SURVEYS

Three surveys were conducted through the Challenge website from August to December 2011 for:

- students
- staff
- parents.

Demographic data
There were 262 respondents to the student survey, of whom 46% were males and 54% were females, with 56% attending public schools. 92% student respondents were from years 4 – 7, being middle to upper primary school. The length of time that they had completed the Challenge varied from 1 to 8 years, with 47% of respondents completing 6 to 8 years of the Challenge.

Of the 66 staff respondents, 80% were teacher librarians, teachers or school support officers and the rest included school leaders and public librarians. Of these, 80% were from government schools and the remainder from non-government schools or public libraries. Sixty-seven per cent of the respondents were from primary and junior primary schools, with 9% from high schools and 20% from Reception to Year 12 schools. For 48% of the respondents, it was their eighth year of involvement in the Challenge. For 6% of respondents, it was the first year of involvement.

There were 19 parent respondents with 9 associated with government schools, and 9 with non-government schools, one was associated with a public library. The parents were of students ranging from junior primary schools to high schools. There was an even spread of how long the parents had been involved in the Challenge, from 1 to 8 years. Response rates for 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, the highest number of responses from students (116) indicated that it was because they liked reading and 58 students indicated they wanted to improve their reading.

A further 48 students indicated that they ‘like a challenge’ and for 58 students, a key motivator was to get the award.
Figure 1: Why students took part in the Challenge in 2011 (according to student survey responses)

Why did you take part in the Challenge?(Choose one or more answers)

Source: www.zoomerang.com Premier's Reading Challenge student survey 2011

The influence of schools and teachers on student participation accounted for 122 responses from students. This acknowledgment from students confirms that the attitude of school leaders and teachers is an important component in student participation.

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

In 2011, 37% of student respondents indicated they read more books as a result of participating in the Challenge, with another 35% unsure. Thirty-eight per cent answered that they were getting better at reading because they were participating in the Challenge, with 31% being unsure. To see that 38% of student respondents are finding that reading is getting easier because the Challenge encourages them to read more and 31% enjoy reading more because of the Challenge, indicates that the Challenge is affecting the reading habits of students.

Sixty-eight per cent of student respondents indicated they enjoyed participating in the Challenge.

Although only a small number of parents responded to the survey, 56% agreed that the Challenge had increased the number / diversity of books their child read in 2011. Fifty three per cent of parents reported that students talked more often about books at home, and 100% agreed that their child enjoyed participating in the Challenge.

The parent responses were very positive with 84% agreeing that participation had improved their child’s reading and 79% agreed their child’s enjoyment of reading had increased. 100% of parents agreed that doing the Challenge gives their child a sense of achievement.
In the staff survey, 86% of respondents thought that the Challenge had increased the number of books students read each year. Eighty one per cent agreed that the Challenge had increased interest in reading, and 76% of staff responded that the Challenge encouraged students who were not usually keen readers.

Seventy-two per cent of staff respondents agreed that students participating in the Challenge were reading a wider variety of books and 76% agreed that the Challenge contributed to improved reading ability.

Management of the Challenge
Parent and staff respondents felt that the Challenge was well organised with good communication and efficient assistance available.

Seventy-three per cent of staff agreed that the booklists on the website influence the books students read and 84% of parents found the booklists useful.

Overall, the Challenge website continued to be underutilised by students in 2011, but increased to 20% of respondents to the student survey using it to find out about the Challenge, while 12% used the booklists on the website. The successful voting by students for their choice of 3 posters for the 2012 poster resulted in over 6 200 vote registrations. This was conducted through the Kidspace section of the website, designed specifically for children.

The awards continued to be very popular, with 62% of students stating that they encouraged them to participate. Of staff respondents, 63% agreed that the awards were an incentive for students to read more books and 63% of parents agreed.

Benefits of the Challenge
A number of themes emerged in response to the 2011 survey question about the major benefits associated with the Challenge.

A high response from staff, parents and students was that the Challenge motivated students to read and that the awards provided a strong motivation to read resulting in increased self-esteem of students.

Another high response was that the Challenge particularly encouraged students who were not keen readers to increase their reading to complete the Challenge.

A further response included comments about students generally improving their reading and increasing their interest in reading through such things as being able to find the right level of books to read, staff knowing more about what individual students like to read and students becoming aware of a wider variety of good quality authors, titles and series. Students reported that they were reading more books, enjoying reading more, spending more time discussing books and authors and sharing good books with friends, and that reading was fun. Increased borrowing of books from the library was also noted.

Respondents also commented that the Challenge provided a positive promotion of reading and a whole-school focus on reading success as a 'cool' activity. Schools, parents and students were proud of what they had achieved with the Challenge.
General comments
Overwhelmingly, general survey comments received were positive and included the following examples:

Students
- ‘I love the Reading Challenge. It is a great way to motivate kids to read more books and to develop their reading skills.’
- ‘...I think it is run perfectly.’
- ‘Awards all the way up to year 12.’
- ‘...I think that they should keep doing the Premier's Reading Challenge for many years to come because it is a great way to build children's confidence like mine thank you a lot.’

Staff
- ‘For all classes including Special classes. They can all do it. Inclusivity.’
- ‘There is a sense of purpose when borrowing.’
- ‘I continue to be impressed with the organisation of the PRC and the availability of the ambassadors to visit schools. They do a great job at promoting this programme.’
- ‘The resources and the information we receive are excellent and it makes the Challenge easy to run.’
- ‘The PRC combined with other events such as Book Week and Literacy and Numeracy Week are great motivators for students and enable them to see reading as an essential skill across the curriculum.’
- ‘Students are feeling a sense of success or achievement on completion of the Challenge.’
- ‘Students are talking with each other more about books and reading.’
- ‘Greater focus on reading to and with students by teachers.’

Parents
- ‘The Challenge has given me more awareness of the type, range and level of books my son can read. Before the Challenge I really had no idea what to get or where to start. Now we are always at the library choosing books for the Challenge and my younger son (4 yrs old) who wants to be like big brother wants to join in and we have set up a little reading challenge at home for him. He loves it.’
- ‘It is a great initiative run in the correct spirit. Don't drop the program.’
- ‘The Premier's Reading Challenge has been critical in switching on my son – he was a reluctant reader, but now is happy to pick up a book (especially as he sees that his ‘heroes’ – Crows players and other ambassadors – read!) As a child who is diagnosed with anxiety, reading for relaxation is a skill he now willingly participates in. Keep up the program!’

Very few negative comments were received, reflecting the following themes:

Students
- ‘Year 6 – 9 I struggled to find any books that were on the list that I actually enjoyed reading.’
- ‘It should be encouraged more.’

Staff
- ‘Just getting kids to read is important, I would like to see less importance on the PRC booklist, and allow students to read what they want, of course with the teacher’s input to make sure the text is suitable.’
- ‘Too many transient students.’

Parents
- ‘Could be encouraged more to parents, besides sending home the paperwork at the start and
asking for it at the end there was really no communication throughout the Challenge. Some parents need to be encouraged as well to get their kids participating.'

- Concerns were expressed about the extra workload the Challenge created for classroom teachers and library staff with no extra funding.
- Some commented that it may be easier to divide the year 6-9 booklist into year 6-7 and year 8-9.
- Some wanted any book a child reads to be an approved title for the Challenge.

The Zoomerang survey from 2011 is being further analysed towards ongoing program improvement.