Southern Cross Program Case Study

Student Engagement

ELTHAM College
Attracting and Retaining Students in a Declining Demographic

School Description

ELTHAM College is a non-selective coeducational Independent school for students of all backgrounds, talents and abilities. Established in 1974, its mission, ‘to release and enhance talents’ is reflected in one of Victoria’s broadest curriculums. Its goal is for each young person to graduate empowered as a proactive, self-directed, life-long learner who can succeed in future studies, the workplace and in life. ELTHAM College’s all-day Kindergarten programs inspire creativity, while its Prep students explore learning through discovery-based learning. The Junior Years program emphasises working together within interconnected workspaces. Communities that promote self-confidence and a love of learning feature in ELTHAM College’s Middle Years program. At its City Campus, Year 9 students explore the dynamic CBD. The College’s three-year Senior Years experience is customised to each student and includes a vast range of academic and vocational subjects.

Project

ELTHAM College is in the shire of Nillumbik, the only shire in Melbourne to have a declining population between 2006 and 2011. The declining demographic is reflected in a gradual decline in enrolments at ELTHAM College during the past decade and an abrupt decline in the past two years. The College’s enrolment dropped from 840 in 2012 to 750 in 2013. There is not expected to be a population increase in the Nillumbik shire until 2021.

‘The traditional catchment for the school is in serious decline,’ said Principal David Warner. ‘We needed to find solutions.’

Process

Dr Warner attended Southern Cross training late in Term 4 of 2012 with five colleagues: the directors of early junior years, of middle years and wellbeing, of senior years, and of admissions, as well as the College’s communications specialist.

‘The training gave us the time to look at the issues, away from day-to-day school life, and the chance to focus in on problem-solving processes,’ said Dr Warner.

‘We knew we had a problem and the Southern Cross facilitator kept us on target in refining our major solutions.’

Those solutions centred on attracting prospective students from non-traditional catchment
areas via a campaign called *It’s Easy To Get To EITHAM College*.

**Results**

After the Southern Cross training, ELTHAM College reviewed the school's transport routes in light of new and expanded catchments. It developed a marketing and communication plan for *It’s Easy To Get To EITHAM College* campaign, and incorporated the plan into the launch of the College's new website. (The site features comprehensive information about bus and train routes and timetables, and matches the transport timetables with the school's own timetables.)

‘It was a very busy period through to the start of the 2013 school year. We totally re-did our branding and our website while also developing the transport strategy,’ said Dr Warner. As well as hoping to increase enrolments, the transport strategy also ties in with the ELTHAM College’s sustainability policy.

‘The Southern Cross training brought home the urgency of the situation and influenced us to move quickly.’

Dr Warner is hopeful the College’s enrolment can be up to 850 within the next three to five years. ‘Then it's a matter of holding that number and seeing if the Nillumbik shire population increases from 2021, as predicted.’

While it is too early to measure such benchmarks, Dr Warner said that by the end of Term 1, 2013, there had been an increase in enquiries and that the new transport strategy was ‘slowly working.’

Dr Warner said of schools considering Southern Cross training: ‘Go into it with an open mind and it will help you to better define your issues.’

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