A chance to rule the school

Children across Australia will compete with classmates to be Principal for a Day.

Students around the country will trade their classrooms for the principal’s office as part of Student Principal for a Day. Registrations are now open for the national event, which will take place on June 4.

Student Principal for a Day is co-ordinated by Principals Australia Institute, which ran the inaugural event last year.

“More than 100 primary and secondary students took part in 2013,” PAI CEO Jim Davies says. “We hope to get even more schools involved this year.”

Students from Catholic, independent and government schools in every state and territory participated last year. The most remote school to take part was Milyakburra on Bickerton Island, about 600 kilometres east of Darwin.

Whilst schools were free to select their student principal using whatever method they wish, many chose to invite students to write applications. Many of the positions were highly contested; students were short-listed and then interviewed by a selection panel made up of students and staff.

“The event is designed to give students a hands-on lesson in leadership,” Davies explains. “Students took their roles very seriously and did everything from leading student assemblies to conducting tours for families of potential new enrollees.”

A program for the day can be negotiated between the student principal and the real principal. Participating schools receive access to a suite of resources and tools to custom design a successful program. Possible activities include chairing a staff meeting, leading a classroom lesson, meeting with the school’s governing council or arranging an interview with a local media outlet.

“One secondary student even dealt with a complaint from a member of the public. She dealt with it so well that the member of the public went from complaining about the behaviour of a student to singing the praises of the school.”

The event has three aims:
• To provide primary and secondary students with a practical leadership development opportunity
  • To connect students and participating schools with others around the country through webinars and online discussion
  • To focus community attention on the value and importance of quality school leadership.

“It is really important that we understand the vital role our principals play not only in our schools but in our wider community as well. This day is a great way to showcase what our principals do and elevate the status of the profession as a whole.”

The event also gives principals and school communities insights into what their students think.

In the lead up to last year’s event, students were asked to rank the three most important qualities of a great principal. The top three responses were:
• They listen
• They make sure our school is a safe place
• They care.

By the end of the program, participants had developed a much richer understanding of what their principal does.

As Year 6 student Will Clark says:

“I learnt that the role of principal was very important to the school and its teachers. To be principal, you have to be responsible because the whole school is depending on you. This experience has changed me in many ways because I have developed my leadership skills.”

A survey of participating students and principals conducted after the event showed the day was a great success:
• 96 per cent of surveyed principals agreed that the event increased the leadership capabilities of their student principals
• 100 per cent of surveyed schools said they would participate again
• 100 per cent would recommend Student Principal for a Day to other schools.

Find out more about the event at: sp4d.edu.au