

By Joan Motyka

It Pays To Be Friendly



Alloy Photography/Veer

Add this to the debate about standardized tests in schools: A new study concludes that social skills can be a better predictor of future earnings than test scores are. Christy Lleras, a University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign sociologist, analyzed data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988, tracking 11,000 students from 10th grade until 10 years after their high school graduation. Her work, published in September's *Social Science Research*, found that pupils described by teachers as conscientious, motivated, and able to relate well to peers and adults earned an average \$3,200 more yearly than those with equally good test scores but poorer social skills. Lleras says many socially adept students were helped by joining in team sports or other activities. It makes sense, she says, that in a service economy, "people with social skills will be much better equipped to navigate."

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