Case Study – Elwood Primary School

Background
Elwood Primary School is situated close to Port Phillip Bay and has around 629 students. At the school, much emphasis is placed on building a culture of lifelong learning through the shared values of empathy, energy, respect, integrity and responsibility.

The school also seeks to play a significant role in the local community. For example, the school hosts eight community markets each year where former and current students and their families mingle with local residents. The market also provides financial support to the school's comprehensive curriculum programs.

Situation
To maximise the potential of the Prep school year, a new Kindergarten – Prep transition program was developed in 2003. The aim of the program was to familiarise students with the school and classroom environment, design learning opportunities where new friendships could be fostered, provide opportunities for students to develop relationships with teachers and structure an environment where parents were able to make connections with other parents and the school prior to the commencement of the student's first school year.

What did you do?
The ‘Ready Set Go’ (RSG) program comprises eight sessions. Beginning in Term 2, the preschool children attend two one-hour sessions at school. The children are allocated to a group and over the course of the full program will have the opportunity to get to know all the Prep teachers and play in all the Prep classrooms. With six Prep classrooms in 2009, this was quite a feat but an essential part of the familiarisation process. While many family members stay in classrooms to support their children, tea and coffee is provided nearby so that families can begin to get to know each other and feel comfortable in the school environment as well.

The first Parent Information Evening also takes place in Term 2. Each of the teachers and the two learning and teaching coaches speak to families providing detail about learning and teaching at Elwood Primary School. In Term 3 two further Transition Sessions are offered.

In Term 4 the program sessions are increased to ninety minutes in length and are scheduled every three weeks. Families are expected to leave and allow the relationship between teachers and students to develop further. Developmental play and more formal learning activities are offered in each session. Music, singing and dance are also incorporated into the program. The second last session takes place after school (between 4pm and 6pm) and is in fact a ‘PJ’ party – a great celebration of the school transition journey. The last session takes place on Transition Tuesday in early December where the prospective Preps join all other Elwood Primary School students (up to Grade 5) in being allocated to their actual class, room and teacher for the following school year. This final session lasts for one hour. A second Parent Information Evening is also run in Term 4 – where the focus is on the other assistance that families can provide in preparing their child for school entry.

The RSG program relies solely on the dedication of the teachers involved and their commitment to supporting students as they transition into the school environment.
Results
Despite no advertising being undertaken other than one kindergarten ‘drop’ announcing that RSG enrolments have ‘opened’, Prep enrolments have tripled in five years.

The program has had a huge impact on the start of the school year and the benefit of family involvement in the school and their familiarity with the school cannot be overstated. The transition program has also helped community building start from an early stage.

The strength of the RSG program lies in three areas:

- Regardless of whether each student has been able to attend all, most or some RSG sessions, the impact on the start of the school year is remarkable – an air of confidence permeates the environment and all children benefit.

- Teachers build a ‘collective’ responsibility for all students and also begin ‘building’ a data bank of knowledge about the students as individual learners.

- The relationship between families and the school is nurtured from a very early time; information is shared confidently in the best interests of each student.