Currently, in America’s schools, approximately one in five high school students will not graduate with his or her peers, and many others will never receive a high school diploma (Stillwell & Sable, 2013). Many students arrive in our nation’s high schools without the requisite skills to be successful, and when they exhibit failure for the first time, a large percentage of them do not have the passion and perseverance to accomplish their long term goals – otherwise known as “academic grit,” a term coined by Duckworth (2007), a leading researcher in the area.

To investigate the issues mentioned above, a study was performed that measured the grit levels of 655 9th grade students and 12th grade students in a large urban, Midwestern school district. A survey was administered to students that contained Duckworth’s (2007) 8-Item Grit Scale, as well as additional questions that pertained to where students learned to become gritty, what self-reported grades students earned in high school, what post-secondary aspirations students have, and where and by whom students believed gritty skills were taught.

Results revealed that students in 12th grade had significantly higher grit scores than 9th grade students. Students also reported that their parents and grandparents had the most influence on teaching them to become gritty, and that the top three environments in which they learned the most grit were their homes, school classrooms, and sports
teams. It was also determined that students with higher grit scores had higher self-reported grades and higher post-secondary aspirations, and that grit levels were significant predictors of such self-reported grades and post-secondary aspirations. Finally, no significant differences were found in this study when data was broken down by gender or race/ethnicity.