

Kellogg's Breakfast for Better Days impacts childrens' learning ability

Last week, millions of children around South Africa were heading off to school, either for the first time, or to experience another year of study. Sadly, a large percentage of the millions of students will be arriving at school hungry.



Research carried out by the University of Stellenbosch Nutritional Information Centre (NICUS) has shown that in South Africa, one in five children do not have breakfast every day. In addition, one in five children go to school on an empty stomach, and this has an impact on their ability to learn and focus. Two-and-a-half million South African children go hungry each year and this is hindering their opportunity to be educated.

Education is a basic human right, so that children can develop to their full potential. But those children with empty stomachs will not be able to focus and learn; they are disadvantaged before the first lessons begin.

For this reason, local food manufacturer Kellogg's has collaborated with the Department of Basic Education since 2014 on an important community-driven hunger-relief programme, the Kellogg's Breakfast for Better Days initiative, which makes sure that children attending school start their days with a full stomach. Kellogg has also partnered FoodBank South Africa, the largest food-banking network in the country, which distributes the food.

In 2014 and 2015, the Kellogg's Breakfast for Better Days initiative served more than 13 million breakfasts to learners every school day in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, the Eastern and Western Cape provinces. By doing this, this far-reaching programme has assisted thousands of children to benefit from their education. Participating schools subsequently reported

an increase not only in attendance, but also in concentration. They also noted that there was less aggressive behaviour from the students and that pass rates in the schools improved exponentially. All of this was made possible by ensuring that those learners started their days off with a full stomach.

"A hungry child struggles to follow what is going on in the classroom," explained Soweto Grade 2 teacher Khuziwe Shiba, who teaches at Ikwezi Primary School in Mofolo North, a school that will benefit from the Breakfast for Better Days initiative. "The kids who have breakfast come to school bubbly, loving, smiling and active, and look forward to the day ahead. The ones that don't have breakfast are gloomy, tired, passive and don't want to play or participate. They are unable to concentrate and easily lose interest."

Why breakfast is so important

Research by nutritionists and dieticians worldwide has shown the importance of a healthy, nutritious meal for children every morning. It assists with cognitive performance, whereas skipping this meal makes it extremely difficult for children to concentrate and study. Breakfast has been associated with an improved memory, which, in turn, results in retaining information when learning - which is vital.

According to registered dietician Kelly Francis, who is based in KZN and has been involved in the Kellogg's Breakfast for Better Days: "It's not just the consumption of breakfast that is important to children; the nature of the breakfast matters as well. Breakfasts containing high-fibre carbohydrates and protein result in sustained energy for optimum classroom performance.

"The input from schools about the positive changes they have seen in the classroom and on the playground is beyond gratifying, and has strengthened Kellogg's' resolve to be a partner to education in South Africa in the way it is best equipped to do so: by providing nutrient-rich breakfasts to young learners."

Principals and teachers from those schools that have participated in Kellogg's Breakfast for Better Days initiative have been full of praise for the impact a regular daily breakfast has had on their learners. Some reported a difference within a month of the programme. Children were happier, concentrated better and their marks improved. In addition, the participating schools also reported improved attendance. Children were waiting in line, ready for their breakfast and to start their school day.

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