



**Ras Al Khaimah American Academy**

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## Contribution of Young People Policy Introduction

The Government of the United Arab Emirates recognizes the importance of young people to its future. In 2016, the Prime Minister and Vice President of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, H.H. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum emphasized this importance by establishing a Ministry of Youth Affairs, headed by the Minister of State for Youth Affairs. **(1)** At the time, the Minister, Her Excellency Shama bint Suhail Faris Al Mazrui was the world's youngest government Minister at 22 years of age **(2)**.

The government's commitment to putting young people's needs and desires at the fore, enabled the youth to shoulder national responsibilities, innovate and contribute to the welfare of the UAE's community.

"The UAE needs the skills, energy, enthusiasm and commitment of the country's young people, and to do that, young people's voices must be heard, their ideas taken on, and their recommendations implemented at all government levels," SHK Mohammed said when announcing the new ministry.

## Objectives of this Policy

This policy seeks to support the work of the country's Youth Ministry to nurture and encourage RAKAA students to develop the skills, confidence, and abilities necessary to participate in their country's development.

While the National Youth Strategy concentrates on young people aged between 15 and 35 years old, this policy sets out the means by which all students in the RAKAA cohort, from KG1 to Grade 12, can begin developing the necessary skills and abilities to achieve personal and national goals as they transition through the five critical stages of life:

1. education
2. work
3. adopting a healthy and safe lifestyle
4. starting a family
5. exercising their citizenship **(3)**.

This is achievable by encouraging students to participate in school decision-making and participate in a range of activities, which both serve the RAKAA community and allow their voices to be heard.

This policy provides general guidance on ways in which the school management, staff and community can encourage students to make a positive contribution and avoid anti-social or criminal behaviour.

## Definitions

Children – a person aged from 1 to 14 years

Students – all children and youth who attend RAKAA from KG1 (4 years of age) to Grade 12 (17 – 18 years of age)

Youth – a person aged from 15 to 35 years

## Student participation defined

Students are one of the many groups of stakeholders within the RAKAA community. Adult members of the community need to recognize and encourage the role that students can and should play in decisions that affect them.

Students should be involved in as many decision-making processes as possible, subject to the rules outlined in policies such as online safety, child protection and safeguarding, confidentiality and data protection. To ensure this involvement is worthwhile, effective and positive, student collaboration with other stakeholders is encouraged, so that students are not simply passive recipients of decisions and services within the school environment. Students should contribute to and, ultimately, help to co-produce those decisions and services.

## Level of participation

A student's level of participation should be determined by their level of skill to make decisions. This will be determined by their age level, maturity and knowledge of specific areas.

At all times, adult stakeholders should nurture their younger counterparts to encourage them to express themselves and have a say in the decision-making process, which is appropriate to their age level. Taking into account the opinions of students and allowing them to take a greater role in the decision-making authority as they mature, will increase the students' empowerment and level of responsibility. **(4)**

## Principles of student participation

**At all times, a clear commitment to involving students should be demonstrated by:**

1. respecting and believing in students
2. making the necessary time, space and resources available for participation
3. providing training and support to students to allow them to participate effectively
4. providing training to adults to allow them to support the student participation
5. disseminating relevant information which is understandable for students
6. managing expectations by explaining what is "out-of-bounds"
7. providing clear feedback on outcomes to all students, not just those directly involved in the decision-making process
8. celebrating achievements and acknowledging the learning of students through participation

**All students should have an equal opportunity to participate, by ensuring:**

1. no student is excluded or prevented from participating because of age, gender, ethnicity, disability, religion, culture, language or location

2. student age, maturity and understanding are considered when deciding how to support participation
3. those who lack confidence or motivation are encouraged
4. assistance for 'hard-to-reach' groups such as students with Special Educational Needs (SEN)
5. Students understand that they have a responsibility to support and promote effective participation.

**Student participation is continually reviewed, ensuring that:**

1. a clear rationale and success criteria have been created
2. criteria achievement is assessed regularly
3. students are involved in the evaluation and review process

**Quality standards are met including:**

1. adherence to quality standards and codes of conduct
2. child protection issues handled according to the relevant policy
3. agreed confidentiality rules
4. agreed data protection rules.

