



**FIGHTING HUNGER  
IN AUSTRALIA**

# **HUNGER IN THE CLASSROOM**

**Foodbank Report 2015**



'Hunger in the Classroom' highlights the issue of children in Australia going to school on empty stomachs and the far reaching impact this has on them, their schools and the wider community.

The report is a summary of research undertaken by Foodbank and others shedding a light on this critical topic.

## KEY FINDINGS

- Two thirds of Australian teachers (67%) report having children come to school hungry or without having eaten breakfast.
- On a typical day around three students in every class will arrive at school hungry or without having eaten breakfast.
- Teachers estimate that the average student loses more than 2 hours a day of learning time when they come to school hungry.
- On the basis of arriving at school hungry once a week, that student would lose in excess of a whole term of learning time over the course of a year.
- 4 out of 5 teachers (82%) report an increased workload due to hungry students as the children find it harder to concentrate (73%), are lethargic (66%) or demonstrate behavioural problems (52%).
- Schools providing breakfast to students overwhelmingly believe this contributes to student physical (97%) and mental (91%) health.
- Schools with breakfast programs believe they impact positively to student relations with staff (83%) and the broader community (70%).
- Every kilogram of food given to a child via a school breakfast program in Australia, provides a long term social return on investment of \$110.

## ABOUT FOODBANK

Foodbank is Australia's largest food relief organisation, providing 40 million meals a year, or 110,000 meals a day, to over 2,800 charities nationally.

Foodbank is also the largest supporter of school breakfast programs in Australia providing food to 1,000 schools nationally both directly and via programs run by other organisations. 67,500 students receive breakfast thanks to Foodbank which provides 137,290 school breakfasts a week.



**1,000**  
**SCHOOLS**  
**NATIONALLY**



**67,500**  
**STUDENTS**  
**DIRECTLY IMPACTED**



**137,290**  
**BREAKFASTS**  
**PER WEEK**

Foodbank sources food and groceries by working with companies and individuals including farmers, wholesalers, manufacturers and retailers who donate surplus stock that doesn't meet specification, is excess to requirements, close to expiry, has incorrect labelling or damaged packaging.

Foodbank also collaborates with the food industry in innovative programs to ensure there are supplies of essential key staple items in its warehouses every day. Much of the nutritious foods best suited to school breakfast programs are sourced via these initiatives. In the Key Staples Program, food manufacturers produce the products Foodbank requires using spare production capacity. Suppliers donate or subsidise the ingredients, packaging and delivery of the products to spread the commitment and enhance the sustainability of the arrangement.

Some of Australia's most well-known brands also make significant commitments of products to Foodbank via cause-related marketing campaigns.

# THE PREVALENCE OF HUNGER IN THE CLASSROOM

In seeking to understand the prevalence and impact of hunger amongst Australia's school children, Foodbank has undertaken a survey of over 500 primary and secondary school teachers from around the country both in metropolitan and rural areas. The picture that emerges is a concerning one with teachers believing a significant number of children are affected by the issue of hunger which has wide ranging and potentially long term ramifications.

**“ Hungry children have difficulty all day with all activities - learning, social interactions and physical demands. It's a wasted day every time and another burden on a child already struggling.”**

**67%**   
**OF TEACHERS**  
report children coming to school hungry

Two thirds of Australian teachers (67%) report having children come to school hungry or without having eaten breakfast on any given morning. Teachers in Government schools (75%) are much more likely to have had children come to school hungry than those in the non-Government sector (48%). The problem is also more prevalent in regional and rural areas (72%) than in the capital cities (63%).

One in four teachers (26%) report that the problem of children coming to school hungry is getting worse. In contrast, only 4% have noticed an improvement.

On a typical day around three students in every class will arrive at school hungry or without having eaten breakfast on any given morning. Most teachers report that it is a habitual problem with 63% saying the children that come to school hungry do so three times a week or more.

**“ I find I spend more one-on-one time with the hungry kids, just so they have assistance to stay focused. It's not fair on that child, nor on his/her classmates who also deserve attention and full learning opportunities.”**

The overwhelming majority of teachers (82%) report that their workload increases when they have hungry students in the classroom. This is because students that are hungry are more likely to find it difficult to concentrate (73%), can be lethargic (66%), have learning difficulties (54%) and exhibit behavioural problems (52%).

**3**   
**STUDENTS**  
arrive hungry in every class





It's not just the students' academic performance that suffers from being hungry or going without breakfast. One in four teachers (26%) say these students are also more likely to experience poor health and be sick more often than other students.

35% of teachers also report that students coming to school hungry or without breakfast are more likely to be late and 29% say they are absent from school more frequently.

Teachers estimate that the average student loses more than 2 hours a day of learning time when they come to school hungry. On this basis, a child arriving at school hungry once a week would lose in excess of a whole term (14 weeks) of learning time over the course of a year.

