

What *Really* Leads to School Success?

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Currently there is a great emphasis on students' standardized test scores with great pressure put on teachers to raise their students' scores or face losing their jobs. However, a study by J. Kirabo Jackson (2018, 2019) of all 9th grade public school students in North Carolina found that:

Test scores are often the best available measure of student progress, but they do not capture every skill needed in adulthood. A growing research base shows that non-cognitive (or socio-emotional) skills like adaptability, motivation, and self-restraint are key determinants of adult outcomes. Therefore, if we want to identify good teachers, we ought to look at how teachers affect their students' development across a range of skills—both academic and non-cognitive. (Jackson, 2019, p. 1)

Jackson's study found that improvements in students' behavior as measured by absences, suspensions, grade point averages, and whether students enrolled in 10th grade on time were a much stronger predictor of future success than improvements in students' standardized test scores and that "the impact of teachers on behavior is about 10 times more predictive of whether they increase students' high-school completion than their impacts on test scores. This basic pattern holds true for all of the longer run outcomes examined, including plans to attend college" (Jackson, 2019, pp. 1-2). In addition, the test scores of the teachers were not related the impact they had on student behavior.

Interestingly, Jackson's emphasis on the importance of student behavior can be found in Indigenous language immersion schools. For example, Luning and Yamauchi (2010) in a study of Hawaiian families with children enrolled in a Hawaiian language immersion school noted how parents valued the emphasis on Hawaiian culture and Hawaiian traditional values. As one student's mother noted, "Academics—that's

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what people send their kids to school for, academics. And that's what we started off thinking ... academics in Hawaiian. And that was great, but we've also seen more than that" (Luning & Yamauchi, 2010, p. 53).

The families believed that the emphasis on traditional Hawaiian culture promoted more well-rounded children, and they felt that the immersion curriculum created positive images of being Hawaiian and could affect the community in positive ways. The Hawaiian traditional values their children acquired were felt by the families to be a major benefit of the school. Both the parents and students appreciated how the program modeled Hawaiian values. A parent noted how students learned "the values that [are] taught through the language." Another parent declared "I just think that some of the things that they learn in that school, they'll never learn in an English school. The culture, the respect I think it's gonna have some kind of impact with them as they grow up." When asked what it meant to be Hawaiian, many students referred to Hawaiian values. One 12-year-old student responded: "It means to have respect, love for the land, the ocean, and the people." Another student, when asked the same question, replied: I guess it's ... mostly family life, ... you have to respect your elders, and you have to take care of your land, your "āina, and you know, just basic facts that if any, if everybody would follow, would help this place, would help Hawaii" (Luning & Yamauchi, 2010, pp. 54-55).

A lack of respect for teachers in the United States by both adults and students can lead to demoralization and aggravates a currently high teacher turnover. This lack of respect includes top down mandates by lawmakers that deskill teachers and can be unrelated to the needs of students. As Doris Santoro (2018, p. 43) writes, "For teachers experiencing demoralization, the moral dilemma is not what they should do to be a good teacher, but that they cannot do what they believe a good teacher should do in the face of policies, mandates, or institutional norms."

Supporters of Indigenous language immersion schools can see the "goal of Western education is to gain knowledge and skills in preparation for the work force, not to create good human beings who live a balanced life" (White, 2015, p. 167). Guadalupe Valdés (1996) reports a similar perspective in Mexican-American immigrant families, many with Indigenous ancestry, who find their children's behavior is more important than their school grades, with respect for others central to the desired ideal. While not denying the importance of their children's academic progress, their primary concern is the behavior of their children. Considering that the United States has a greater percentage of its population in prison than any other country in the world (Kann, 2018), including prisoners who had high test scores, it is hard to fault parents who prioritize their children's behavior over their standardized test scores.

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