**Principles into practice**

The success of student participation is reliant on adherence to the principles outlined in this policy. It is also reliant on the development of relevant and meaningful ways in which students can participate in the management and development of the school.

RAKAA could use a range of activities and programs to include students in the school's decision-making processes. The following list is by no means exhaustive, and all stakeholders should be encouraged to suggest additional which take advantage of current practice in the field. A series of links is also included in this document to allow stakeholders planning activities to take advantage of case studies from international sources.

**Student Council**

The RAKAA Student Council is generally chaired by an elected committee of Grade 12 students. Each grade level from Grades 9 to 11 also elects representatives to the council. Younger students are represented by two Grade 9 students who are co-chairs of the Junior Student Council – a committee of class representatives from Grades 4 to 8 (generally two students per class).

The role of the Student Council is to plan and deliver extra-curricular and break time activities for students, as well as representing the views of students to teachers and school

administration. Council members can also make recommendations for School Improvements which are considered for inclusion in the annual School Improvement Plan.

Grade 12 students generally lead committees of their peers and Grades 9 to 11 students which focus on specific areas e.g. social activities, charity, student assistance, etc.

One teacher is assigned as a mentor to the Student Council and is able to train students in correct procedures and assist with their interactions with other stakeholders.

### **E-Safety Committee**

Each class at RAKAA is represented on the E-Safety Committee which meets regularly with the Principal and the Head of Section (Middle and High School) to discuss initiatives related to the implementation and maintenance of E-Safety policies and principles. Their input is then fed into the work of the E-Safety Committee.

### **E-Safety Student Ambassadors**

E-Safety Student Ambassadors will cascade online safety learning through assemblies, peer coaching and buddying schemes.

### **Peer Mentoring and Support**

Older students can be encouraged to support their younger colleagues through training in mentoring and support. Programs such as buddying can help to create a more cohesive school community and give younger students the opportunity to share their views with a near peer, who is seen more as a friend and, therefore, less intimidating than a teacher or administrator.

The Peer Mentoring Program which includes peer coaching and mentoring groups will allow ambassadors to feed information to the E-Safety Committee to improve online learning. The E-Safety Committee is currently considering the most effective means to facilitating this process, including reporting channels, such as forms and scanned code.

### **Policy Feedback**

Student representatives will be asked to give points of view on school policies and initiatives taken to support their learning.

### **Working Groups**

From time to time, teachers or students initiate projects to involve students in community activities.

Examples of these one-off and annual approaches include:

- cleaning up a local beach as part of their community commitment in Islamic Studies
- collecting toys for the local Red Crescent charity
- funding and packing food parcels for the needy during Ramadan

## Student Assemblies

Classes or groups of students plan assemblies to highlight social issues within the school and the local community e.g. Internet Safety Day, Anti-Bullying Month, International Women's Day and Children's Day.

## Awareness Session

The school involves the students in many awareness sessions for events like Safer Internet Day, Breast cancer awareness, Anti Bullying week, Digital Citizenship week throughout the year. They designed their own activities to enhance learning such as rap songs, posters, and newsletters.

## School Publications, Social-Media, and Parent Events

Students will be encouraged to contribute to school publications such as newsletters and social media posts. They will also be involved in parent events to provide a student perspective on issues.

## Celebration Days

Student groups, supported by academic and administration staff, plan days or weeks to celebrate international events e.g. Digital Citizenship Week, Book Week, Sports Days

## Extra-curricular activities

Older students and teachers share their extra-curricular skills with younger students to engage them in meaningful non-academic skills development e.g. Gardening, Craft, Art, Yoga and Orienteering.

## Al Fazaa

This Parents and Citizens Association sponsored activity encourages leadership within the school. Students are elected or appointed as the Al Fazaa representative for each class. This is done on a rotational basis to allow as many students as possible to experience program benefits of developing social cohesion and maintaining effective bonds on solidarity within UAE society.

## Benefits of student participation

Empowering RAKAA students and encouraging their participation of in decision-making provides a range of benefits for both the students and the school community as a whole.

