

Better breakfast, better grades

March 17 2015

A new study from the University of Iowa reinforces the connection between good nutrition and good grades, finding that free school breakfasts help students from low-income families perform better academically.

The study finds students who attend schools that participate in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's School Breakfast Program (SBP) have higher achievement scores in math, science, and reading than students in schools that don't participate.

"These results suggest that the persistent exposure to the relatively more nutritious breakfast offered through the subsidized breakfast program throughout elementary [school](#) can yield important gains in achievement," says researcher David Frisvold, assistant professor of economics in the Tippie College of Business.

The federal government started the SBP for children from [low-income families](#) in 1966. The program is administered in coordination with state governments, many of which require local school districts to offer subsidized breakfasts if a certain percentage of their overall enrollment comes from families that meet income eligibility guidelines.

Frisvold conducted his study by examining academic performance from students in schools that are just below the threshold—and thus not required to offer free breakfasts—and those that are just over it—and thus do offer them.

He found the schools that offered free breakfasts showed significantly better [academic performance](#) than schools that did not, and that the impact was cumulative so that the longer the school participated in the SBP, the higher their achievement. Math scores were about 25 percent higher at participating schools during a students' elementary school tenure than would be expected otherwise.

Reading and science scores showed similar gains, Frisvold says.

Frisvold says the study suggests subsidized breakfast programs are an effective tool to help [elementary school students](#) from low income families achieve more in school and be better prepared for later life.

More information: "Nutrition and Cognitive Achievement of the School Breakfast Program," [www.sciencedirect.com/science/ ... ii/S0047272714002497](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/.../S0047272714002497)

Provided by University of Iowa

Citation: Better breakfast, better grades (2015, March 17) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-03-breakfast-grades.html>

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