MICHEL MARTIN, HOST:

One ongoing question in child psychology is what can help kids do better in school? For a long time, researchers have focused on happiness. The thinking goes, when kids feel happier, they tend to get better grades. But now a new study suggests that parents and schools should focus on another aspect of mental health. NPR’s Michaeleen Doucleff has this report.

MICHAELEEN DOUCLEFF, BYLINE: Two years ago, Tania Clarke and her colleagues sent out a survey to teenagers asking about their well-being. She’s a psychologist at the University of Cambridge.

TANIA CLARKE: Our study was conducted with just over 600 adolescents aged 14 to 15 across seven schools in England.

DOUCLEFF: She asked them questions about how confident they feel, and do they have a sense of purpose? The goal was to see what aspects of mental health are associated with doing well in math and English. One stuck out above the others.

CLARKE: Eudaimonia.

DOUCLEFF: Eudaimonia – what does that mean?

CLARKE: It’s about having the opportunity to understand what purpose in life feels like for you and having opportunities to cultivate your unique personal strengths and talents.