It is generally accepted by teachers (95%) that it is difficult for students that come to school hungry to reach their full potential academically or to participate in physical education and sporting activities (95%).

**2**   
**HOURS**  
learning time  
students lose  
when hungry

**“ Children are not getting the nutrition they need to assist them with their learning. This causes them to fall further and further behind as they get older.**

**This lack of academic progress often leads to early drop outs which in turn creates the cycle all over again with them having children and not being aware of what to do.”**

# SCHOOL BREAKFAST PROGRAMS Fuelling Brighter Futures

Breakfast has long been proclaimed as the most important meal of the day. The Dietitians Association of Australia confirms that it is important for everyone to eat something nutritious each morning to replenish carbohydrate stores and re-fuel for the day ahead.

**“ The breakfast club promotes positive engagement with learning and assists in developing positive and trusting relationships with staff. It promotes emotional and physical stability by ensuring that an essential need is being met; allowing the students to be more focused on and prepared for learning.”**

It provides energy and leads to higher intakes of essential nutrients such as carbohydrate, dietary fibre and certain vitamins and minerals. Longer term, eating breakfast regularly is associated with lower levels of obesity and chronic conditions such as coronary heart disease and diabetes

Breakfast is also critical to mental function. Having a meal at the start of the day improves alertness, concentration, visual and thinking abilities, mood and memory, helping to avoid the 'fuzzy' feeling that is an indicator that the brain is starving for energy.

For this reason breakfast has been linked in numerous studies to improved literacy and numeracy skills in school children.

In a survey conducted by Foodbank amongst Australian schools with breakfast programs, there was an overwhelming belief that ensuring children aren't hungry contributes to the attendance of students as well as their overall physical and mental health.

The schools also believed overwhelmingly that their breakfast programs contribute positively to student relations with staff and the broader community.

## Q. Do you think the school breakfast program positively contributes to each of the following:

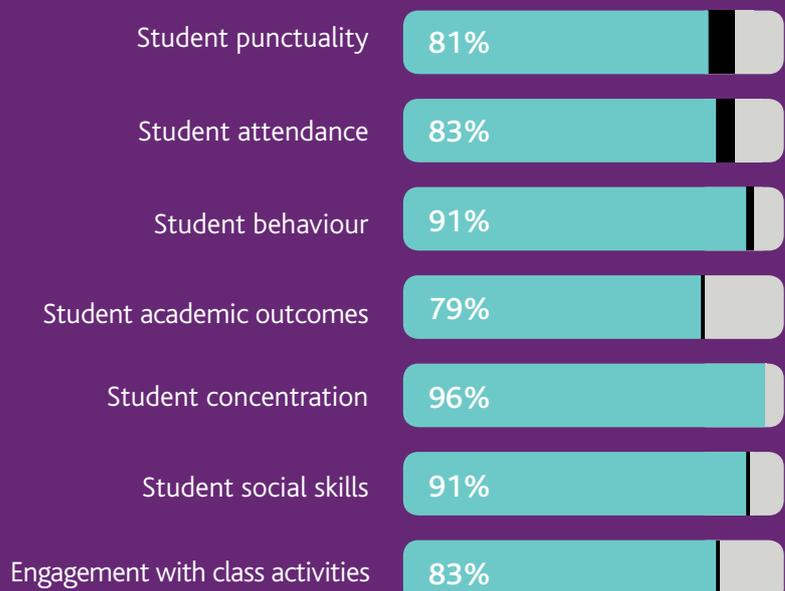
% of schools reporting

YES

NO

DON'T KNOW

## EDUCATIONAL FACTORS



A study just completed by Edith Cowen University's School of Education<sup>1</sup> confirms that Foodbank WA's School Breakfast Program is improving concentration and behaviour in class amongst children from low socio-economic schools.

Eight out of 10 students surveyed felt the School Breakfast Program helped them to concentrate on their school work and 'behave properly'.

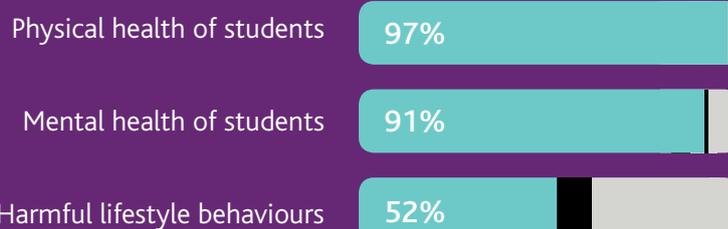
**“ Since commencing the breakfast program, on-time arrivals of students have increased. Student are fully prepared and alert at class time and are generally more engaged in learning. It has also increased the conversation around healthy eating habits and healthy foods. The program in conjunction with other programs in the school has seen a reduction in ‘irritable’ (commencing school unhappy or upset) behaviours.”**

**“ The breakfast program is certainly a lovely way for the students to begin their day. They eat a range of healthy foods and socialise in a homely atmosphere. The students learn how to prepare their food independently with the younger students being supported by the older.”**

Teachers reported that students were more ready to learn and were better behaved and more productive when they had eaten breakfast and that without a school breakfast program in place, some students would not attend school.

