenge that matters to me is...

Our Voice

Our Impact

having more after school activities for ~~the~~ people under the age of 18 in our community that are cheap or free

An issue, topic or challenge that matters to me is...

Our Voice

Our Impact

Access to healthcare for teenagers and young families living in regional areas. hospitals or healthcare centres are too far away and way to expensive. healthcare should be free and closer in distance for regional areas.

An issue, topic or challenge that matters to me is...

Our Voice

Our Impact

No opportunities for Country kids.

One point of commonality between young people from the city and those from the country was their general perception of educational disadvantage experienced by regional learners. This could be seen in comments from day 1 referring to “rural schools funding”, the need for “more money for schools”, and “to have funding across every school”, speaking once again to young people’s strong sense of justice and equality.





An issue, topic or challenge that matters to me is...

Our Voice

Our Impact

People suffering in silence and can't get the help they need. This includes being afraid of speaking out, not the right resources and judgement and many more.

An issue, topic or challenge that matters to me is...

Our Voice

Our Impact

Mental health in farming and agricultural areas.

An issue, topic or challenge that matters to me is...

Our Voice

Our Impact

Lack of self-confidence & positive self talk in young people.

Social issues

Learners from metropolitan Adelaide and regional South Australia expressed social issues differently. Young people from the regions were more likely to express a link between social issues and their causes and impacts. For example, they often spoke about issues like suicide, drugs and alcohol in relation to poor mental health.

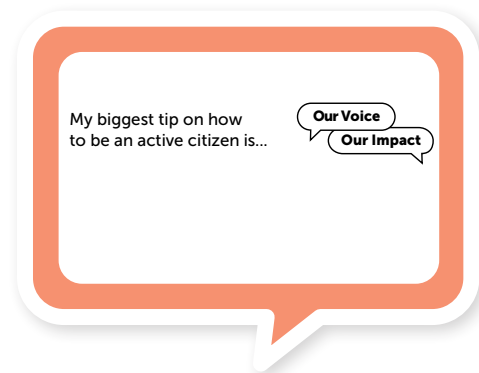
Young people in the city more often identified social issues in isolation. Young people in Adelaide care deeply about societal issues like youth homelessness, youth gangs, poverty, and domestic and gendered violence. However, they less frequently expressed the causes or impacts of these issues.

These differing perspectives between groups could be related to varied lived experiences of societal issues, higher prevalence or perception of mental health issues in their local environments, or a greater understanding of the effect of mental health issues on communities.

Young people's top tips for being an active citizen

The 2025 Active Citizenship Convention encouraged young people to use their voice, take action and create a positive impact. The following insights were generated by year 10 learners in response to:

My biggest tip on how to be an active citizen is ...



