

Premier's Reading Challenges and student engagement- what's the story?

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The Premier's Reading Challenge or equivalent (PRC) is run in every state and territory in Australia, with 2026 being the 25th year of the longest running challenge. The aim of the PRC is to encourage students to develop a lifelong habits of reading for pleasure – “to read, to read more, and to read more widely” (NSW Department of Education, 2026). How effective are these challenges in nurturing student engagement in reading for pleasure, though, and how do schools effectively implement the PRC to maximise these potential benefits?

This presentation will highlight key findings from research which examines the PRC in three Australian states, drawing on experiences and insights from teachers and teacher librarians who run the challenge in schools. Best-practice examples will be highlighted, demonstrating how strong school support of the PRC can reflect the principles of Cremin's Reading for Pleasure pedagogy with particular emphasis on the role of an influential reading mentor. The experiences of students will also be explored, presenting selected vignettes of student stories about their developing role as reader through their participation in the PRC, with particular attention to the ways in which the challenge may have impacted this developing reader identity through belonging to a community of readers.

This presentation's emphasis on highlighting the voices and experiences of students, teachers and teacher librarians reflects the conference theme of Empowering Voices, and is intended to shine a light on the powerful potential of strong whole-school cultures of reading for pleasure, demonstrated through the work of teachers who continue to support the Premier's Reading Challenge in their schools, libraries, and classrooms. Attendees will benefit from examples of best practice in implementing the PRC or other whole-school programs aimed at developing a strong reading culture.