ABSTRACT
The Health and Nutritional Determinants
Of Academic Achievement In Jamaican
Primary School Children.

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It is well established that poor social background
and attendance contribute to failure at school, but
little research has been done on the role of health
and nutrition factors.

Five primary schools were randomly selected from
those serving poor areas of Kingston. All the grade 5
students (n=755) were given the Wide Range Achievement
Test. All the succeeding (n=167) and failing (n=158)
students were identified. A comprehensive number of
health, nutrition and socio-economic variables were
assessed at school. Further information was collected
from a subsample of succeeding (n=43) and failing
(n=40) students at home.

We found that the health and nutritional status of
the children were not optimal. The failing students
were worse off, than the succeeding students, in a
wide range of health, nutrition and socio-economic
variables.

In order to determine the variables which best
predicted attendance and achievement multiple linear
regression and discriminant function analyses were
carried out.
In the larger sample, the socio-economic variables which predicted school achievement were the number of exercise books, the uniform rating and the possession rating. The health and nutrition variables which predicted achievement after controlling for SES, were height-for-age, haemoglobin, lead and ferritin levels, clinic attendance, cold and fever in the previous month, breakfast history, gender and age of the child.

In this sample, the socio-economic variables which predicted school attendance were the uniform rating, the possession rating and the number of exercise books. The health and nutrition variables which predicted attendance were weight-for-height, hospital attendance for injury, lead and haemoglobin level.

The results obtained from the students visited at home were similar and therefore validated the results found in the larger sample.

In conclusion, poor health and nutrition were found to contribute significantly to both school failure and school attendance after controlling for the socio-economic variables.