SUMMARY of 2009 ZOOMERANG SURVEYS

Three surveys were conducted through the Challenge website in November and December 2009 for:
- students
- staff
- parents.

Demographic data

There were 131 respondents to the student survey, of whom 50 per cent were males and 50 per cent were females, with 86 per cent attending DECS schools. Most of the student respondents attended primary school. The number of years they had completed the Challenge were spread reasonably evenly from one year through to six years, with the highest number in their fifth year.

Of the 201 staff respondents almost one half were teacher librarians and the rest included school leaders, teachers and school support officers. Of these, 73 per cent were from DECS schools and the remainder from non-government schools. Seventy-five per cent of the respondents were from primary and junior primary schools, with 15 per cent from high schools and nine per cent from Reception to Year 12 schools. For 52 per cent of the respondents it was their sixth year of involvement in the Challenge. For 5 per cent of respondents, it was the first year of involvement.

There were 16 parent respondents with seven associated with DECS schools, eight with non-government schools and one associated with a public library. They were parents of students ranging from Reception to Year 12. Response rates for the student and the parent surveys were quite low and this must be kept in mind when reading the results.

Student reading

When asked why they took part in the Challenge, students could tick one or more answers. As shown in Figure 1, 24 per cent of students (the majority) indicated that it was because they liked reading.

Students making their own decision to participate in the Challenge accounted for 40 per cent of responses with 11 per cent indicating they wanted to improve their reading. A further 14 per cent “like a challenge” and for 15 per cent, a key motivator was to get the award. In another question, 96 per cent of respondents stated they enjoyed getting the award.

The influence of schools and teachers on student participation accounted for 22 per cent of responses from students. This acknowledgment from students tended to confirm what has been suspected: that the attitude of schools and teachers was an important component in student participation.

Students reported that friends and parents were the least likely to influence them to participate.

Figure 1: Why students took part in the Challenge in 2009 (according to student survey responses)
In 2009, 53 student respondents indicated they read more books now that they are participating in the Challenge. Another 28 per cent were unsure. Encouragingly, 64 per cent answered that they were getting better at reading because they were participating in the Challenge, with 19 per cent being unsure. To read that 57 per cent of students are borrowing more books from the library now is another indicator that the Challenge is having an effect on reading habits of students.

A large majority (95 per cent) of student respondents indicated they would like to participate again next year and 86% indicated they enjoyed participating in the Premier’s Reading Challenge.

Although only a small number of parents responded to the survey, 62 per cent agreed that the Premier’s Reading Challenge had increased the number of books their child read in 2009, with 44 per cent indicating their children borrowed more books from the library. Thirty-eight per cent of students talked more often about books at home, and 88 per cent of parents responded that their child enjoyed participating in the Challenge.

The parent responses were very positive with 50 per cent agreeing that participation had improved their child’s reading and their child’s enjoyment of reading. All parent respondents indicated that it had given their child a sense of achievement.

In the staff survey, 89 per cent of respondents thought that the Challenge had increased the number of books students read each year. Ninety per cent agreed that the Challenge had increased interest in reading, and 81 per cent of staff responded that the Challenge encouraged students who were not usually keen readers, with 75 per cent indicating the Challenge motivated boys to read.

Over 77 per cent of staff respondents agreed that students participating in the Challenge were reading a wider variety of books and contributed to improved reading ability. Ninety-four per cent felt students were spending more time reading due to the Challenge.

Management of the Challenge

Respondents felt that the overall management of the Challenge was well organised with good communication and efficient assistance available by email and phone. Almost every respondent agreed that they receive sufficient information about the Challenge, value the regular email updates and are kept well-informed. They also agree that the website is a useful way to find out about the Challenge. More than 50 per cent of staff used the booklists on the website to influence the purchase of books for the library.

The medals continued to be very popular, with 96 per cent enjoying receiving them. Of staff respondents, 94 per cent agreed that the awards were an incentive for students to read more books and 81 per cent of parents agreed.

Benefits of the Challenge

A number of themes emerged in response to the 2009 survey question about the major benefits associated with the Premier’s Reading Challenge, including that it:

- provided a strong motivation and purpose for students to read resulting in them being enthusiastic about spending more time reading more books, more often and encouraging each other to keep reading
- encouraged students to read a wider variety of good quality books and increased library borrowing and student discussion of books at school and at home
- provided a whole-school focus for reading and raised the profile of reading within the school with more parents supporting their children’s efforts
- was an inclusive program which encouraged students of all abilities to read more books, including boys and those who may have been reluctant to read, resulting in an increase in their self-esteem
- provided awards which were a valuable recognition for students who were excellent readers right through to those who struggled with reading
- encouraged students to develop persistence and organisational skills to achieve a goal.
Ideas to enhance the Challenge

The responses to the question asking for suggestions for improving the Challenge covered a variety of topics.

Many respondents had no suggestions for improvement and indicated they were very happy with the program.

Some comments were about increasing the number of awards and were summed up with the following advice from a student: “Make more awards because next year I am going to get a ‘hall of fame’ medal and then I want to keep doing it.”

Below is a summary of respondents’ suggestions:
- further increase the number of books on the booklist
- provide schools with more financial support to purchase more library books
- get ambassadors out to country schools
- have an honour’s list on the website.

General comments

The final question of the survey asked for any other comments from respondents.

Overwhelmingly, the comments were positive with respondents saying such things as:
- “The children love the medals and are so excited to be presented with them.”
- “Our senior school students enjoyed the fact that they could continue PRC in Years 10, 11 and 12. “
- “Thank you so much for the work done to promote and administer this fabulous program. “
- “I think it is a fantastic program that is easily accessible to all students and their families. I commend the organisation of the program and hope to see it continue. “
- “I’m very happy with the efficient way it is organised and it is improving every year with queries dealt with quickly and efficiently.”
- “It has become an accepted and successful part of our literacy program.”
- “As a classroom teacher I find the Reading Challenge is an integral part of my program.”
- “Thank you for the opportunity to allow our readers to shine. Many students are very proud of their medals and love the recognition they receive.”
- “It has been a positive program for our school to raise the importance of reading at home and at school.”

The few negative comments reflected the following themes:
- There was concern about motivating students in older year levels to participate.
- Concerns were expressed about the extra workload the Challenge created for classroom teachers and library staff.