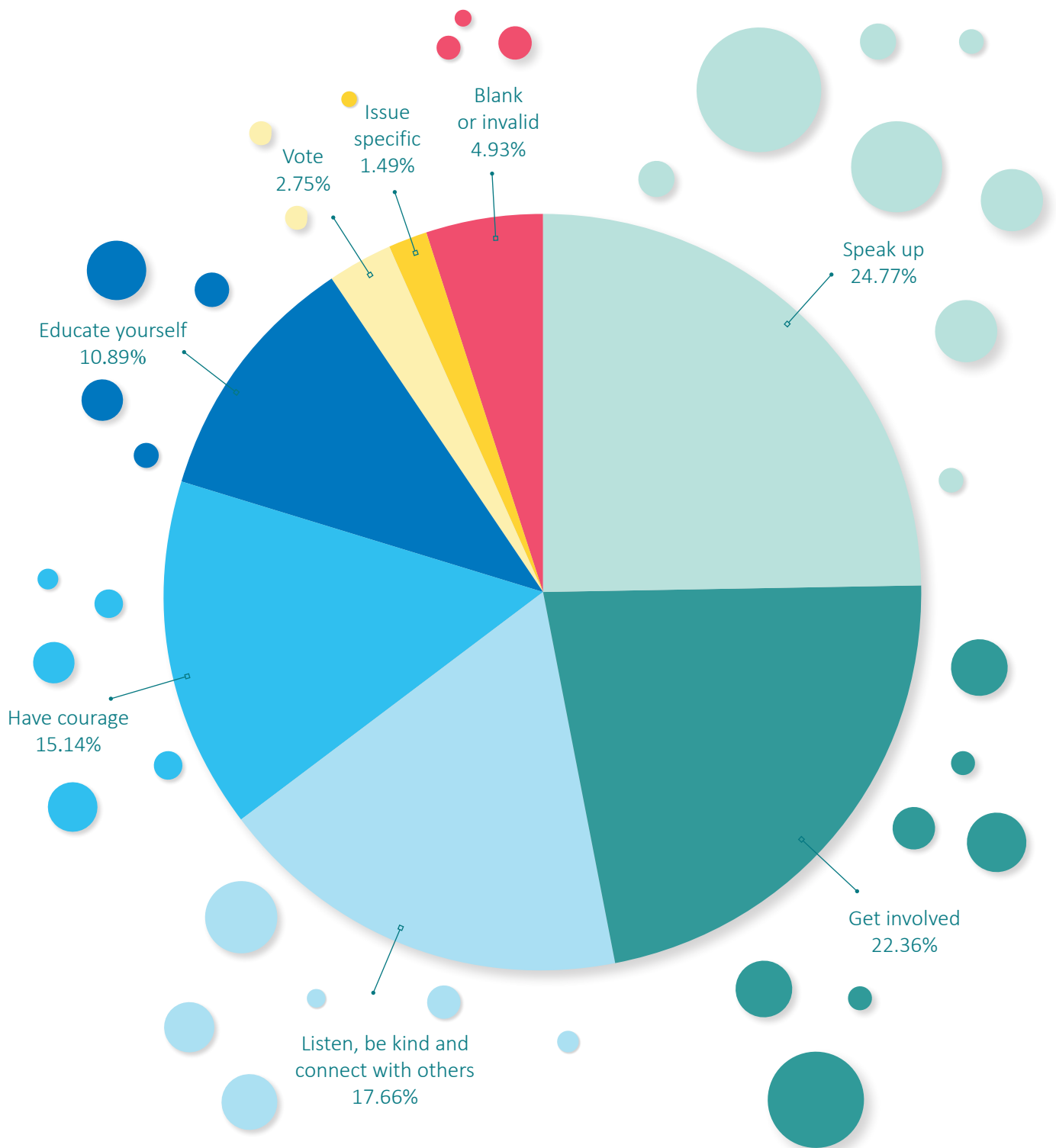
Learners had a range of ideas for how young people can be active citizens and make a positive difference in their communities.

Their top tips fell into 5 main categories:

- 1** **Speak up**
- 2** **Get involved**
- 3** **Listen, be kind and connect with others**
- 4** **Have courage**
- 5** **Educate yourself**

Other advice that appeared with less frequency included voting in elections and advocating for specific issues of importance to them.

Young people's top tips for being an active citizen*



* Based on 873 learner voice cards

Key insights

Appeals to emotion and calls to action

Young people's top tips for active citizenship focused on feeling or doing rather than knowledge-based advice. Their advice referenced kindness, courage and practical skills with 7 times the frequency than head-driven responses (such as "educate yourself" and "staying informed").

For young people, active citizenship is about taking action (as seen in Speak up and Get involved), being caring and respectful (as seen in Listen, be kind, and connect with others) and being brave (as seen in Have courage).

My biggest tip on how to be an active citizen is...

Our Voice
Our Impact

To be brave and bold
and just get your voice
out there because you
can change the world. Be
kind and compassionate

These insights highlight the importance of civics and citizenship education. While knowledge and critical inquiry are important, young people also value having the capability to act and the disposition to do so.

Learners are interested in expressing their citizenship through active, compassionate or courageous means, like speaking up on an issue they care about or showing respect to someone they disagree with. Learners also identified that it's important to show that they care about others and about issues. As one young person wisely shared, "staying positive and engaged is a powerfully radical move in a cynical disengaged society".

