Linking Schools and Early Years Evaluation summary

An important element of the Linking Schools and Early Years (LSEY) project is the external evaluation. The evaluation enables LSEY to contribute to Australian research evidence around ways to promote support so children arrive at school ready to engage in the opportunities offered in their new learning environment.

The evaluation has identified practice principles and key ingredients that relate to what and how communities have implemented LSEY and aims to provide a summary of the LSEY evaluation findings from data collection in 2008 (baseline), 2010, 2011 and 2012. For more information about the LSEY project and full evaluation reports see [www.rch.org.au/lsey](http://www.rch.org.au/lsey).

Core components
The evaluation has indicated that what communities do (the activities) is important, but it’s how they do it (the approach) which really makes the difference. The evaluation identified core components which were consistently evident in the planning and implementation of the LSEY approach and local activities.

These are considered imperative in creating service/school and systemic change.

- **A locally responsive approach (place-based)**
  - Responding to the impact that local realities and context can have on children and their families

- **A partnership approach**
  - Cross-sectoral service partnerships that can provide a continuum of learning and support for children and families

- **Outcomes and evidence informed planning**
  - Starting with clear outcomes for children, families and services and using evidence to inform practices to achieve the desired outcomes

- **Community led**
  - Planning and action is led by local families and services and strengthens local leadership capacity

- **Respectful relationships**
  - Relationships underpin and drive the effectiveness of community level responsiveness, planning, action and outcomes

Towards sustainable change
Building community capacity to achieve ongoing long-term practice change and improved outcomes for children and families.
Summary of the LSEY external evaluation – outcomes, practice principles, key ingredients, activities and findings

The evaluation found that the identified core components that drive the effectiveness of the project activities. The graphic below is a snapshot of the evaluation findings around each project outcome and some example activities. Changes identified through the evaluation are an indication of how practice change between early years services, schools and communities can contribute to ‘children arriving at school ready to engage in the learning opportunities offered’.

**LSEY outcomes**
- Sustainable community partnerships
- Children & families make a smooth transition between early years services & schools
- Early years services and schools actively engage with families
- Schools are responsive to the individual learning needs of all children

**LSEY approach**
- A locally responsive approach (place-based)
- A partnership approach
- Outcomes and evidence informed planning
- Community-led
- Respectful relationships

**Project activity examples**
- Partnerships and networks
- Peer swaps
- Links worker support
- Community forums
- Joint professional development
- Playgroups in school
- Family-friendly reviews
- Exploring with families their role in their children's learning
- Informal opportunities for families to engage
- Partnership approaches to Transition Statements
- Common language tool
- Collaborative early years/school planning
- Sharing professional practice

**Changes identified from the LSEY evaluation**
- Stronger relationships have created functional partnerships
- Opportunities to collaborate strengthen relationships
- A shared understanding and common language
- Increased capacity of early years/school partnership working
- Embedded commitment to networking and local partnerships
- Clear indicators of sustainable partnerships and local activities
- More children participating in transition activities that start earlier in the year and involve multiple school visits
- Schools have enhanced transition activities and programs
- More schools visiting early years services and vice-versa
- More parents satisfied with transition programs
- More consistent transition information for children and families
- More opportunities for parents to engage in children’s learning
- More parents spending time in early years services/schools
- Community services have more conversations with families about early years services and school
- Parents report good relationships with early years/school staff
- A culture change in attitudes to parent involvement
- Increased information sharing between early years & schools
- Modified prep programs for diverse learning opportunities
- More parents share information about their child with schools
- Increased referrals between community services, early years services and schools
- Greater participation in cross-sector meetings and training