## For students

- Opportunities to develop active citizenship skills which will allow them to participate in the future governance of the United Arab Emirates
- Strengthening their links to the school community
- Developing 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills of communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity which are essential employability skills



- Providing safe environments in which students can see how decisions are made and how they can contribute to them, as well as the relationship between rights and responsibilities.
- Promoting students' growth and development outside the formal curriculum

### For the school

- Improvements in behaviour and engagement in learning
- Creation of a more inclusive environment where students are supported by their near peers and other stakeholders
- Providing a range of perspectives and ideas to improve the processes and procedures in place at the school

### For the Community

- Strengthen communities by allowing students who are socially excluded to interact with others
- Empower students to act on community issues that affect them
- Promote volunteerism
- Ensure young people have employability skills to help them integrate more easily into the workforce

### Barriers to Participation

While involving students in school decision-making is a sensible approach, challenges to this approach may include:

- Students who are unwilling to participate
- Communication barriers such as language and cultural differences
- Current stakeholders' inability to listen to and work with students
- Current stakeholders' lack of confidence about how to involve students
- Lack of knowledge about safeguarding
- Limited time and venues
- Lack of understanding of advantages of this approach
- Excessive enthusiasm by some stakeholders who have a fixed approach due to their previous experience

Initial training of all stakeholders and publicity about the advantages of this approach will help to alleviate some of these barriers. Continual evaluation of the processes and feedback from students and teachers will inform areas where barriers continue to exist so that appropriate remedial action can be taken. The school's Senior Management Team, with assistance from the E-Safety Committee and input from the E-Safety Ambassadors, will develop remedial action plans once specific issues are identified.

## Consent Form for the use of Cameras and other Image Recorders

### Authorization



**Authorization to use student photos on the RAKAA website, ads, flyers, social media, and the school yearbook.**

*Throughout the year, students' pictures will be taken to document school events and activities and some of the pictures will be used in the yearbook, school ads, social media, or the website.*

*The authorization is requested to use your daughter's/son's pictures in the above-mentioned categories.*

Student's Name : .....

Grade : .....

I authorize **"RAK American Academy RAKAA"** to publish my daughter's/son's picture.

Parent's Name : .....

Parent's Signature : .....

Contact No. : .....

Date : .....



## Other Related Policies

Online safety policy:

<https://rakaa.sch.ae/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/RAKAA-Online-Safety-Policy.pdf>

Cyber safety Policy:

[https://rakaa.sch.ae/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/RAKAA\\_Cyber-safety-Policy\\_Updated.pdf](https://rakaa.sch.ae/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/RAKAA_Cyber-safety-Policy_Updated.pdf)

Anti-Bullying policy:

[https://rakaa.sch.ae/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/RAKAA\\_Anti-Bullying-Policy.pdf](https://rakaa.sch.ae/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/RAKAA_Anti-Bullying-Policy.pdf) Child protection policy:

[https://rakaa.sch.ae/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/RAKAA\\_Child-Protection-and-Safeguarding-Policy.pdf](https://rakaa.sch.ae/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/RAKAA_Child-Protection-and-Safeguarding-Policy.pdf)

Acceptable Use policy:

<https://rakaa.sch.ae/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Student-Acceptable-Use-Policy-and-Technology-Usage-Agreement-2022-V5.pdf>

Unacceptable Use policy:

<https://rakaa.sch.ae/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Student-Unacceptable-Use-Policy-and-Technology-Usage-Agreement-2022-V4.pdf>

Data protection policy:

<https://rakaa.sch.ae/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Data-Protection-Policy.pdf> Safeguarding rights of the children:

<https://www.tamimi.com/law-update-articles/new-uae-law-safeguarding-rights-of-children/>

## References:

- (1) <https://u.ae/en/about-the-uae/the-uae-government/government-of-future/youth>
- (2) <https://uaecabinet.ae/en/details/cabinet-members/her-excellency-shamma-bint-suhail-faris-al-mazrui>
- (3) <https://u.ae/en/about-the-uae/the-uae-government/government-of-future/youth>
- (4) Drawing on Shier (2000)5