Courage and citizenship: an unexpected theme

Courage was not one of the convention's planned learning intentions, yet it emerged as a strong and unexpected theme. While the keynote speech touched on themes of authenticity and bravery, young people repeatedly highlighted the importance of courage and resisting social pressures. This offers unique insight into how young people understand their citizenship responsibilities and the barriers to them being active.

My biggest tip on how to be an active citizen is...

Our Voice
Our Impact

Listen into the goings on
and political happenings.
Fight for what you believe
in and don't give up when
it's hard

Young people's advice included, "don't be afraid to step outside your comfort zone" and "be proud to express your ideas".

In an increasingly polarised world, young people are keenly aware that it takes courage to speak out, disagree respectfully with others, stand up for a belief, meet someone new or give something a go. For young people, courage is an essential element of citizenship.

The importance of community

Young people from regional South Australia more often suggested getting involved in their local community than young people in metropolitan Adelaide. Advice regional learners shared included “volunteer wherever you can”, “contribute to your community” and “be involved in a sport (be involved with people in your community)”.

My biggest tip on how to be an active citizen is...

- get involved in your community.
- don't be a bystander.

Our Voice
Our Impact

My biggest tip on how to be an active citizen is...

to support and volunteer problems that need more attention. Fight, speak up for a better future.

Our Voice
Our Impact

This highlights that young people from the regions are more likely to be connected to their community, be aware of different ways to get involved, and be able to articulate why being active in the local community makes a difference.

On the other hand, learners living in the city were 25% less likely to suggest getting involved in their local community as a means of being an active citizen. This suggests there is an opportunity to encourage young people in Adelaide to connect with their local community by volunteering or supporting local community events and organisations.

Staying informed

Young people in metropolitan Adelaide more often suggested “staying informed” as their top tip for being an active citizen, with advice like:

- “pay attention to prevalent issues and build an understanding of the actions we can take to be a part of the solution”
- “be curious, be critical, seek knowledge”.

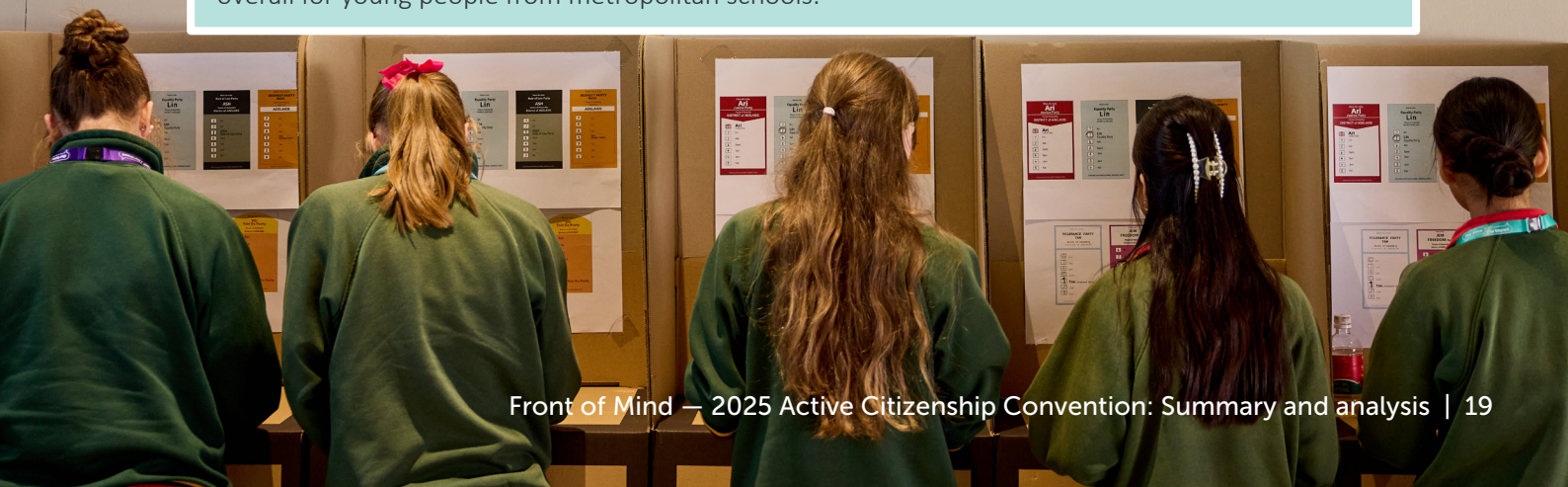
Young people in metropolitan Adelaide placed greater emphasis on head-driven, intellectual responses to citizenship than young people from regional South Australia.

