**How Important is Grit in Student Achievement?**

[MindShift](http://blogs.kqed.org/mindshift/author/mindshift/) | October 2, 2012

***When it comes to high achievement, grit may be as essential as intelligence.***

**By**[**Emily Hanford**](http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/team2.html)**,**[**American RadioWorks**](http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/)

Before she was a psychology professor, Angela Duckworth taught math in middle school and high school. She spent a lot of time thinking about something that might seem obvious: The students who tried hardest did the best, and the students who didn’t try very hard didn’t do very well. Duckworth wanted to know: What is the role of effort in a person’s success?

Now Duckworth is an assistant professor at the University of Pennsylvania, and her research focuses on a personality trait she calls “grit.” She defines grit as “sticking with things over the very long term until you master them.” In [a paper](http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~duckwort/images/Grit%20JPSP.pdf), she writes that “the gritty individual approaches achievement as a marathon; his or her advantage is stamina.”

Duckworth’s research suggests that when it comes to high achievement, grit may be as essential as intelligence. That’s a significant finding because for a long time, intelligence was considered *the* key to success.

Intelligence “is probably the best-measured trait that there is in all of human psychology,” says Duckworth. “We know how to measure intelligence in a matter of minutes.”

But intelligence leaves a lot unexplained. There are smart people who aren’t high achievers, and there are people who achieve a lot without having the highest test scores. In [one study](http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~duckwort/images/Grit%20JPSP.pdf), Duckworth found that smarter students actually had *less* grit than their peers who scored lower on an intelligence test. This finding suggests that, among the study participants — all students at an Ivy League school — people who are not as bright as their peers “compensate by working harder and with more determination.” And their effort pays off: The grittiest students — not the smartest ones — had the highest GPAs.