The research confirmed that a regular breakfast improves nutrition and academic results in students, helps growth and development and positively impacts on happiness and mental health.

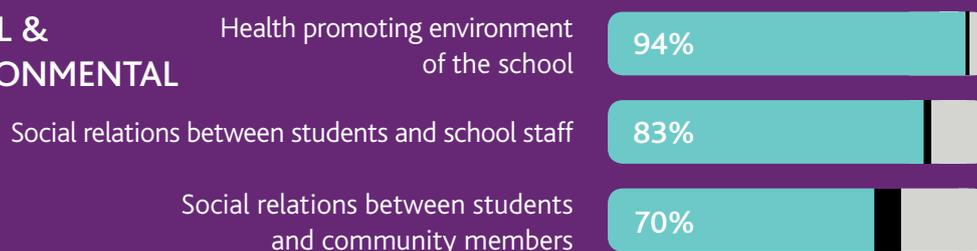
## WELLBEING



## NUTRITION



## SOCIAL & ENVIRONMENTAL



<sup>1</sup> Byrne M, Gower G, Anderson K, Partington G, Cross D & Coffin J 2014 'Food for learning: Impact of the WA Healthy Food for All program in low SES schools', ECU Industry Collaboration Grant – 2014, Edith Cowan University

## THE SOCIAL RETURN ON INVESTMENT OF SCHOOL BREAKFAST PROGRAMS

In 2014 Foodbank commissioned Net Balance, Australia's leading sustainability advisory firm, to use an internationally-recognised approach to understanding the social return on investment of its food distribution activities. As part of this project it looked at the value of the short and long term benefits flowing from children receiving food via school breakfast programs.

In identifying the social value created by school breakfast programs the study found that some students often leave home without breakfast and this impacts on their concentration levels in class, their ability to absorb information and sometimes leads to more aggressive behaviour in class as well as at home.

**“ It's about so much more than just food... it's hygiene, nutrition, food handling and respect; not just for what we eat, but our bodies and each other, and it strengthens the working relationships between the students, parents, teachers and the community.”**

Access to a regular, nutritious breakfast is likely to provide these children with higher levels of energy and enhance their immune system leading to better performance in class and improved physical health. Many of the student may also have better life chances through their performance at school and physical health improvements but also because the program helps strengthen their social skills and makes them more responsible citizens.

Using money as a proxy to represent the value of the outcomes experienced, the forecasted social return created for every kilogram of food provided by Foodbank to children via school breakfast programs is \$110.



# METHODOLOGY

## Teacher's Survey

This survey was conducted online by Galaxy Research using Web Survey Creator. The sample was 532 respondents, both primary and secondary school teachers, distributed throughout Australia including both capital city and non-capital city areas.

Fieldwork commenced on 23 April 2015 and was completed on 3 May 2015.

Following the completion of interviewing, the data was weighted by gender and region to reflect Australian Bureau of Statistics school staff counts.

## School Breakfast Program Survey

These findings are the combined results of two surveys conducted by Edith Cowen University's School of Education (in Western Australia) and Foodbank Australia (all States and Territories excluding WA). The total sample was 590 schools drawn from schools currently receiving food from Foodbank for their school breakfast programs. The distribution of these schools reflects the distribution of school breakfast support within the Foodbank network i.e. significant numbers in Western Australia, South Australia, Queensland and Tasmania but very small numbers in New South Wales, Victoria and the Northern Territory.

The original questionnaire was designed by Edith Cowen University's School of Education and a subset of the questions from this survey formed the basis for the questionnaire used by Foodbank Australia.

Fieldwork took place in Western Australia from 21 July 2014 to 26 September 2014 and in the rest of Australia from 23 March 2015 to 6 May 2015. Following the completion of the surveys, the data was collated and, where appropriate, state weightings were applied.

## Social Return on Investment

The SROI project was conducted by Net Balance in two phases. Phase 1 was a scoping study completed in July 2012, while Phase 2 was the SROI analysis conducted between December 2012 and June 2014.

The objective of the scoping study was to explore the feasibility of carrying out the SROI analysis of Foodbank's activities and to begin to construct the theory of change to show how value is created. In relation to school breakfast programs it involved face-to-face interviews in two schools.

Phase 2 involved verifying the changes, determining impact and forecasting the social value created for food recipients. In relation to students in school breakfast programs this work was based on the results of research conducted in 2012 which surveyed 330 teachers and principals on the changes experience by students participating in the Western Australia School Breakfast Program and published literature on food insecurity amongst low-income families.



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