My biggest tip on how to be an active citizen is...

Be educated on current affairs even if its just watching the news form your own opinion

Our Voice
Our Impact

Learners on days 2 and 3 of the convention, when most students attending were from metropolitan schools, twice as often suggested “educate yourself” as their top tip, compared with the advice from learners who attended day 1, when most students were from regional South Australia. Despite this, head-driven responses still only made up just under 15% of top tips on days 2 and 3, and therefore emotional and practical responses were still more likely overall for young people from metropolitan schools.





Artwork based on feedback from learners
— Wednesday 20 August

How might this influence learning and teaching in South Australia?

1

Rights and responsibilities

What learners are saying:

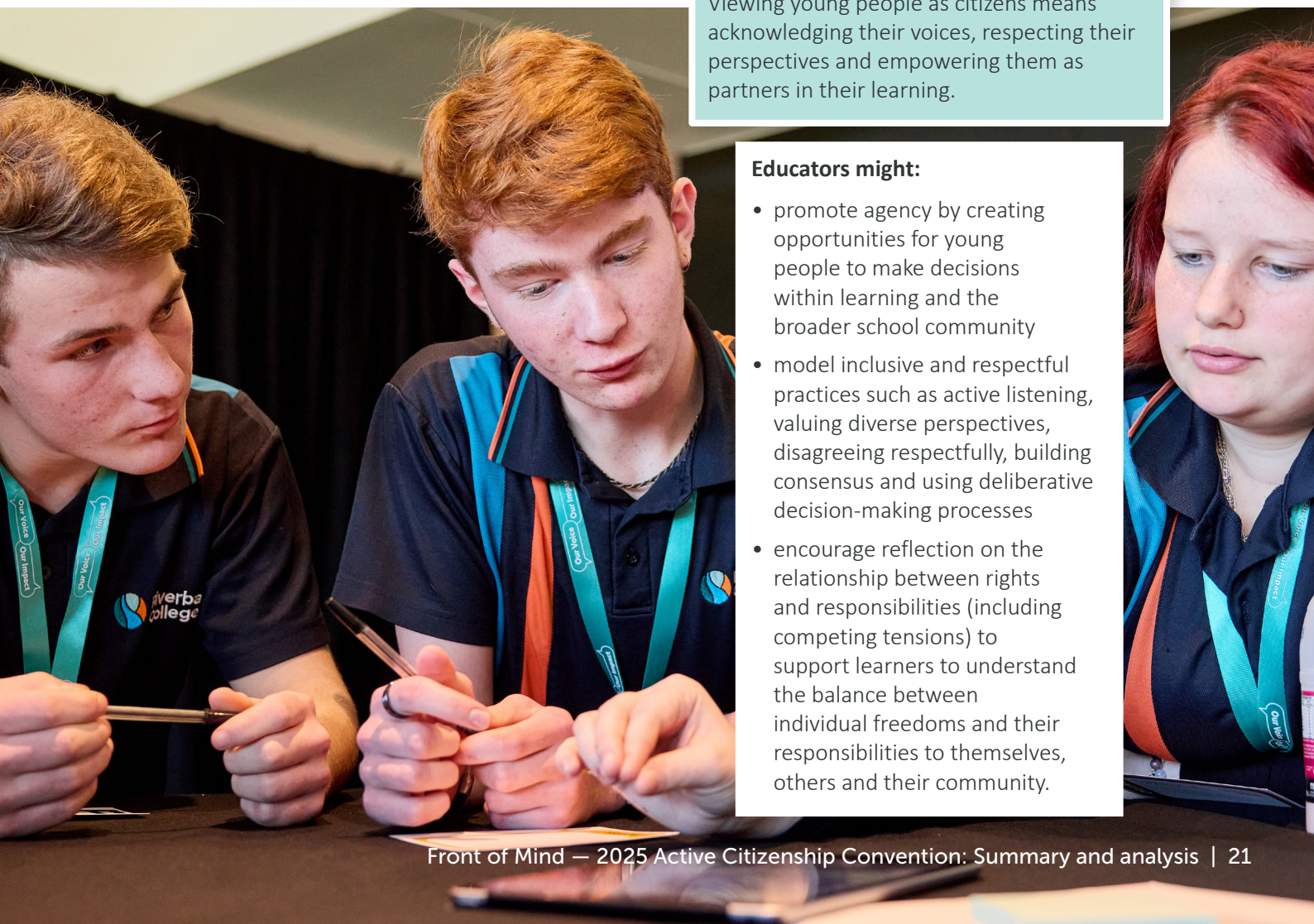
Young people indicated their desire to be viewed as citizens, including being heard on issues that matter to them and being involved in decision making. Learners felt strongly about their rights, the rights of others and the importance of acting responsibly.

