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What Can IEA Data Reveal About Hunger and School Performance?

Latest analysis of IEA data from the [Progress in International Reading and Literacy Study](#) (PIRLS) has shed new light on the link between children reporting feeling hungry and their academic performance. Based on results from 47 of the education systems that took part, the further analysis shows that there is a significant relationship between lower literacy scores and children reporting that they arrive at school feeling hungry every, or almost every, day.

Commenting on the findings, IEA Executive Director, Dr Dirk Hastedt said:

“As with all IEA studies, PIRLS links together a measure of achievement with many of the environmental factors which influence how well a young person can learn, including whether they are distracted by hunger or stress. The study asks the grade 4 (around 10 years old) students taking part how often they arrive at school feeling hungry. In the latest cycle, 26% of the children asked, reported feeling hungry most days.

“There seems to be a link between children reporting feeling hungry and a lower performance in the reading literacy assessment. Students who said they feel hungry most days scored on average 502 points in the assessment, whereas those who said they never came to school hungry scored an average of 534 points.

“What is quite striking is that while the percentages of students saying that they felt hungry differed across the education systems taking part in the study, there was a relationship with academic performance in all of them.

“We know from PIRLS that almost 45% of schools in 45 of the education systems taking part in the study provided free school meals for at least some of their pupils. The reasons for this will no doubt differ depending on national circumstances, however these findings raise questions around why children are going to school hungry, and whether these students are going to be more vulnerable during the current school closures if they are relying on free school meals.”

ENDS

Notes to editors:

This analysis is based on the responses from students in 47 education systems/countries who were asked “**How often do you feel this way when you arrive at school? I feel hungry**” and responded with either “every day” or “almost every day”.

The average scores of students who gave the 4 possible responses are as follows:

Every day = 494.58

Almost every day = 511.02

(Average score when combining “every day” and “almost every day” = 502.36)

Sometimes = 522.96

Never = 533.92

IEA is preparing a series of short analyses using data from our studies, to provide insights into how well prepared pupils, their teachers, and schools are to continue schooling during the coronavirus crisis.

The series of analyses will look at different themes in turn, starting with the issue of hunger, with future editions planned including the impact of socio-economic status, access to digital devices, and the preparedness of teachers to adapt to new ways of reaching their students.

More information about this release, or future releases, can be sought from:

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