Benalla P-12 College Student Leadership Program Embraced Statewide.

Benalla P-12 College Debating team celebrating their top score in the virtual debating series

Benalla P-12 College is hosting a student leadership program that is having a State-wide impact. Young leaders are learning the finer arts of debating, then honing their skills in an innovative virtual environment with other young leaders from the four corners of the state.

This innovative Virtual debating program focuses on leadership skills by developing students’ critical thinking skills, learning how to collaborate well with their peers, how to deal with real world problems and solutions, how to use technology effectively and to get to know students in distant schools; all in an exciting atmosphere of friendship and inquiry.

The virtual debating program takes place using the DET Polycom Videoconferencing network which links up distant classrooms using high-definition videoconferencing units. Each week the leaders meet up in a virtual debating chamber to debate relevant and often controversial issues that affect them directly.

In the inaugural series in Term 1, under the guidance of Virtual Debating coordinator and program creator, Brendan O’Brien, the Benalla Year 5/6 leaders debated against teams from Mildura West Primary School, Grovedale Primary School (near Geelong), Eskdale Primary School (near Mitta Mitta) and Edi Upper Primary School in the King Valley. In Term 1, the Benalla P-12 Year 5/6 debating team was the highest scoring team for the Series and our congratulations go to Jess Patterson, Ankur Singh, Sienna Irwin, Hamish Nelson, Anika Vilayphone, and Matthew Townsend. Thanks also to Benalla P-12 College Year 7 debating coordinator Sangeeta Vashishta and teacher Alison Schneider who helped the students rehearse their winning speeches.

Debating topics this term included: “That people spend too much time on the Internet”, “That the legal age for drinking alcohol should be 21 in Australia”, “That Homework is a waste of time” and “That Junk Food should be banned from school canteens.” Next term’s controversial topics could include: “Greyhound racing is cruel and should be banned”, “Animal testing for medical and cosmetic purposes should be banned”, and “Smoking in cars with child passengers should be banned.”

The program has generated strong interest and demand from schools across the state, and has progressed from a single series involving 5 schools, to a tri-weekly competition involving 19 schools and has expanded to include a year 7 series. All three series are fully subscribed, with a waiting list of schools wanting to join in Term 3. Comprehensive websites have been developed to support both the Year 5/6 and Year 7 Leadership programs with some powerful tips on how to spot logical fallacies and how to effectively use persuasive speaking techniques.

debating2.global2.vic.edu.au/
yr7leadership.global2.vic.edu.au/