What this might mean for educators:

Viewing young people as citizens means acknowledging their voices, respecting their perspectives and empowering them as partners in their learning.

Educators might:

- promote agency by creating opportunities for young people to make decisions within learning and the broader school community
- model inclusive and respectful practices such as active listening, valuing diverse perspectives, disagreeing respectfully, building consensus and using deliberative decision-making processes
- encourage reflection on the relationship between rights and responsibilities (including competing tensions) to support learners to understand the balance between individual freedoms and their responsibilities to themselves, others and their community.



2

Compassion and empathy

What learners are saying:

Young people indicated they view active citizenship as more than an intellectual endeavour, requiring not just knowledge of key issues but also attitudes and behaviours to act with compassion, respect and empathy.

What this might mean for educators:

Designing holistic learning experiences to develop transferable capabilities and dispositions in addition to essential knowledge is key to developing informed, compassionate and engaged citizens.

Educators might:

- promote opportunities to engage with multiple perspectives to develop empathy and meaning-making.
- encourage collaboration and community engagement, such as volunteering, civic campaigns or local partnerships
- celebrate learner voice by facilitating democratic dialogue
- create platforms for learners to showcase their collaborative projects and share insights with their peers, school and community
- design learning to develop attitudes and skills necessary for positive interactions with society.



3

Courage

What learners are saying:

Young people perceive courage as an essential requirement for active citizenship. Courage enables individuals to take a stand, challenge injustices and voice their opinions when faced with the possibility of criticism, failure or the enormity of societal issues.

What this might mean for educators:

Offering a multitude of opportunities for young people to practise courage and step beyond their comfort zones.

Educators might:

- foster an open-minded learning culture, valuing and respecting diverse opinions so learners can express their thoughts without fear of judgement
- provide opportunities for learners to engage in meaningful discussions, take considered risks to step outside of their comfort zone and develop resilience through productive failure
- begin with small, low-stakes activities that build confidence, such as class dialogue, debate or school-based projects
- encourage a culture of collaboration to provide learners with opportunities to offer or receive peer support and feedback
- recognise and celebrate acts of courage when learners step outside their comfort zone, such as speaking up, being an upstander, leading a project or contributing to an initiative with positive repercussions outside of their immediate community.



4

Interest becomes passion

What learners are saying:

Young people have a keen sense of justice and are curious about matters of local, national and global significance, from the conceptual to the specific.

What this might mean for educators:

Designing experiences that incorporate the interests of young people helps to energise learning, boost engagement and provide young people with a sense of purpose.

Educators might:

- design learning experiences that invite exploration through questioning and dialogue connected to learners' areas of interest
- identify authentic connections across learning areas, extracurricular activities and experiences beyond school to connect learners' lived experiences with contemporary real-world issues
- expose learners to opportunities and multiple perspectives beyond their lived experience
- leverage student interests to boost engagement through service learning
- promote critical thinking and reflection by empowering learners to investigate challenges and opportunities with appropriate complexity, and encourage learners to design solutions that might contribute to the resolution or improvement of an issue
- provide meaningful opportunities to develop and apply critical thinking and analytical, reflective and communication skills in authentic contexts.



