

Enrol for Prep Campaign Evaluation

Starting school is a major milestone in a child's life and can be both an exciting and stressful time for families. Supporting children to prepare for this new chapter, and to make a smooth transition to school, will help them to adjust to their new environment more easily, and is linked to a range of positive outcomes for children.

In recent years, some Logan schools have expressed concern about the number of children who are not starting Prep on time, for reasons that are largely avoidable. In some cases, parents were enrolling late and not meeting administrative requirements, resulting in delays for some children. Financial barriers also meant that some parents were unable to obtain a birth certificate to prove their child's eligibility for Prep, which also resulted in delays.

Enrol for Prep is a multi-year parent awareness campaign that was initiated in early 2017, in response to these concerns. It provides parent friendly information and resources to parents of Prep age children on how to enrol and prepare for school, to help reduce delays and give children a positive start to their schooling. The campaign aligns with the Logan community's *Roadmap for Change – On Track at Five* life stage to support children to successfully transition to school.

Purpose and scope

With the Enrol for Prep campaign due to enter its third year, a formal evaluation has been undertaken to measure the campaign's progress and impact, and to decide whether to continue (and, if needed, modify) the campaign moving forward. The evaluation builds upon an initial review of the campaign by Clear Horizon Consulting as part of the *Logan Together Progress Report* in Nov 2018. It includes years one and two of the campaign and was most interested in understanding if the campaign has contributed to improved parental awareness of enrolment requirements and changes in the enrolment behaviours of parents. A key question was: did the campaign result in more parents enrolling their children in Prep earlier and fewer parents enrolling after day eight of the new school year¹.

Methodology

A mixed method approach using quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis was adopted for the evaluation. Sources included:

- Data obtained from schools on enrolments and other measures
- A Likert scale survey and qualitative interviews with school officials
- Face to face and online parent polls

A complete data set including baseline information and data for year one and year two of the campaign was available for four schools in Logan: Burrowes State School, Woodridge State School, Marsden State School and St Francis College Crestmead. Twelve schools provided data for the 2018/2019 enrolment period and six schools participated in the survey and qualitative interviews. A total of 65 parents participated in the parent polls.

Key Findings

- Over the campaign period all schools for which we had a complete data set had an overall increase in the number of families enrolling in Prep in the year prior to commencement.
- Three of the four schools (Burrowes State School, Woodridge State School and St Francis College) had a decrease in enrolments received after day eight of the new school year.
- The number of families who did not have a birth certificate at enrolment also decreased at three of the schools - Marsden State School, St Francis College and Burrowes State School.
- We cannot attribute these results solely to the campaign, as schools have also implemented initiatives to promote early enrolments.



¹ Most school staffing (teaching and non-teaching) is allocated on the basis of enrolments as at the eighth day of the school year. Schools can also receive additional state funded staff for students with special needs.

- There were mixed results for Logan schools in the 2018/2019 enrolment period. For six schools, enrolments received prior to the year of commencement accounted for 90% or more of total enrolments, and for 11 schools enrolments received after day eight of the new school year accounted for 5% or less of total enrolments. However, late enrolments were significant at several schools including School A which received 56% of its total enrolments in the new school year, and School B which received 30% of total enrolments in the new school year. A third school (School C) provided anecdotal information that they were still receiving “an influx of enrolments in the new school year, up to and after day eight”.
- In the 2018/2019 enrolment period there were 101 Prep children across 12 schools who did not have a birth certificate at enrolment, and 369 children who did not have a transition statement upon commencement.
- There are also many schools in Logan for which we have little or no data and as such the extent of enrolment and other related issues at these schools is not known at this time.
- Of the 65 parents who participated in the polls, 18 had seen the Enrol for Prep campaign materials. Several parents indicated they were not aware of the four-year-old health checks or that they needed their child’s birth certificate to enrol to prep, until they saw the Enrol for Prep postcard. Other parents said they particularly liked the *We Are Ready For Big School* poster and how it outlined the skills their child should have or be trying to acquire before starting school.
- In year two, campaign materials were distributed late in the year and distribution channels were scaled back, reducing the campaign’s reach and impact that year. This is consistent with the findings from the parent polls.
- Five out of six school officials interviewed said they were most concerned about the growing number of Prep children with oral language delays at school entry. One school said that 1/3 of its Prep children this year have articulation and language delays, and another reported that some of its students have delays of up to two years. The 2018 Australian Early Development Census indicates that the number of children who are developmentally vulnerable on the Communication domain, has increased slightly in the following areas - Berrinba, Browns Plains, Cornubia, Forestdale, Hillcrest, Kingston, and Logan Holm.

Limitations

A complete data set was available for only four schools in Logan, preventing a broader assessment of impact across the city.

Parental self-reports were limited to awareness of the campaign and as such self-reported impacts of the campaign could not be obtained.

Recommendations

1. The Enrol for Prep campaign is extended for a third year with some adaptations and evaluated again in 2020 to determine its future. A targeted approach is adopted moving forward that monitors and responds to hotspots and changing trends rather than the use of broad brushed tactics.
2. Distribution channels are extended to reach families who are not accessing services prior to school and those living in social housing. There is a greater campaign presence at natural meeting places as well as on-line, and greater sharing of responsibility for campaign distribution across Logan Together partners.
3. The campaign commences earlier in the preceding school year to be most impactful and to take into account that schools are commencing the enrolment process earlier – in some cases the start of term two (May).
4. Logan Together works with the identified schools (A, B & C) to put a response in place to address late enrolments, and, obtains a better understanding of the extent of the problem at schools for which we have little or no data.
5. The campaign is not confined to prep enrolment processes and has stronger focus on supporting positive transitions to school at the community level – ensuring it adds value to existing efforts by partners. A response is also explored to address delays in children’s oral language at school entry.

6. Time is invested in building relationships with schools and other partners (old and new), to support campaign distribution and monitoring and evaluation efforts. Maintaining energy and buy-in is critical to ensure the campaign does not lose momentum and to achieve real and lasting results.
7. Supporting processes for data collection, monitoring and evaluation are established, which maximise opportunities at the point of enrolment, while be mindful of the administrative burden on schools.

