

added assessment in high-stakes decisions, others insist that they should be used precisely in that manner. The economist Eric Hanushek states that, if we could just replace the bottom 5 to 10 percent of teachers with average teachers, our schools' performance could rise to a level near the top internationally. The *Los Angeles Times* caused a furor in August 2010 when it published the names and ratings of some 6,000 public school teachers; Secretary of Education Arne Duncan approved the action and urged other districts to follow suit.¹⁰

While it makes sense to look at students' performance on tests when evaluating teachers, there is something strange about the idea that the sheer act of ranking and replacing teachers will cause *student* performance to soar. It is as though students had no say in their own performance—as though their very mental workings could be controlled by an outside force. There is something equally strange about placing so much trust in the test scores themselves, without regard for the nature of the subject, the material tested, the quality of the tests, the relation of the tests to the curriculum, the other things taught, and much more.

Attempts to reduce failure through formulas abound. Teach for America has been seeking to identify effective teachers before they even begin teaching, by finding correlations between personality traits and increased test scores. Their findings have been inconsistent and inconclusive; their most robust conclusion is that teachers who in college pursued measurable goals such as GPA and "leadership achievement" were likelier to bring about test score increases. Similarly, districts across the country administer the Haberman Educational Foundation's Star Teacher Pre-Screener, a multiple-choice test intended to predict whether prospective teachers have the necessary qualities for raising student achievement.¹¹ Such formulas seem scientific but actually rest on faith that if we could only tweak things right, achievement would rise to desired levels. The problem—and not a trivial one—is that even if one could identify a "type" of teacher

likely to bring up test scores, that type would not necessarily be the best kind of teacher in all ways. Students need different kinds of role models—not only go-getters, but people who take deep interest in something, whether or not it carries status, high pay, or visible marks of achievement. By treating test scores as the main measure of a teacher's worth, these initiatives could keep many fine teachers out of the field and narrow the very idea of education.

In a similar manner, psychologists have been trying to identify personality and behavior traits associated with student success. According to Paul R. Sackett, a professor of psychology at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, the greatest predictors of student success, as far as student behaviors go, are conscientiousness (e.g., work ethic, dependability, and perseverance), agreeableness (teamwork, emotional stability), various kinds of extroversion, and openness to new experiences. Roger P. Weissberg, an education and psychology professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago, is developing "common-core standards for social-emotional learning," while others are working on programs for the teaching and assessment of emotional skills.¹² As with the Teach for America formula and the Star Teacher Pre-Screener, this research seems biased in favor of a particular kind of success and the kinds of personalities likely to attain it. Many thoughtful and capable students dislike working on teams, enjoy thinking on their own, and are not necessarily agreeable. If "common-core standards for social-emotional learning" do indeed catch on, they may cast eccentric, dreamy, and reclusive individuals as deficient.

School programs are filled with success stories and success talk, yet their conception of success is often limited. In Chicago, the organization Strategic Learning Initiatives brought its "turnaround" program to 10 struggling schools; much of the reform was aimed at preparing students specifically for the kind of questions they would encounter on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test. Every day, the students received "success time" devoted to the practice of skills. They