5

Community connection

What learners are saying:

Responses from young people emphasised the importance of belonging and having opportunities to make a positive impact on one's community.

What this might mean for educators:

Leveraging this connection might include a powerful call to action for learners to engage with their community, voice their ideas and contribute meaningfully to society.

Educators might:

- explore and identify ways to support learners to become involved with varied communities
- create opportunities for learners to connect beyond the classroom by partnering with local organisations, community groups and businesses
- link global issues to local actions to show learners the tangible ways they can make a difference
- foster safe and inclusive environments that promote belonging through cultural safety, respect and self-regulation
- co-design authentic learning opportunities with and for learners to apply their knowledge, capabilities and dispositions through collaborative initiatives in their community in which they live, learn, work and play.



Appendix

We recognise and thank all schools that participated in the 2025 Active Citizenship Convention.

Aberfoyle Park High School
Adelaide Botanic High School
Adelaide High School
Aldinga Payinthe College
Allendale East Area School
Ardrossan Area School
Australian Science & Mathematics School
Avenues College
Banksia Park International High School
Berri Regional Secondary College
Birdwood High School
Bordertown High School
Brighton Secondary School
Cardijn College
Charles Campbell College
Christian Brothers College
Christies Beach High School
Clare High School
Cleve Area School
Cooper Pedy Area School
Coomandook Area School
Cowell Area School
Craigmore High School
Cummins Area School
Eastern Fleurieu R–12 School
Edmund Rice Flexi School
FAME Flexi School
Findon High School
Gawler & District College B–12
Gladstone High School
Gleeson College
Glenunga International High School*

Golden Grove High School
Grant High School
Hamilton Secondary College
Harvest Christian College
Heathfield High School
Henley High School
Hope Christian College
Immanuel College
John Pirie Secondary School

Kangaroo Inn Area School
Kangaroo Island Community Education
Karcultaby Area School
Karoonda Area School
Karna Plains School
Kimba Area School
Kingston Community School
Lameroo Regional Community School
Le Fevre High School
Loreto College
Loxton High School
Lucindale Area School
Mark Oliphant College
Marryatville High School
Mercedes College
Millicent High School
Miltaburra Area School
Mitcham Girls High School
Modbury High School
Moonta Area School
Mount Barker High School
Mount Carmel College
Murray Bridge High School
Nazareth Catholic College
Norwood International High School
Nuriootpa High School
Oakbank School
Ocean View P–12 College
Open Access College
Orroroo Area School
Our Lady of the Sacred Heart College
Para Hills High School
Parafield Gardens High School
Pembroke School
Peterborough High School
Pinnacle College
Playford International College
Plympton International College
Port Augusta Secondary School
Port Lincoln High School
Renmark High School

Reynella East College
Riverbanks College B–12
Rivergum Christian College
Riverton & District High School
Roma Mitchell Secondary College
Rostrevor College
Salisbury East High School
Salisbury High School
School of Languages
Scotch College
Seaford Secondary College
Seaview High School
Seymour College
Specialised Assistance School for Youth
St Aloysius College
St Dominic's Priory College
St Francis de Sales College
St John's Grammar School
St Michael's College
St Peter's Girls' School
Streaky Bay Area School
Temple Christian College
The Heights School
Thebarton Senior College
Thomas More College
Tumby Bay Area School
Underdale High School
University Senior College
Unley High School
Urrbrae Agricultural High School
Valley View Secondary School
Victor Harbor High School
Waikerie High School
Wilderness School
Willunga High School
Wirreanda Secondary School
Woodcroft College
Woodville High School
Xavier College
Yankalilla Area School

*Note, 122 different schools attended the convention across the 3 days. Glenunga International High School attended on 2 separate days, bringing the combined total to 123 schools.



Safeguarding Democracy
Education.SafeguardingDemocracy@sa.gov.au



**Government
of South Australia**

Department for Education