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## Academic achievement in high school: does emotional intelligence matter?

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### Abstract

The relationship between emotional intelligence and academic achievement in high school was examined. Students ( $N = 667$ ) attending a high school in Huntsville, Alabama completed the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i:YV). At the end of the academic year the EQ-i:YV data was matched with students' academic records for the year. When EQ-i:YV variables were compared in groups who had achieved very different levels of academic success (highly successful students, moderately successful, and less successful based on grade-point-average for the year), academic success was strongly associated with several dimensions of emotional intelligence. Results are discussed in the context of the importance of emotional and social competency on academic achievement.

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## 1. Introduction

Today it is more crucial than ever that secondary students are academically prepared to compete for knowledge and technology based jobs. When students are not prepared the costs to individuals and society can be extremely high. For example, higher levels of unemployment, lower earnings, and increased health problems have been linked to early withdrawal from school (Jimerson, Egeland, Sroufe, & Carlson, 2000; Reyes, Gillock, Kobus, & Sanchez, 2000; Rumsberger, 1995). The fiscal costs for one city, as the result of students dropping out in only one school district, was estimated at 3.2 billion in lost earnings and 400 million in social service costs (Rumsberger, 1995). Not accounted for in these figures are the costs to an individual's quality of life (Ellenbogen & Chamberland, 1997). Some of the documented impacts are poor mental health (Reyes et al., 2000) and antisocial behavior (Bullis, Walker, & Sprague, 2001). Given these social costs, it is somewhat disconcerting to note that there has been an increase in the percentage of US students who do not complete high school. According to the US census bureau in 1990, 11% of all youth between 16 and 24 years of age were not enrolled in school or had not graduated from high school (Rumsberger, 1995). In 1994 the number had increased to 12% (Reyes et al., 2000).

Given the increasing importance of a high school degree, it is not surprising that a sizeable literature has evolved on factors promoting academic success in high school. Early efforts focused on cognitive factors. Since these variables typically account for relatively small amounts of the variability in academic success (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Ransdell, 2001), researchers have become increasingly aware of the need to study a broader range of potential predictors (McLaughlin, Brozovsky, & McLaughlin, 1998). Socioeconomic factors, peer relationships, and the quality of the institution have all been linked with academic success in high school (e.g., Berger & Milem, 1999; Bjarnason, 2000; Newcomb et al., 2002).

One new area of recent interest has been the impact of social and emotional competency on academic achievement. Early discussions on the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and achievement in various educational contexts were quick to claim a strong association (e.g., Elias, Bruene-Butler, Blum, & Schuyler, 1997; Goleman, 1995; Pasi, 1997). As more recent writers have noted, however, these early claims were made largely on the basis of very preliminary data (see Matthews, Roberts, & Zeidner, 2003; Zeidner, Roberts, & Matthews, 2002). Although many educators were quick off the mark to develop or adapt intervention programs for EI (e.g., Elias et al., 1997), little was known about the efficacy of these types of interventions (Mayer & Cobb, 2000). Even less was known about how EI could be assessed using reliable and valid measures (Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, 2001).

More recently, a small body of empirical research has emerged to suggest that there is merit to the idea that EI is associated with academic achievement—as long as careful attention is directed at the methodology for assessing EI and achievement variables (Parker, Summerfeldt, Hogan, & Majeski, 2004). Petrides, Frederickson, and Furnham (2004) examined the relationships among EI, cognitive ability, and academic performance in a British sample of 650 Grade 11 students. They found that EI moderated the relationship between academic performance and cognitive ability. Academic success was operationalized as the standardized test results from the General Certificate of Secondary Education (the principal means of assessing academic achievement at the end of compulsory secondary education in the UK). Petrides et al. (2004) also found evidence that EI was negatively associated with deviant school behaviors (unauthorized absences or being ex-

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